

Title: Polling District Place and Station Review
Lead Officer: Leanne Marlow
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Davison
Wards of the District directly affected: All

| Approvals required | Date | Name |
|---|---|----------------|
| Portfolio Holder | 12/9/23 | Ian Davison |
| Finance | 12/9/23 | Alex Elston |
| Legal Services | | |
| Chief Executive | 12/9/23 | Chris Elliott |
| Director of Climate Change | | Dave Barber |
| Head of Service(s) | 12/9/23 | Graham Leach |
| Section 151 Officer | | Andrew Rollins |
| Monitoring Officer | 12/9/23 | Graham Leach |
| Leadership Co-ordination Group | | N/A |
| Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council? | Yes recommendation to Council regarding a delegation to the Chief Executive | |
| Contrary to Policy / Budget framework? | No | |
| Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)? | No | |
| Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)? | No | |
| Accessibility Checked? | Yes/No | |

Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the plan to undertake a statutory review of polling districts and polling places for Warwick district.

Recommendations

- (1) That Audit & Standards Committee approves the compulsory polling district and places review to commence on Monday 2 October 2023.
 - (2) That Audit & Standards Committee approves the timetable for the review as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.
 - (3) That the Electoral Registration Officer is authorised to take the necessary measures as soon as possible to give effect to parliamentary constituency changes, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new constituencies, until the boundaries are fully in force.
 - (4) That the Electoral Registration Officer is authorised to take the necessary measures to give effect to any new or amended polling districts on completion of the polling district review, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new boundaries, until the boundaries are fully in force.
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1 Reasons for the Recommendation

- 1.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district.
- 1.2 The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.
- 1.3 Under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025. The intention of the legislation is that reviews are to be complete no later than the January before a UK Parliamentary General Election. However, since the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011, there is no longer any certainty as to when the next general election will be. Officers have been advised by the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and the Electoral Commission to start the review as soon as the legislation allows, this being Monday 2 October 2023.
- 1.4 In addition, the Boundary Commission for England has completed a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The Commission has published its final recommendations, and Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries will be made by 1 November 2023. Once the orders for new parliamentary constituencies have been made, the new boundaries will be used for the next general election. The polling scheme Warwick District has in place will need to reflect the new constituencies.
- 1.5 For the reasons above, it is important to complete the review as soon as possible, so the polling districts and places for future elections can be agreed in time for Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024 and the as yet unscheduled the next general election and.
 - 1.5.1 Although the review itself cannot commence earlier, than the legislative date of 1 October 2023, there is a degree of preparatory work which can be undertaken

prior to the review, as well as informal preliminary consultation. Any changes in polling districts will need to be reflected in the electoral register on 1 February 2024 so it does not affect data being sent to printers for the May 2024 scheduled elections. A notice will need to be published 14 days before to confirm there will be a revised register further to 1 December 2023 which will reflect any changes made. This therefore requires a compact timetable.

- 1.5.2 That Committee should be aware that the Chief Executive, within his role as Returning Officer has the delegated authority to designate polling places where a decision is required at short notice, for example a building becomes unavailable at short notice.

2 Alternative Options

- 2.1 The Committee could ask officers to compact the timetable even further, so the review concludes ready for the revised register publication on 1 December 2023. The elections team have limited resources due to post elections work, canvass reform 2023 and the new Elections Act 2022 laws creating additional workload, therefore this is not considered possible currently.
- 2.2 The review could be considered over a longer period of time, but this goes against recommended practice from the Electoral Commission and needs to be completed to account for the new Parliamentary Constituencies.

3 Legal Implications

- 3.1 The process for a polling district, place and station review is set out in Schedule A1, Representation of the People Act 1983. The Council must: publish a notice of the holding of a review, consult the Returning Officer (RO) for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area, publish all representations made by an RO within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them as the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area and, if the authority maintains a website, by placing a copy on the authority's website, seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the RO.

4 Financial Services

- 4.1 There are no direct impacts on the Council's budget as a result of this report. However at the conclusion of the review polling places may change resulting in charge increases. Adaptations may be required for some polling places to meet the requirements of electors with disabilities if no other venue is sufficed.

5 Business Strategy

- 5.1 Warwick District Council has adopted a Business Strategy which sets out key areas for service delivery.

The outcome from this review should seek to support the theme of Maintain or Improve Services through providing appropriate locations for polling places within the district.

6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 The report has no direct environmental implications of the proposal in relation to the Council's policies and Climate Emergency Action Plan. However as part of the review and the criteria for allocating polling stations is to provide a location which is within walking distance of the electors allocated to that station.

7 Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 7.1 The Elections Act 2022 extends accessibility to elections including requiring Returning Officers to take all reasonable steps to provide support for those with a disability in polling stations. Each polling station will be considered, and specific issues identified in meeting the guidance from the electoral commission.

8 Data Protection

- 8.1 The report has no direct data protection implications.

9 Health and Wellbeing

- 9.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications of the proposal.

10 Risk Assessment

- 10.1 The significant risk associated with the report, is for the Council not to take action at this time. This will lead to Polling Districts not being in place for the new Parliamentary Elections and potentially electors not voting in the correct constituency or an appropriate location.

11 Consultation

- 11.1 The timetable for the consultation is set out at Appendix 1 to the report. There will be public notices issued about the review and communication plan to promote this is being produced with the media team. The following will be written to directly to make them aware of the review and seek their views:

District Councillors, County Councillors, Parish Clerks to pass on to the parish council, local MPs, Booking agents for the current polling stations, local disability groups.

Background papers: None

Supporting documents: None

Polling District, Places and Stations Review 2023

| Tasks | Dates |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Deadline for report to A&S | 13 September 23 |
| Go to A&S for approval of timetable | 25 September 23 |
| Publication of Notice of Review | 2 October 23 |
| Publication of (A)RO representations | 2 October 23 |
| Consultation begins | 2 October 23 |
| End of formal consultation | 10 November 23 |
| Consider responses and prepare final proposals | 13 November 23 – 6 December 23 |
| Report to committee deadline | 7 December 23 |
| Audit & Standards Committee | 19 December 23 |
| Conclude Review | 22 December 23 |
| Amend Polling scheme | 12 January 24 |
| Republish register (if changes to PD) | 1 February 24 |

*If republishing of the register is required, we need to publish a notice of publication in a local newspaper 14 days before.