

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee

Date **15 October 2019**

Report of: **Head of Democratic Services**

Subject: **FINAL POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW
REPORT**

SUMMARY

The Council has a statutory duty to keep under review the polling districts and polling places it uses for parliamentary (and other) elections. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires that a review be undertaken before 31 January 2020. This report concludes the process and puts forward proposals which will be submitted to Council for final approval.

An interim review of all polling places was carried out in 2017. The subsequent recommendations from that review were agreed by the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee in September 2017 and approved by Council in October 2017.

The Committee is now requested to note the final consultation responses and to consider the proposals set out in this report which will then be recommended to Council for the scheme to be approved.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee:

- (a) notes the final consultation responses;
- (b) considers the proposals set out in this report; and
- (c) recommends the final scheme for Polling Places and Polling Districts 2019 to Council for adoption for the next four years, as shown in Appendix D to this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Council has a statutory duty to keep under review the polling districts and polling places it uses for parliamentary (and other) elections. The last full review was undertaken in 2014 and an interim review was undertaken in 2017 to address issues surrounding the use of schools as polling stations as well as other problematic locations. The regulations contained in The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and places. The current compulsory review must now be started and completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020.
2. The Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee (LRA) has delegated powers to undertake such a review and to recommend a final scheme to the Council for adoption.
3. This report concludes the review process and the Committee is now requested to note the final consultation responses and to consider the final proposals set out in this report which will then be recommended to Council for the scheme to be approved.

THE 2019 REVIEW

4. The review was conducted in three stages in order to give maximum opportunity for public comment and the views of local interest groups to inform the review:
 - **Stage One:** (1 April – 13 May)
Collate and publish data; give notice of the review; undertake preliminary consultation with interested parties and statutory consultees; commence inspection of current and potential polling places as necessary; prepare draft proposals.
 - **Stage Two:** (20 June – 17 July)
Publish draft recommendations as determined by the Committee at the meeting of 18 June; invite further comment from interested parties and statutory consultees; complete inspection of current and potential polling places as necessary.
 - **Stage Three:** (30 July – 24 Oct)
The LRA Committee at this September meeting is asked to consider comments received during the final consultation stage and will recommend a final scheme to Council. At the adoption of the final scheme, public notice will be given; Electoral Registration Officer will implement and publish the register of electors on 1 December 2019. Returning Officer to have regard to the scheme in the conduct of elections.

THE DRAFT SCHEME

5. Attached to the report presented to the LRA Committee at its 18 June 2019 meeting at Appendix B was the detailed list of polling districts for each ward, together with a note of the current polling place and electorate (as at 1 March 2019). Any consultation comments which were received were also noted.
6. The proposals for each ward, in summary, were:

Fareham East	No change to current scheme
Fareham North	No change to current scheme
Fareham South	No change to current scheme
Fareham West	No change to current scheme
Fareham North-West	No change to current scheme
Hill Head	No change to current scheme
Locks Heath	No change to current scheme
Portchester East	No change to current scheme
Park Gate	Further consideration to be given to alternative venues for PG2 and analysis of voter turnout PG1, PG3 and PG4 No change to current scheme
Portchester West	No change to current scheme
Salisbury	No change to current scheme
Stubbington	Further consideration to be given to alternative venues for ST2 ST1, ST3 and ST4 No change to current scheme
Titchfield Common	No change to current scheme
Titchfield	No change to current scheme
Warsash	No change to current scheme

7. As can be seen from the above table, the specific actions were to review polling districts Park Gate 2 and Stubbington 2.

FINAL CONSULTATION RESPONSES

8. A total of 34 final consultation responses were received. 27 of these were either positive or neutral. Of the remaining seven responses, two echoed the issues already raised in Park Gate. The other five responses did not show any trends or objective issues that needed to be addressed.

9. The final consultation responses can be found at Appendix A to this report.

Park Gate

10. Park Gate has been the subject of several reviews as electoral registration statistics show that it is a growing ward. Polling districts PG1, PG3 and PG4 are now well established in their existing venues and have attracted no adverse comments. PG2 was subject to an interim polling place review in October 2017 when it was moved away from Sarisbury Green Social Club due to booking clashes with other community group meetings.
11. However, the relocation to St Margaret Mary Church Hall in Middle Road has attracted some criticism over the distances some voters need to travel. The current polling district boundary split results in the biggest distance from the polling station being some 1.5 miles away from Vine Close.
12. The recent housing development schemes in the Park Gate area have resulted in a significant imbalance across the four polling districts and so it is recommended that a holistic review of the polling district boundaries be undertaken to redistribute the voter number balance between the districts and to re-assess the polling stations accordingly.
13. Therefore, the changes required are to:
 - The number of voters voting at St Margaret Mary Church Hall in Middle Road
 - The number of voters in each polling district which are currently unbalanced
 - The distance some voters are required to travel to their polling station (particularly from the south end of the ward to St Margaret Mary Church Hall)
14. The table at Appendix B shows the current polling districts and their polling places, and the proposed, new polling districts and places that make the changes listed above. These changes are detailed in the following list:
 - The district boundary lines (PG1, PG2, PG3) have been redrawn to balance the number of electors in each district.
 - PG1 and PG2 will continue to vote at St Margaret Mary Church Hall
 - PG3 (which now forms the south end of the ward) will vote at Priory Park Community Centre to reduce the distance travelled for voters and balance the number of voters at each polling place.
 - PG4 will continue to vote at Priory Park Community Centre.
 - Priory Park Community Centre is currently used for a single polling station (PG4) but has sufficient space for 2 polling stations so there are no cost implications.
15. To aid the transition to a new polling station for voters in the new PG3, letters will be sent to affected households informing them of the change once the new electoral register is published with the new polling districts and before any communications start regarding the May 2020 elections.
16. The Returning Officer and the ward councillors for Park Gate have been consulted and are fully supportive of the proposals.

Stubbington

17. For the European Parliamentary Election in May 2019, Stubbington district 2 was moved to the Stubbington Methodist Church on Mays Lane at the instruction of the Returning Officer. This was to alleviate congestion within the car park and within the polling place at Crofton Community Centre which now holds 5 polling stations.
18. A complaint was raised by a resident of Crofton Court because voters there had to walk or drive past the Community Centre, which is directly adjacent to Crofton Court, in order to get to the Methodist Church.
19. It is recommended that the district boundary line at the cross section of ST1 and ST2 be redrawn to move voters at Crofton Court, Village Close and Stubbington Lane (Odds 1 to 29, Evens #26) from ST2 to ST1.
20. The table at Appendix C shows the current polling districts and their polling places, and the proposed, new polling districts and places that make the change described above. These changes are detailed in the following list:
 - The district boundary lines (ST1, ST2) have been redrawn to balance the number of electors in each district.
 - ST1 will continue to vote at Crofton Community Centre.
 - ST2 will continue to vote at Stubbington Methodist Church
21. The Returning Officer remains of the view that there should not be more than 5 polling stations at Crofton Community Centre (all 4 Hill Head districts use Crofton Community Centre) and is in support of this recommendation.
22. The ward councillors have been consulted and are in support of this proposal although both have highlighted that parking at the Methodist Church in Mays Lane can be difficult during busy periods and so the situation there will be kept under review.

IMPENDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY REVIEW

23. Fareham Borough Council has recently been notified that it has been selected for a Local Government Boundary Review which is scheduled to be completed by 2022. One of the purposes of this review is to examine the number and boundary of wards or divisions for the purposes of the election of councillors to ensure an even distribution of electors per elected member. This means ward boundaries undergo a compulsory review in the next 2-3 years which may result in statutory boundary changes (and subsequently polling districts and places) and over-ride any changes made by this current review.

RISK ASSESSMENT

24. The Committee is reminded that undertaking this review fulfils the Council's statutory obligations. However, failure to meet the reasonable requirements of electors or not taking sufficient account of accessibility to disabled persons may lead to representations to the Electoral Commission, which may direct changes to be made. In undertaking the review, the Council is ensuring that it is taking reasonable steps to enable all electors to participate in the democratic process.

CONCLUSION

25. The Council has a statutory duty to undertake a review of the polling districts and polling places used in parliamentary (and other) elections before 31 January 2020. The proposals for the final scheme have been formed following consultation on the draft scheme approved by the Committee at its last meeting. The scheme takes account of the comments of statutory and other consultees and has regard for housing developments in the next four years, when a further review will be undertaken. The views of accessibility groups have been taken into account and, where additional comments have been made on operational practice, these will be passed to the relevant Returning Officer for action. The Committee is asked to approve a final scheme, attached as Appendix D to this report, and recommend it to Council for adoption.

Appendices:

Appendix A	2 nd Round Consultation Responses
Appendix B	Park Gate Proposed Changes
Appendix C	Stubbington Proposed Changes
Appendix D	Final Scheme for Polling Places and Polling Districts 2019

Background Papers:

Comments of the Returning Officer
Comments of ward councillors
Comments of third parties

Reference Papers:

LRA Committee Report 18 June 2019
Representation of the People Act 1983
The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006
The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Leigh Usher (Ext 4553)