

Council – 9 December 2024

Polling District and Polling Places Review 2024

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Council is required to undertake a review of the polling places and districts within its area. This is a decision for the Council to make taking into account representations from the public/other interested groups, and also taking into account and giving weight to the views of the Returning Officer.</p> <p>This report sets out the process undertaken and results of the consultation.</p> <p>It should be noted that a full detailed review of polling districts and places was undertaken as part of the boundary review and changes leading up to the 2023 district elections. There are therefore very limited proposed changes to the polling places agreed at that time and no changes to the polling districts which all work well and comply with the Electoral Commission Guidance.</p> <p>The representations made, and the recommendations of the Returning Officer along with her comments are included in the Table at Appendix 1.</p>
Recommendations	<p>That Council agree:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. There should be no changes to the polling districts.2. The changes to polling places as set out in the Table at Appendix 1.
Reasons for recommendations	To comply with the statutory requirements and Electoral Commission Guidance.

Wards	All
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jill Cleary, Leader of the Council
Strategic Director	Alan Bethune – Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Transformation
Officer Contact	Tanya Coulter Assistant Director Governance 02380 285532 tanya.coulter@nfdc.gov.uk

Introduction and background

1. The Council is required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 to undertake a compulsory review of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places which must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive).
2. A *polling district* is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area – a constituency or ward for example. A *polling place* is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district. A *polling station* is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the designated polling place. The Returning Officer must provide a sufficient number of polling stations and allocate the electors to those polling stations in such a manner as they think is the most convenient.

Process and Responses to consultation

3. The purpose of the review is to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, all electors have reasonable facilities for voting and these are accessible to electors who are disabled.
4. A Notice of Review was published on the Council’s website on 30 August 2024 along with the consultation documents which set out the current arrangements and sought responses from residents. The consultation ran until 29 September 2024.
5. Engagement with specific groups was also undertaken including disability groups, elected representatives and parish councils.

6. Information provided to the elections team during the elections in May and July 2024 - from poll clerks, presiding officers, voters and polling station inspectors – was also considered as part of the process of review.
7. There was a good response in terms of numbers to the consultation exercise with a total of 82 responses received. These responses can be broken down as follows:
 - 45 wholly positive comments about the polling station
 - 9 “other” comments including two about Religious or Pride “propaganda” being displayed
 - 1 comment that all stations need to be paperless & voting computerised
 - 1 comment that ID checks should be carried out outside to protect the vulnerable
 - 1 comment that postal voting should be encouraged for all
 - 1 comment that elector votes online
 - 1 comment regarding having to vote for Pennington even though living in Lymington
 - 1 comment that they could not access the information of the review

28 negative comments across 15 venues – 8 of which are for Bashley Village Hall and 5 for Waterside Primary School, with 1 further comment against the use of schools in general.
8. The Returning Officer has considered the responses, and in particular has considered the issues raised in respect of Bashley Village Hall and Waterside School. The detailed responses, and the comments of the Returning Officer in light of those comments, are included in the Table which is at Appendix 1.

Corporate plan priorities

9. The review supports the corporate plan People priority by enabling communities to respond to the review to ensure that the arrangements for elections meet the needs of all members of the community and remove barriers to voting wherever possible.

Options appraisal

10. The options considered following representations are set out in the Table at Appendix 1. The Council has to undertake the review and is constrained as to the options available for polling places by the availability of suitable places for use as polling stations.
11. Consultation has been undertaken for a period of a month during September 2024 and responses have been possible via the Portal on the website; by email and by post or in person by appointment. Specific contact has been made with relevant groups including disability groups, local councillors and parish councils.
12. This report with Appendix 1 was considered by the General Purposes and Licensing Committee at its meeting on 1 November 2024. Members of the Committee asked questions of the Officers present and were supportive of the proposals, and the minutes of this debate can be accessed [here](#).

Financial and resource implications

12. There are no specific financial or resourcing implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

Legal implications

13. The Electoral Commission Guidance specifies that as part of the compulsory review, the Council must consider the accessibility of potential polling stations when considering designating or reviewing a polling place. In doing so they must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled.
14. This review has been undertaken in accordance with Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission and is required by legislation to be undertaken and completed by January 30 2025.

Risk assessment

15. Risk assessments were carried out prior to the Parliamentary Election in 2024 of all polling stations, and are reviewed on an ongoing basis following feedback from staff and voters at each election by the Council's Health and Safety team and Elections team.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

16. The aim of the review and allocation of polling places is to ensure so far as practicable that electors are able to access their polling station on foot or by sustainable transport. This is not always possible within a large rural district however postal and proxy voting are promoted by the Elections team to assist voters who do not wish to drive to polling stations or who have difficulty with accessing the polling station.

Equalities implications

17. The review has been undertaken in accordance with the Electoral Commission Guidance as stated above to ensure that wherever possible polling stations are accessible and offer no barriers to voting.

Crime and disorder implications

18. There are no crime and disorder implications.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

19. None that arise from the report.

Conclusion

20. The review is a mandatory review, undertaken relatively soon after a detailed review as part of the recent boundary changes. It was not anticipated therefore that major changes would need to be made to the polling districts or places, and the responses to the consultation confirm that in the majority of cases the polling stations used by residents are suitable and no issues are raised. In the cases where issues have been raised, the General Purposes and Licensing Committee considered the representations and the Returning Officer's comments and decided to accept the proposals of the Returning Officer and to recommend these for adoption by Full Council.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Table of Responses and Returning Officer proposals

Background Papers:

Feedback received during elections in May and July 2024
Risk Assessments of individual polling stations