

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet - 20 November 2023

Report Title

Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023 - Approval of Polling Districts and Polling Places Scheme

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Sharon Kemp, Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

Mike Thomas, Electoral Services Manager
01709 823268 or Mike.thomas@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

A statutory review of polling places and polling districts has been undertaken between 2 October 2023 and 30 October 2023, which included a public consultation on the current polling scheme and the Returning Officer's proposals. This report considers the responses and final proposals for determination, in order for Cabinet to make final recommendations to Council.

Recommendations

That Cabinet recommend to Council that: -

1. The submissions made in respect of the review of polling districts and polling places for the Borough of Rotherham be noted.
2. Approval of the adoption of the polling district boundaries as outlined in Appendix 2 and the maps found in Appendix 5.
3. Approval of the final proposals for polling places as detailed in Appendix 2 to this report.
4. The Electoral Registration Officer is requested to make the necessary amendments to the polling districts to take effect from publication of the revised register on 1 December 2023.

5. The Electoral Registration Officer is requested to make the necessary amendments to the RVB and RVD polling district boundaries to take effect from publication of the revised register following the next UK Parliamentary General election.
6. Power to designate polling places in accordance with section 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 is continued to be delegated to the Chief Executive.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Borough Wards shown by current and proposed Parliamentary Constituencies
- Appendix 2 Polling place scheme and final proposals
- Appendix 3 Summary of responses to the consultation and Returning Officer comments
- Appendix 4 Ward maps of current polling districts and polling stations
- Appendix 5 Ward maps of proposed polling districts and polling stations
- Appendix 6 Part A - Initial Equality Screening Assessment Form
- Appendix 7 Part B - Equality Analysis Form
- Appendix 8 Carbon Impact Statement

Background Papers

[2023 Polling District and Polling Places Review - Consultation](#)

[Electoral Commission guidance on the review of polling districts and polling places](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
Council – 29 November 2023

Council Approval Required

Yes

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023

1. Background

- 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.
- 1.2 The following definitions may be helpful when reading the report and Appendices:-
 - “Polling districts” are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
 - “Polling places” are the buildings or areas designated by the Council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
 - “Polling stations” are the number of issuing desks in the building that is the designated polling place.
- 1.3 The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all Local Authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years. The Council undertook the last full review between October 2018 and December 2019. This review considered the changes to the Borough ward boundaries. The next review must be completed by January 2025.
- 1.4 The Boundary Commissions for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have completed a review of the Parliamentary constituencies in their respective areas and submitted their recommendation reports to the Speaker of the House of Commons on 27 June 2023. The Government will draft an Order containing the recommendations for all four Parliamentary Boundary Commissions. Once the draft Order is approved by the Privy Council, the new constituencies will be used for the next General Election following that date. Any by-elections taking place beforehand would use the existing constituency boundaries.
- 1.5 The review of Polling Districts and Polling places considered the changes to the Parliamentary constituencies covering the Rotherham Council area, to ensure the proposed polling districts and polling places would allow the smooth administration of local government and Parliamentary elections on the current or proposed constituency boundaries. The breakdown of Borough wards by current and new Parliamentary constituencies can be seen in Appendix 1.
- 1.6 The review formally commenced on 2 October 2023, and should the recommendations be accepted by Cabinet and Council, it will finish on 29 November 2023. This will allow the changes in polling districts to be reflected on the revised electoral register which is due to be published on 1 December 2023.
- 1.7 Ward boundaries cannot be changed as part of this review. Ward and constituency boundaries are the responsibility of the Local Government and Parliamentary Boundary Commissions respectively. This review can only consider the internal boundaries of polling districts within wards.

1.8 The review is governed by the provisions of Schedule 1A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 and must follow the Electoral Commission guidance on the review of polling districts and polling places.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Time to conduct the statutory review is severely restricted with scheduled elections and a Parliamentary General election due to take place within the 16-month review window. Due to the electoral events due to take place, it has been necessary to conduct the review at the earliest opportunity to be able to prepare and administer the May 2024 scheduled local elections as well as the imminent UK Parliamentary General election.

2.2 Preparatory work was undertaken by Council officers to inform the Returning Officer's initial proposals which were set out in the consultation.

2.3 A small number of the current polling places will not be available in future or are no longer suitable, so alternatives were sought. The main issues considered in the development of the Returning Officer's proposals as set out in the consultation were:

- (a) To try to identify new polling places in areas where the existing provision is unsuitable or unavailable.
- (b) To consider, as appropriate, feedback received following recent elections raised by members of the public, elected members and other stakeholders.
- (c) To ensure, as far as practicable, that any new polling places are accessible to people with disabilities.
- (d) To ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- (e) To try to minimise disruption to schools. It should be noted that the Returning Officer has the right in law to select schools as polling venues which places a duty on schools, as publicly funded buildings, to provide the facilities required if asked to do so. However, where alternative premises exist which can provide better facilities for voting, these will be considered.
- (f) To ensure polling stations have sufficient space to allow for checking Voter ID in private.
- (g) Ensuring that, as far as possible, the number of polling station electors allocated to a polling station does not exceed 2,250.
- (h) Considering, as far as practical, the impact of new building developments on projected polling station electorate figures.

2.4 Due to the introduction of Voter ID requirements, the Electoral Commission has lowered the recommended maximum number of polling station electors

that should be allocated to a polling station. The recommended maximum has reduced from 2,500 to 2,250. Currently seven polling districts exceed this new lower maximum station electorate figure; therefore, changes were proposed as part of the Returning Officer's proposals.

- 2.5 Further details of the existing polling scheme and the initial proposals for changes were outlined in the Consultation Paper.
- 2.6 The Council gave public notice of the formal commencement of the review on 2 October 2023, and publicised the review via the Council website and social media. Any registered elector was entitled to make representations.
- 2.7 The deadline for responses to the consultation was 30 October 2023. Twenty responses were received, commenting on 27 polling districts. A summary of the responses and the Returning Officer's comments is provided in Appendix 3.
- 2.8 As a result of the representations made during the consultation, the final proposals contain four changes in addition to the initial proposals.
 - (a) Brinsworth Ward: It is proposed to amend the polling district boundary between BWD and BWC to move numbers 69 to 83 Whitehill Lane and four properties on Orchard Way from polling district BWD to BWC.
 - (b) Brinsworth Ward: It is proposed to move the polling district boundary between BWD and BWB to move 58 to 68 Brinsworth Lane from BWD to BWB.
 - (c) Brinsworth Ward: It is proposed to move the polling district boundary between BWD and BWE to move 56 Brinsworth Lane from BWD to BWE.
 - (d) Greasbrough Ward: It is proposed that Greasbrough Library is designated the polling place for GRA polling district, instead of Greasbrough Primary School.
- 2.9 Further details of the final proposals and the polling place scheme are set out in Appendix 2.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 Option 1 - Do not change any polling places before the 2024 elections. This option has been discounted because the Council has a statutory duty to carry out a review, some existing polling places will not be available for elections in 2024 and the guidance for the maximum number electors allocated to a polling station has changed.
- 3.2 Option 2 - Consider the results of the review and determine changes in time for the publication of the revised register on 1 December 2023. This would allow the changes to be in place ahead of the scheduled local elections in May 2024 and the forthcoming Parliamentary General election, as well as taking into account the revised guidance for polling station electorates.

3.3 It is recommended that the proposals for changes to polling places as outlined in this report and Appendix 2 be approved.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The consultation period for the review ran from 2 October 2023 to 30 October 2023. Public notice of the review was given, and information about the review made available on the Council's website and in Customer Service Centres, Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs. Any registered elector was entitled to make representations.

4.2 As well as being available on request, details of the review and the consultation paper were also sent to elected ward members, MPs, Parish Councils, and local groups including those representing disabled people.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 provides for decisions on polling districts and places to be made by the Council.

5.2 Once the Council has made its determination, the conclusion of the review will be published including the reasons for the council's decisions in respect of the designation of polling districts and places. Reasons have been given in Appendix 2.

5.3 Certain persons, on specific grounds, can appeal to the Electoral Commission about the alteration of polling places.

5.4 The Assistant Director of Legal, Elections and Registration Services will be responsible for implementing the decisions. Electoral Services will take the measures to bring the changes into effect, making the necessary amendments to the polling districts to take effect from publication of the revised register on 1 December 2023, and putting the new polling place scheme in place for any elections taking place from this point forward.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 The cost of conducting the review will be funded from within the existing Electoral Services budget. The cost of scheduled local elections is approved as part of the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. By-elections are a budget pressure within the Finance and Customer Services budget. Other elections are funded by Central Government.

6.2 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 The Council has a legal duty to review polling districts and polling places, as described in this report. The legislative framework for reviews of polling districts and places consists of: (i) sections 18A to 18E and Schedule A1 of

the Representation of the People Act 1983, as inserted by section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006; (ii) section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 None arising directly from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 In England and Wales, legislation entitles the (Acting) Returning Officer to use schools maintained or assisted by a local authority for use as a polling station. This includes schools which receive grants from money provided by Parliament, Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) schools, academies and free schools.

9.2 Where there are no suitable alternatives to using a school, the decision to close the school on polling day lies with the Headteacher. Electoral Services will work with schools to see if there is a way to keep the school open while considering safeguarding issues. If this is not possible, the school will have to consider closing to pupils on polling day.

9.3 For scheduled elections, schools that are used as polling places are provided with the dates, so they can consider setting polling day as an inset day to avoid the loss of an additional day's teaching.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 The Council must seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practical, every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to people who are disabled. Provision of reasonably convenient polling arrangements is an essential element of the free and fair elections required under Protocol 1, Article 3 of the Human Rights Act.

10.2 The Initial Equality Screening Assessment can be found at Appendix 6 along with the Equality Analysis (EA) at Appendix 7. The EA identifies actions to address accessibility identified through the review, including outcomes from the consultation

10.3 The actions provide that Presiding Officers will carry out an evaluation of the suitability and accessibility of all polling places and polling stations at the next scheduled election in May 2024. This information will be used to assess if any mitigations are required for future elections, or if any changes are needed in terms of polling stations or polling places. Further evaluation will then be undertaken at each election.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 There are some unavoidable but limited implications on CO2 emissions and climate change. The carbon impact assessment can be seen in Appendix 8.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 None arising directly from this report.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Polling places are essential for the conduct of elections. Inadequate provision of polling places and polling stations could have a detrimental effect on voter turnout and could be the source of an election challenge.

14. Accountable Officers

Phillip Horsfield, Assistant Director of Legal, Elections and Registration Services

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	06/11/23
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	02/11/23
Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phillip Horsfield	02/11/23

Report Author: Mike Thomas, Electoral Services Manager
01709 823268 or Mike.thomas@rotherham.gov.uk

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).