
Subject:	STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS
Meeting and Date:	Electoral Matters Committee – 20 November 2023 Council – 29 November 2023
Report of:	Electoral Services Manager
Decision Type:	Non-Executive
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: The Council started its statutory review of Polling Districts, Places and Stations on 02 October 2023. This report covers the recommendations in relation to the responses received during the consultation and seeks agreement to amend the current scheme to one of the options listed.

Recommendation: Electoral Matters Committee:

- (a) To consider the proposed Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations Scheme and make recommendations to Council.

Council:

- (a) To approve the recommended proposals for the Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations Scheme
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1. Summary

- 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. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires the Council to undertake and complete a review of Polling Districts and Places between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive).
- 1.2 The current polling place scheme is not recommended by the Electoral Commission, so we are seeking to delegate the power to designate polling places to the relevant (Acting) Returning Officer / Returning Officer in the case of polling stations needing to be changed.
- 1.3 The Electoral Matters Committee considered the existing scheme and determined whether any changes should be proposed prior to consulting on the scheme.
- 1.4 Following the consultation process, the Electoral Matters Committee will consider the relevant responses received and make recommendations to Council.
- 1.5 Council will determine the Polling District Scheme to be used for Parliamentary and Local Government Elections and Referenda. The Electoral Registration Officer will make any changes agreed and publish the register on 1 December 2023 reflecting the changes.

2. Introduction and Background

Designating Polling Districts

- 2.1 A Polling District is the geographical sub-division of an electoral area, eg UK Parliamentary constituency, a ward or an electoral division.
- 2.2 The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts for UK Parliamentary elections and for keeping the polling districts under review. Please note that ward boundaries cannot be altered as part of this review, only Polling Districts.
- 2.3 Although there is no requirement to sub-divide local government electoral wards into polling districts, it is recognised good practice to do so. When doing so, every effort must be made to ensure that the polling district scheme for Local Government elections mirrors as closely as possible that agreed for Parliamentary elections.
- 2.4 When designating polling districts, the Council must seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 2.5 In addition, and unless there are special circumstances that lead the Council to determine otherwise, each parish must be in a separate polling district.
- 2.6 The proposed Polling Districts Scheme follows the already established polling district boundaries with the exception of the polling district in Aylesham. A copy of the proposed Polling Districts Scheme including the estimated Electorate figures and local and Parliamentary turn out are attached at **Appendix 1** together with the maps depicting the proposed polling district boundary changes at **Appendix 2** and the maps of the existing polling districts at **Appendix 3**.

Polling Place

- 2.7 A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district should be designated so that it is obvious when an elector arrives at the polling place address where the polling station is located.
- 2.8 There must be a designated polling place in every polling district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district.
- 2.9 The polling places must be kept under review.
- 2.10 The current Scheme designates the polling place as follows:-

Each Polling District to be designated as the polling place. Where no suitable Polling Station is available the Returning Officer be authorised to designate an adjoining Polling District for that polling place.
- 2.11 The Electoral Commission do not recommend a whole polling district is designated as a polling place as this does not indicate the location of the polling station. In certain situations, it might not be practicable to await formal approval from the Electoral Matters Committee and Full Council in order to designate a new polling

place – for example, where a building becomes unavailable during the run up to an election or during the election planning phase.

For a practical solution, we recommend the power to designate polling places in accordance with section 18 and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 is delegated to the relevant (Acting) Returning Officer (ARO) / Returning Officer (RO). This will enable the ARO / RO to find an alternative polling station and designate a new polling place at the same time, speeding up the process and allowing the election planning to continue unimpeded.

Polling Stations

- 2.12 A Polling Station is the room or building where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the polling place designated for the polling district. The function of appointing polling stations is the responsibility of the (Acting) Returning Officer for Parliamentary elections and the Returning Officer for local government elections.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 Representations have been invited on the Polling District Scheme and current polling places / stations. The consultation was included on the Council website, sent out via Keep Me Posted, and posters sent to the town and parish clerks for display on their noticeboards.
- 3.2 In addition to consulting elected representatives, the Acting Returning Officers for the current Parliamentary Constituencies of Dover and of South Thanet, the Acting Returning Officer's for the new Dover and Deal Constituency and the new Herne Bay and Sandwich Constituency, local disability groups and local political parties were also consulted.
- 3.3 **Appendix 4** shows the responses relevant to the consultation. The only issues to come to light from the responses were the positioning of the polling stations for Buckland (South) (representation 16), Sandwich (North) (representations 9,13 & 36) and Middle Deal (Park) (representation 19), which are the responsibility of the (Acting) Returning Officer and not the Council. The ARO response to those representations is included in **Appendix 4**. There was a request to make Sandwich one ward and one polling station instead of two (representation 36), but this review cannot alter town or parish boundaries and one polling station would not be possible under the current maximum figures to attend a polling station to vote as recommended by the Electoral Commission.
- 3.4 There were no negative responses to the original proposals put forward in **Appendix 1 and 2**. The final summary of proposed changes can be found at **Appendix 5**.

4 Identification of Options

4.1 Option 1:

- (a) That the current scheme be amended to incorporate all the recommendations of the (Acting) Returning Officer (ARO) for the Dover / Dover and Deal Parliamentary Constituency (as per the summary at Appendix 5).

- (b) That the power to designate polling places is delegated to the relevant ARO / RO. This will enable the ARO / RO to find an alternative polling station and designate a new polling place at the same time, speeding up the process and allowing the election planning to continue unimpeded.
- (c) The Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places be designated as the Polling Districts and Polling Places for Local Government Elections.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

4.2 Option 2:

- (a) To amend the current scheme in some way to be determined by the Committee / Council.
- (b) That the power to designate polling places is delegated to the relevant ARO / RO. This will enable the ARO / RO to find an alternative polling station and designate a new polling place at the same time, speeding up the process and allowing the election planning to continue unimpeded.
- (c) The Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places be designated as the Polling Districts and Polling Places for Local Government Elections.

4. Evaluation of Options

- (a) Option 1 is the recommended option as both statutory and non-statutory consultees have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals.
- (b) Option 2 is not recommended as any changes proposed would not have been included in the consultation process and therefore would have prevented the statutory and non-statutory consultees from commenting on the changes.

5. Resource Implications

There are no financial implications in designating the Polling Districts however the cost of elections will be affected by the number of Polling Stations used.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Current and Proposed Polling District Scheme with the estimated Parliamentary electorate and local and Parliamentary turn-out figures.

Appendix 2 – Maps of the proposed changes to polling district boundaries.

Appendix 3 – Maps of the existing polling district boundaries.

Appendix 4 – Responses received to the consultation.

Appendix 5 – Summary of Proposed Changes

7. Background Papers

Representation of the People Act 1983

Electoral Administration Act 2006.
Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations
2006.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

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