

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee

Date **26 November 2024**

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

Subject: **PARLIAMENTARY POLLING DISTRICTS & POLLING PLACES:
CONSULTATION RESPONSES AND FINAL PROPOSALS**

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 2025. This report explains and concludes the process and puts forward proposals which will be submitted to Council for final approval.

The Committee is now requested to note the 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 consultation responses as set out in Appendix A;
- (b) considers the proposals set out in this report; and
- (c) recommends the final scheme for Polling Places and Polling Districts 2024 to Council for adoption for the next four years, as shown in Appendix C 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 completed in 2019, and an interim review was undertaken in 2023 to address the new warding arrangements implemented following the Electoral Review of Fareham carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission. This interim review also considered the outcome of the Review of Parliamentary Constituencies carried out by the Boundary Commission for England.
2. 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 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
3. The Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee (LRA) has delegated powers, as set out in the Constitution (Functions 58 and 59, Part 2, Chapter 6), to undertake such a review and to recommend a final scheme to the Council for adoption.
4. This report concludes the review process, and the LRA Committee is now requested to note the consultation responses, consider the final proposals set out in this report and to recommend a final scheme to for adoption by Council.

THE LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

5. 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 districts.
6. Polling districts are the geographical sub-divisions of an electoral area, whether that is a constituency, a county division or a borough ward. Neither the parliamentary constituency boundaries, nor the local government wards and division boundaries may be changed by this process.
7. A local authority is also required to designate a polling place for each polling district. A polling place is a building or area in which polling stations are located. The location of a polling station within a polling place is a matter for the Returning Officer and, as part of this review, the Returning Officer is required to make a formal comment on polling stations currently or likely to be used in any parliamentary (or other) election.
8. In undertaking a review, the local authority must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. It must also seek to ensure that so far as it practicable, every polling station is accessible to electors who are disabled. A polling place should preferably be located within the polling district, but the Act recognises this is not always feasible.
9. The process for undertaking a review is largely prescribed by the Act and regulations but minor alterations can be implemented between major reviews to satisfy the reasonable requirements of electors or to consider the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.
10. If the local authority in carrying out the review fails to meet the reasonable requirements of the electors or does not take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons

of polling stations within a designated polling place, then representations may be made to the Electoral Commission. The Commission may then direct the authority to make alterations to the polling places designated in the review.

THE 2024 REVIEW

11. The review was conducted in three stages, with the stage two consultation period being extended until after the UK Parliamentary General Election held on 4 July 2024 to give maximum opportunity for public comment to inform the review:
 - (a) **Stage 1** (1 October 2023 – 2 May 2024)
Give notice of the review; commence inspection of current and potential polling places as necessary; prepare draft proposals.
 - (b) **Stage 2** (6 May 2024 – 26 July 2024)
Publish draft recommendations as determined by the LRA Committee at the meeting of 12 March 2024; invite comment from interested parties and statutory consultees; complete inspection of current and potential polling places as necessary. The consultation period was extended to the end of July to consider the views of those who visited a polling station at the UK Parliamentary General Election on 4 July 2024.
 - (c) **Stage 3** (November 2024 – December 2024)
The LRA Committee at this November meeting is asked to consider comments received during the consultation stage and will recommend a final scheme to Council. Upon the adoption of the final scheme, public notice will be given and the Returning Officer will have regard to the scheme in the conduct of elections.

THE DRAFT SCHEME

12. The draft scheme was presented to the LRA Committee on 12 March where the Committee approved the statutory Notice of Review; which was subsequently published on 18 March; and considered the proposed scheme of polling districts and polling places. The detailed list of polling districts and polling stations were appended to the March report.
13. The draft scheme considered the new warding arrangements, following the electoral review which had resulted in changes to the name, layout and electorate of wards across the Borough. These changes included an increase in the number of wards, from 15 to 16, with each ward being represented by two councillors.
14. The draft scheme also considered the Boundary Commission for England's review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. As the new constituency boundaries are not coterminous with the new Fareham Borough ward boundaries and neither review had taken into account the Hampshire County Council divisions, all polling districts were reviewed as part of the interim review. This resulted in an increase in the number of polling districts across the Fareham Borough, from 64 to 67.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

15. The consultation ran from 8 May 2024 to 26 July. This was an extended timeframe due to the UK Parliamentary General Election being called at extremely short notice for 4 July 2024. Officers recognised that the election provided the potential to gather additional feedback from voters who may not have voted at the local elections in May

but who did visit polling stations for the parliamentary elections, as turnout is always significantly higher for a national poll.

16. Residents within the Borough were given the opportunity to complete an online survey to provide feedback on their designated polling place.
17. There was a particular focus on seeking feedback on the accessibility of the polling places for electors with physical disabilities or other requirements to assist their attendance at the polling station.
18. A total of 148 respondents completed the survey with 4 comments made via the Let's Talk Fareham Facebook group.
19. Overall, the majority of those who responded were happy with their designated polling place and felt that the location and facilities provided were accessible.
20. The feedback received was mainly centred around the provision of parking at polling places and the need for clearer signage to indicate where the polling station entrance is.
21. A number of respondents were disappointed that their polling place had changed from their usual location – it should be noted that it was necessary to change some polling places with effect from the local elections in May following the electoral review, with some previously used polling places also no longer being used as they were deemed to be no longer suitable (e.g. Fareham Fire Station and Portchester Fire Station have no parking facilities).
22. The consultation responses can be found at Appendix A to this report.

(ACTING) RETURNING OFFICER COMMENTS

23. A requirement of the polling place review is to include the comments of the (Acting) Returning Officer, this being the individual responsible for the running of parliamentary elections. The comments of the (A)RO for the Fareham and Waterlooville and Hamble Valley constituencies are included at Appendix B to this report.

FINAL SCHEME

24. The draft scheme was developed and published following the implementation of the new warding arrangements, which resulted in changes to the name, layout and electorate of wards and polling districts across the Borough.
25. The consultation results indicate that more than 90% of respondents are satisfied with the location and accessibility of polling places and polling stations. It is therefore recommended that the draft scheme be adopted as the final scheme and the LRA Committee is therefore asked to review the final scheme before recommending it to Council for adoption.
26. To further assist Members of the committee, Appendix D sets out the full list of polling stations showing which ward, county district and parliamentary constituency they serve.

RISK ASSESSMENT

27. The LRA Committee is reminded that undertaking this review fulfils the Council's statutory obligations. Failure to meet the reasonable requirements of electors or not taking sufficient account of accessibility may lead to representations to the Electoral

Commission who may direct changes to be made to the scheme. 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

28. The Council is required to undertake a review of the polling districts and places used in parliamentary (and other) elections before 31 January 2025. It must observe certain criteria, not least of which is accessibility to polling places to those with disabilities.
29. The proposals set out in Appendix C to this report have been formed taking account of the comments from consultees. The Committee is asked to approve the proposals, with a view to recommending a final scheme to Council for adoption at its meeting on 12 December 2024.

Appendices

Appendix A	Consultation responses
Appendix B	Comments of the (Acting) Returning Officer
Appendix C	Final Scheme for Polling Places and Polling Districts
Appendix D	Polling Stations by ward, District and Constituency

Background Papers:

Consultation Responses

Reference Papers:

LRA Committee Report 5 October 2023

LRA Committee Report 12 March 2024

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:

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