

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE – 18 JULY 2022

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 That the General Purposes and Licensing Committee approve

- a) the commencement of an interim review of polling districts and polling places in response to the changes in electoral arrangements for the New Forest; and
- b) the publication of the Notice of Review at **Appendix A** on 18 July 2022.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The recent review of the New Forest electoral arrangements by the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE) has necessitated a review of polling districts and places to ensure that polling districts are coterminous with the revised ward boundaries.

2.2 This is not a compulsory five-year review as required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the last of which was undertaken during 2019. Instead, this is an interim review to ensure the appropriateness of arrangements as part of the implementation of the electoral review changes, however the Electoral Commission guidance for undertaking the compulsory review will be followed.

2.3 The new boundaries do not come into force until May 2023 and any changes made as part of this review will also not be effective until that time.

2.4 This is not a matter that can be dealt with under delegated authority and the Committee's recommendations will be approved by Council.

2.5 The following definitions and requirements are provided as background information:

- A **Polling District** is a geographical area created by a sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary Election
- A **Polling Place** is a building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer
- A **Polling Station** is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Polling stations are chosen by the Returning Officer
- Each district council must provide "such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances". The Council has a responsibility to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled
- Unless special circumstances apply, a polling place and polling station should be in the same polling district
- The Returning Officer has no power to requisition buildings in private ownership for use as polling stations but is entitled to use schools maintained or assisted by a local authority, as well as those schools' receiving grants made out of monies provided by Parliament. This includes academies and free schools

3. THE REVIEW

- 3.1 A notice will be published on the council's website and in the council's information offices to inform people that the review is being undertaken. The notice (**Appendix A**) provides information about the review itself and how to make representations.
- 3.2 The review will take into account the requirement for local authorities to comply with the following legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places:
- each Parish in England is to be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply
 - the council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors
 - the polling place must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified in the district)
 - the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station
- 3.3 Where parts of existing electoral areas are to be split due to the revised district and parish ward boundary arrangements, they will be made into separate polling districts as part of this review with an indication of the polling district they will move into (the two-letter reference) suffixed by the letter Z (where more than one part area moving, they will be suffixed by Z1, Z2 etc.). This is necessary as the electoral register will need to be constructed in a way that can reflect the current and the new boundaries, until the new boundaries come fully into effect (May 2023). The part areas will then be combined with the rest of that polling district on publication of the revised register in December 2023. New district ward boundaries are shown on **Appendix C**.
- 3.4 The new ward boundaries mean that some existing polling stations are no longer in the correct polling district or ward area, and they will be subject to review as part of the consultation.
- 3.5 The review will be completed to coincide with the publication of the revised Electoral Register (1 December 2022) in order that changes can be in place for the quadrennial District and Parish elections in May 2023.
- 3.6 A dedicated area of the council's website will hold information about the review including maps of the proposed polling district and an online form for representations and comments to be made. These pages will go live on 18 July 2022 to coincide with the consultation period newforest.gov.uk/districtsandplacesreview2022

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The consultation period will be six weeks to allow sufficient time for interested persons to read and consider the proposals, gather comments, and respond with any alternative arrangements that they may wish to submit. This period will commence on the date the notice of review is published (18 July 2022) and conclude at midnight 28 August 2022.

- 4.2 Given the time of year arrangements have been made to discuss the consultation in advance with those schools in Hythe currently designated as polling stations.
- 4.3 Initial consultation has been undertaken with the (Acting) Returning Officer who has reviewed the proposed polling districts and made initial proposals for polling places and polling stations based on the revised boundaries. These proposals are contained within **Appendix B** which also highlights specific issues for consultation and aims to address some of the known issues or concerns previously made, including accessibility. Polling districts marked red require resolution as part of the review, those marked amber need consideration as part of the review and where they are marked green no changes to the existing arrangements are being proposed.
- 4.4 Representation will now be sought from elected representatives, including MPs, district council members, parish and town councils, together with disability groups and other known interested parties.
- 4.5 Comments will be invited on the recommendations proposed by the (Acting) Returning Officer and, where appropriate, to propose alternative polling districts/places with reasons for their proposal so that it can be given appropriate consideration.
- 4.6 Members of the Council will be specifically encouraged to make comments regarding known issues and concerns using local knowledge of their ward. Ward members for New Milton, Ringwood, Hythe and Dibden, Fawley, Totton and Lymington and Pennington will be invited to specific sessions in early August to consider the proposals in those areas in more detail.
- 4.7 Full consideration will be given to all representations and final recommendations, with reasons for the decisions, will be presented to this committee in September. The following will also be published on the council's website:
- All correspondence sent to the (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review
 - All correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability
 - All representations made by any persons in connection with the review
 - The minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revision of the designation of polling districts or places within its area as a result of the review
 - Details on the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising directly out of this report, but the financial viability of polling stations will be assessed as part of the review to ensure value for money per elector, and alternatives sought where this is not deemed to be the case.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Each polling station is assessed to ensure accessibility requirements are met and where this is not the case the review will seek to find a more suitable alternative.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The small geographic nature of polling districts means that electors are only required to travel a short distance to their polling station if they are travelling by car.

<p>For further information contact:</p> <p>Rebecca Drummond Service Manager – Elections and Business Improvement 023 8028 5080 Rebecca.drummond@nfdc.gov.uk</p> <p>Debbie Everett Principal Electoral Services Officer 023 8028 5445 Debbie.everett@nfdc.gov.uk</p>	<p>Background Information:</p> <p>None</p>
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