

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### **Report to Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee**

**Date**                    **05 October 2023**

**Report of:**            **Assistant Director (Democracy)**

**Subject:**              **REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES**

#### **SUMMARY**

The Council has recently completed an electoral review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which has resulted in a new pattern of warding arrangements across the borough. The Boundary Commission for England has also published its final recommendations for new parliamentary constituencies. Taking both into account, the Council must now review its existing polling district boundaries, considering boundaries of the new Fareham Borough wards, Hampshire County Council divisions and the new parliamentary constituencies.

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 2025.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Committee notes the progress of the polling place review as set out in this report.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has recently undertaken an electoral review of the Fareham Borough, which has resulted in a new pattern of warding arrangements that will take effect from the May 2023 local elections.
2. The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) has undertaken a review of all Parliamentary constituencies in England, to rebalance the number of electors represented by each Member of Parliament. This review has resulted in the Fareham Borough being split between three constituencies: Fareham and Waterlooville, Hamble Valley, and Gosport. The new constituencies will be used at the next UK Parliamentary General election.
3. The Council must now review the polling districts across the Borough, and amend existing polling district boundaries; where necessary; considering the boundaries of:
  - (a) New Fareham Borough wards;
  - (b) Hampshire County Council divisions; and
  - (c) New Parliamentary constituencies

## **BACKGROUND**

4. Between January 2022 and February 2023, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) carried out an electoral review of the Fareham Borough, with their final recommendations for new electoral and boundary arrangements published on 7 February 2023.
5. An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for a local authority and considers:
  - (a) How many councillors are needed.
  - (b) How many wards there should be, where their boundaries are and what they should be called.
  - (c) How many councillors should represent each ward.
6. When carrying out an electoral review, the Commission has three main considerations:
  - (a) Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
  - (b) Ensuring that the recommendation reflects community identity.
  - (c) Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.
7. The LGBCE's final recommendations determined that:
  - (a) Fareham should be represented by 32 councillors; one more than there are now.
  - (b) Fareham should have 16 wards; one more than there are now.
  - (c) The boundaries of all wards should change, with a number of the ward names also changing to better reflect their identity.
8. The new warding arrangements will take effect from the May 2024 local elections, with all 32 councillor seats up for election.

9. Following the passing of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020, and the publication of the relevant Parliamentary electorate data in January 2021, the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) began a review of all Parliamentary constituencies in England, to rebalance the number of electors represented by each Member of Parliament.
10. The BCE is required by law to make sure that each constituency in England has between 69,724 and 77,062 electors. As part of this process, the number of constituencies in England will increase from 533 to 543.
11. Following a consultation process, the Commission looked at all feedback received and considered whether any changes should be made to their proposals for new constituency boundaries.
12. In June 2023, the BCE published its final recommendations for new constituency boundaries:
  - (a) In order to reduce the electorate of the Eastleigh and Fareham constituencies, a Hamble Valley constituency has been created, comprising areas around the River Hamble including Titchfield, Shedfield and Bursledon. The Hamble Valley constituency includes the current Fareham Borough wards of Locks Heath, Park Gate, Sarisbury, Titchfield, Titchfield Common and Warsash.
  - (b) To the east of the Borough, the constituency has been renamed Fareham and Waterlooville and includes the towns and rural areas of the lower Meon Valley, including the current Fareham Borough wards of Fareham East, Fareham North, Fareham North-West, Fareham South, Fareham West, Portchester East, and Portchester West.
  - (c) The Gosport constituency boundaries and name remains unchanged.

## **REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

13. The Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the local authority to divide its area into polling districts for the purpose of parliamentary elections and to keep such districts under review. Polling districts may also be designated for local government elections and in practice they follow the same boundaries as the parliamentary ones. A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of an electoral area, whether that is a constituency, a county division, or a borough ward.
14. A local authority is also required to designate a polling place for each polling district. A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations are located. 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.
15. A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the Returning Officer.
16. Following the LGBCE's electoral review of the Fareham Borough wards, the boundaries have changed in size and shape in many of the wards which has, in turn, impacted on the polling districts. In addition, the location of some polling places may now be outside of the ward to which they were previously assigned.

17. For the 2023 Parliamentary constituencies review, the BCE used the local government boundaries in place on 1 December 2020 and used the electorate figure from the register of Parliamentary electors as of 2 March 2020. As the new Parliamentary boundaries are based on local government ward boundaries that will cease as of May 2024, they are not coterminous with the new Fareham Borough ward boundaries.
18. All polling districts must now be reviewed, and new polling districts created to ensure that they align with both the new Fareham Borough Council ward boundaries, the Hampshire County Council division boundaries and the new Parliamentary constituency boundaries, whilst also identifying which polling place will be assigned to each polling district.
19. To support the review of the polling districts, the following need to be considered:
- (a) Identifying where polling districts affected by new boundaries may need to be altered.
  - (b) Identifying potential polling places where polling districts may change and carrying out an assessment on suitable buildings within the area.
  - (c) Identifying the polling districts where a change of polling place is likely to be required.
  - (d) Identifying where polling districts are not affected by new boundaries (in whole or in part).
20. Whilst the new local boundaries do not come into effect until May 2024, the electoral register which must be published on 1 December 2023 will be based on the new wards. The Elections team is currently reviewing the polling districts for each of the new wards, and considering whether the polling place is still appropriate or whether the location should be changed. The following points are being considered when reviewing each polling district:
- (a) Ensuring the new polling districts align with the local, county and parliamentary boundaries.
  - (b) Considering the voter's needs – including accessibility and location of the polling place
    - i. Keep electors voting at the same polling place, wherever possible.
  - (c) The potential for reducing the number of polling places, which could result in:
    - i. More streamlined administrative processes.
    - ii. Reduced costs - venue hiring and poll staffing.
    - iii. Fewer polling places in a ward for candidates and their agents.
21. A working draft of proposals for the new polling district arrangements can be found at Appendix A. This is a working document which will be updated as this review progresses.
22. A working draft of proposed polling districts and polling stations can be found at Appendix B, together with relevant notes and considerations. This is a working document and will be updated as the review progresses.

## **STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

23. 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 review was undertaken in 2019 and the next compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025. In addition to compulsory reviews, local authorities may also conduct additional reviews at other points, depending on local circumstances.
24. The possibility of aligning the current assessment (following the electoral review) with the statutory review has been considered, however as the new polling districts will form the electoral register, which is being published on 1 December 2023, the two reviews will be kept separate. The new polling districts will, however, reflect the new parliamentary constituency boundaries.
25. It is proposed that the statutory review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations will commence after the May 2024 all-out local elections, for completion by the end of January 2025.
26. Running the review consultation in May will provide us with invaluable information from our electors, who can comment based on their very recent experience at the polling place. It will be particularly useful to receive comments at this time from those whose polling place/station may have changed since the last time they voted.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

27. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report.

### **CONCLUSION**

28. The Council has recently been the subject of an electoral review conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, which has resulted in a new pattern of wards across the borough. In addition, the Boundary Commission for England has reviewed all Parliamentary constituencies in England, which has concluded with the borough of Fareham being split across three constituencies.
29. Following these reviews, the current polling districts and polling stations across the borough must be reviewed in time for publication of the new electoral register in December 2023.
30. The Council is also required to undertake a review of the polling districts and places used in parliamentary (and other) elections before January 2025. This statutory review will be conducted after the May 2024 elections.

### **Background Papers:**

None

### **Reference Papers:**

None

Appendix A: Working draft of proposals for new polling districts (maps)

Appendix B: Working draft of list of proposed polling districts and polling stations.

**Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Leigh Usher, 01329 824553.