
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	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. RESOLUTIONS

- 1.1 that the final proposals in respect of Polling Districts and Polling Places, as contained in Appendix 1 (as amended), be approved; and**
- 1.2 that the decisions of the Committee in respect of 1.1 above take effect from the date of poll any election/referendum held or on publication of the revised Register of Electors.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on the 24 July 2023 it was agreed that the statutory review would formally commence on 2 October 2023.
- 2.2 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).
- 2.3 The review consists of four stages:
- Stage 1 – Notification

- Stage 2 – Consultation
- Stage 3 – Concluding the Review
- Stage 4 – Publication

- 2.4 The (Acting) Returning Officer must make a submission regarding current and any proposed polling stations.
- 2.5 The report sets out the results of the consultation and the findings of the Electoral Services team to the formal review of Polling Districts and Polling Places.
- 2.6 The consultation ran from 2 October to 13 November all submissions and summaries are recorded in the various appendices below. Polling Station Inspectors reviewed the current polling stations within the area at the Local Elections in May. Officers have considered the suitability of these and any other recommendations, including verbal discussions with Elected Members and members of the public. They have also assessed any changes that maybe needed to Polling Districts. Members of the Committee are asked to consider any further proposals and finalise the review.
- 2.7 Communications were sent out to Councillors, stakeholder groups, Parishes and through Council communications including press releases and social media.
- 2.8 A full review document will be published at the end of December giving all the polling districts and places agreed by the committee. This will also record any further and outstanding work required on polling districts and places. Any changes made will be incorporated into the revised electoral register which will be published, if necessary, early in 2024.
- 2.9 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.

- 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.
- 3.3 There are no scheduled local elections in 2024 so costs for Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May will be attributable to Central Government.

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 This report deals with statutory functions but relates to the strategic purpose of an effective and sustainable council.

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 Officer time was necessary in dealing with consultation, producing statistics, maps and reporting back to this Committee.

Key Issues

A. Proposed Polling District Boundaries and Polling Places.

- 6.3 Appendix 1 to the report details Polling Districts and associated electoral areas, and the proposals arising from the consultation, together with consultee comments.
- 6.4 Appendix 2 includes all of the submissions made within the consultation.

B. Issues arising from consultation on recommendations

- 6.5 Polling District COA Cofton Hackett – The old village hall is in disrepair and has accessibility issues. Officers have received requests from electors to move to the new village hall. Officers have visited the new village hall and confirm that it would make a good polling place for the electors of COA.
- 6.6 Polling District ALB Beoley – A resident has written in regarding the use of the village hall (submission BR8). The complaint is not with the use of the hall per se rather that election posters are displayed at the property adjacent to the village hall on polling day.
- 6.7 Polling Districts ASA (Aston Fields North), ASB (Aston Fields South), SSA (Slideslow South) and SSB (Slideslow North) – St Godwald’s Church Hall. Submissions (BR5 and BR9) were received regarding the use of the polling place for two District Wards, both did not want St Godwald’s Church Hall used for the number of electors being sent there.
- 6.8 The Electoral Matters Committee at its meeting on 24 October 2019 had agreed for a trial to be held using St Godwald’s Church Hall for Slideslow Ward electors. This was due to be at the 2020 May elections, however these were cancelled due to Covid and the May 2021 elections were under strict Covid regulations. The first opportunity to use St Godwald’s Church Hall as a polling place for Slideslow was May 2023.
- 6.9 As this was the first time the polling place was used for Slideslow; polling staff handed a short questionnaire to voters at random regarding the polling place and future options for polling. Of those 146 completed 87% were happy with the polling place and over 49% would use it in the future. Over a third (37%) would like to see the polling place return to Finstall First School. The full results can be found in Appendix 3.
- 6.10 Both the submissions to the consultation mentioned parking being an issues and this was reflected in the questionnaire with 27 of those that made comments regarding polling place were related to parking issues.
- 6.11 Although not an official submission on the consultation a Councillor did want to raise concerns regarding the use of schools as polling places and that they had been given an undertaking by the then Returning Officer at the last County Council elections that “following concerns of

parents, that no Schools or school buildings would be used for any polling station that could disrupt our children's education".

- 6.12 In terms of the use of schools for polling: Government Departments have always advocated, via legislation and guidance, the use of schools as polling stations and this has been further emphasised in recent draft guidance to Returning Officers (ROs) released on 31 October in a section on public buildings that:

"Schools which receive public funding are included in this and should also be made available to ROs free of charge. However, we also appreciate that over recent years schools have been more reluctant to offer rooms to ROs for the purposes of running polls.

If the polling day is known well in advance of the election, schools can decide in liaison with the local authority to set those days as inset days to avoid disruption."

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.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Polling District and Places Spreadsheet

Appendix 2 – Submissions Received

Appendix 3 – Results of questionnaire regarding polling place for SSA and SSB polling districts

Local Government Boundary Commission for England Guidance

Relevant statutory provisions

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder		
Head of Service		
Financial Services	Pete Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer, Interim Director of Finance and Resources	26 November 2023
Legal Services		