
Statutory Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillors May, Leader, and Hotham, Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
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Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	Will be part of consultation
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	N/A
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 that the timetable for the review in appendix 2 be agreed;

1.2 that the review formally commences on 2 October 2023.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The report sets out the key stages and proposed timetable to the formal statutory review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, as required under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, and as based on Electoral Commission Guidance (a copy of the guidance is included in appendix 1).
- 2.2 The last statutory review took place in 2019 and this statutory review must be conducted and completed before end of January 2025, as per legislation to cover a 5-year period. However, it is desirable to complete the review before March 2024 to tie in with the forthcoming Westminster Parliamentary Election to be held before end of January 2025.
- 2.3 There is a review of Worcestershire County Council Division Boundaries currently underway by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) which is due to conclude in July 2024.

- 2.4 A review of the Bromsgrove District Ward Boundaries by the LGBCE is currently under consideration to commence fully in September 2023 and completed by April 2025.
- 2.5 The statutory review covers, Polling Districts (a geographical area, which tend not to cross Ward or Parish Boundaries), Polling Place (a building or area where Polling Stations are located) and Polling Stations (the room or area where polling takes place, the decision on location of the polling station is decided by the (Acting) Returning Officer).
- 2.6 The review consists of four stages:
- Stage 1 – Notification
 - Stage 2 – Consultation
 - Stage 3 – Concluding the Review
 - Stage 4 – Publication

A timetable for agreement is included in Appendix 2.

- 2.7 The (Acting) Returning Officer must make a submission regarding current and any proposed polling stations.
- 2.8 Consultation will involve writing to all interested parties and stakeholders including All Ward Councillors, the MP, County Councillors, Parishes and organisations that deal with different forms of disability where voting in person could pose a difficulty. Officers will be contacting individuals or organisations that have commented on their own polling station and invite them to make representations. In addition any Elector within the constituency may make a submission to be considered as part of the review.
- 2.9 Once complete certain people or organisations may appeal to the Electoral Commission to have changes made if they feel the Local Authority hasn't met reasonable expectations of the electorate or taken into account the needs for accessible polling stations.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Subject to the Committee's final decisions, there may be some minor financial implications for the Council which arise directly from this review, but which can be contained within existing budgets.

- 3.2 Depending on the outcome of the review there may be additional costs or savings regarding polling stations that are to be used in future elections.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Review will be undertaken as required under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Electoral Administration Act 2013, and in accordance with relevant Electoral Commission Guidance.

- 4.2 a) Authority to set Polling District boundaries and to designate polling places rests with the Council (Statutory elements of the Council's Constitution under the Local Government Act 2000). Bromsgrove District Council has delegated full relevant powers to this Electoral Matters Committee.

b) Decisions about the situation of Polling Stations within designated Polling Places are for the (Acting) Returning Officer. Arrangements must comply with relevant provisions of the Representation of the People Acts and Regulations, the Equality Act 2010 and the Elections Act 2022.

- 4.3 "Relevant authorities" (such as Bromsgrove District Council) must
"a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances";
and

"b) seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled and, when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons. If it is necessary to use a place where the access is not ideal, then every reasonable adjustment must be undertaken to provide access for all electors."

- 4.4 The Elections Act 2022 has placed new considerations for Local Authorities in regard to polling places. Key considerations are accessibility and checking voter's ID to ensure polling stations have suitable space to allow polling station staff to check documents and provide a privacy screen or separate area for confidential conversations.

5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 5.1 None as this report deals with statutory functions.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.2 It is preferable that choice of polling place location can help minimise unnecessary additional journeys by motorised vehicles.
- 5.3 Emissions and carbon footprint should be reduced as far as possible.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Accessibility for members of minority or disadvantaged groups is a key issue in the selection of suitable Polling Stations. The (Acting) Returning Officer will have a general responsibility to provide equipment to support people with a range of disabilities in the polling station.

Operational Implications

- 6.2 The review will take up a large amount of Officer in time in dealing with consultation, producing statistics, maps and reporting back to this Committee.
- 6.3 Officers have already started working on:
- Current Polling Stations – Polling Station Inspectors reviewed all of the current stations within the area in May.
 - Polling Districts – Polling Districts are being assessed in conjunction with the Planning Department regarding new builds within the area and in regard to the new ward boundaries.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Any changes agreed must be likely to be sustainable for a reasonable number of years, as frequent changes of Polling Station are not helpful for electors and undermine their knowledge of, and confidence in, electoral systems.

- 7.2 Choice of Polling Place / Polling Station should not give rise to significant grounds of complaint which might put election results at risk of challenge.
- 7.3 The (Acting) Returning Officer must provide adequate levels and standards of staffing to secure proper polling arrangements. The Electoral Commission has changed its guidance in that no more than 2,250 electors should be allocated to a single polling station with at least 1 Presiding Officer and 3 Poll Clerks.
- 7.4 Paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 refer to boundary reviews being conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. Once these reviews are completed further Polling District and Places reviews will need to be conducted where there are changes to Division and Ward Boundaries.
- 7.5 Although the statutory review could be held off until July 2024 it seems prudent to conduct the review as soon as possible to sort any current anomalies. This will mean revised Polling Districts and Places are in position before the Police and Crime Commissioner elections next May and are agreed if there is a snap General Election.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Electoral Commission Guidance
Appendix 2 – Proposed Review Timetable

Local Government Boundary Commission for England Guidance
Relevant statutory provisions

**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE
2023**

24 July

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Hotham	10 July 2023
Head of Service		
Financial Services		
Legal Services		