

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

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holder	21/12/23	Ian Davison
Finance	21/12/23	Alex Elston
Legal Services		
Chief Executive	21/12/23	Chris Elliott
Director of Climate Change	21/12/23	Dave Barber
Head of Service(s)	21/12/23	Graham Leach
Section 151 Officer	21/12/23	Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	21/12/23	Graham Leach
Leadership Co-ordination Group		N/A
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Yes	
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	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the final proposals for the statutory review of Polling Districts, Places and Stations for Warwick District.

Recommendation(s)

- (1) That Audit & Standards Committee approves the final proposals for the compulsory Polling District, Place and Station review as set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to the report.
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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 Polling 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 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 were made on 29 November to be in place for the next UK Parliamentary election. The Polling scheme proposed for Warwick District will reflect the new constituencies. The Polling District letters may change post this review to reflect the new constituencies, ready for the revised register publication on 1 February 2024.
- 1.4 The Elections team has undertaken extensive research and site visits within the timeframe that allows. It is important to note that the Polling Review would normally take approximately 6 months to complete but officers have compressed the review into 3 months due to the potential snap general election as advised by the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators.
- 1.5 All the final proposals are based on the consultation responses, site visits and research collated. The consultation was carried out from 2 October to 10 November. We received approximately 250 responses to the consultation; responses to which we are legally obliged to publish once the review has concluded.
- 1.6 The final proposals will meet the accessibility requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022 which adds additional responsibilities onto the Returning Officer to make sure it is easier for all disabled people to vote. The Returning Officer is required to take all reasonable steps to provide equipment to support disabled voters to vote independently and in secret at the polling station.
 - 1.6.1 The 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 review could be extended further to give more time to liaise with potential future polling places as we are having difficulty communicating in some places. However, this would cause uncertainty to the election in May 2024 when booking polling places and where the electorate would vote. Due to the printers requesting the data for poll cards early, the Council would need to publish the revised register to reflect the new polling Districts and the new parliamentary boundaries on 1 February 2024.

3 Legal Implications

- 3.1 The process for a Polling District, Place and Station review is set out in Schedule A1, of the 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. 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 The direct impact to the Council's budget as a result of the report will increase due to purchasing additional lighting for polling places that require it. Officers are in contact with some of the polling places to make sure the venue is accessible by purchasing ramps. We have referred the single point of contact for some polling places to the Rural and urban capital improvements grants scheme (RUCIS) to help make their venue more accessible during public use.
- 4.2 There is potential to have additional polling places subject to the Committee approving the proposals which would increase the hire charge. This is mainly due to the increased electorate and developments within Warwick District area.

5 Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 Warwick District Council has adopted a Corporate Strategy which sets three strategic aims for the organisation. Each proposed decision should set out how the report contributes to the delivery of these strategic aims. If it does not contribute to these aims or has a negative effect on them the report should explain why that is the case.
- 5.2 Delivering valued, sustainable services – we have focused on the consultation responses which shows the passion some residents have in regard to their polling place, and we have listened to their views and tried our utmost efforts to meet the views of the residents and communities who vote at these polling stations. Unfortunately, legally some polling places cannot be used even with residents' views to keep the venues as they are due to not meeting accessibility requirements so we have to weigh up how we can work with the venues to meet the legal requirements and match the residents' views.
- 5.3 Low cost, low carbon energy across the district – polling places should where practicable be within walking distance of the electorate. It certain circumstances this criteria isn't always met. An example would be if there is no accessible venue within the polling district then an alternative venue in another

polling district is used.

- 5.4 Creating vibrant, safe and healthy communities of the future - the consultation reached out to communities and groups within the polling districts to share their views on their local polling places. These responses have been seriously considered within the final proposals.

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 where practicable.

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. Equalities and Human Rights Commission suggest the duty to make reasonable adjustments comprises three requirements. For service providers and those exercising public functions, these requirements are: Where a provision, criterion or practice puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage. Where a physical feature puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled to avoid that disadvantage or adopt a reasonable alternative method of providing the service or exercising the function. Where not providing an auxiliary aid, for example a ramp for wheelchair, puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled, to provide that auxiliary aid. These requirements have been taken into consideration and applied at all polling places in Warwick District area.

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 risk associated with the report is for the Council not to agree the final proposals at this time. This will lead to Polling Districts potentially not being in place for the Parliamentary Elections and potentially electors not voting in the correct constituency or an appropriate location.
- 10.2 Another risk would be if delaying the conclusion of the review, it would potentially mean printers would not have the correct details for poll cards in May 2024 elections.

11 Consultation

- 11.1 The consultation was published on Warwick District Council website and hard copy surveys were left in the offices at Riverside House. We also printed hard copies of the consultation paperwork and distributed these to the following libraries in the District area; Kenilworth library, Leamington library, Lillington library, Warwick library and Whitnash library. Posters were also distributed in the District at libraries, community centres, sent to Parish clerks to post on their noticeboards and car parks in the District area. Social media posts were

shared regularly through out the consultation period.

- 11.2 The following people were consulted during the consultation period; District Councillors, County Councillors, Parish clerks, to pass on to the Parish Councils, booking agents for the current polling stations, local disability groups, local community groups, residents of Warwick District area and polling station staff.

Supporting documents:

Appendix 1 (Changes Final Proposals)

Appendix 2 (No Changes Final Proposals)

Appendix 3 (Maps to support the Changes Final Proposals)