
Subject: STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS

Meeting and Date: Electoral Matters Committee – September 2023

Report of: Electoral Services Manager

Decision Type: Non-Executive

Classification: Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: The Council is required to carry out a review of Polling Districts by 31 January 2025. This report details the requirements and seeks agreement to carry out the statutory consultation.

Recommendation: To approve the Polling District Scheme for consultation.

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). 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 Returning Officer in the case of polling stations being unavailable. The Committee will consider the existing scheme and determine whether any changes should be proposed prior to consulting on the scheme. Following the consultation process the 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 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 (Acting) Returning Officer. This will enable the (A)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.

Consultation

- 2.13 Representations will be invited on the Polling District Scheme and current polling stations. The Consultation will be included on the Council website in addition to consulting elected representatives. The Acting Returning Officer for the current Parliamentary Constituency of South Thanet, the Acting Returning Officer's for the new Dover & Deal Constituency and the new Herne Bay and Sandwich Constituency and local disability groups will also be consulted.

3. **Identification of Options**

- 3.1 Option 1: To undertake the statutory consultation utilising the proposed Polling District and Polling Places Scheme.
- 3.2 Option 2: To recommend changes to the proposed Polling District Scheme and to undertake the statutory consultation on the proposed revised Polling District Scheme.

4. **Evaluation of Options**

- 4.1 Were any changes to be proposed and not included in the consultation process this would prevent the statutory and non-statutory consultees from commenting on the changes.

5. **Resource Implications**

There are no additional financial implications associated with this report. The consultation process and review will be conducted within existing budgets. However, additional polling stations may be required to reflect any amended polling districts and the Electoral Commission requirement that there should be no more than 2250 electors per polling station. It should be noted that there will be costs as a result of hiring additional venues and employing additional polling station staff.

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.

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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