

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

11 July 2019

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillors M Dormer, Leader and Thain, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Portfolio Holder Consulted	No
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Ward(s) Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	Will be part of consultation
Not a Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The report sets out the key stages and proposed timetable to the formal review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, as required under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, and as based on Electoral Commission Guidance (a copy of the guidance is included in appendix 1).
- 1.2 The last review took place in 2014 and this review has to be conducted and completed before end of January 2020, as per legislation to cover a 5-year period. However it is desirable to complete the review before 1 December 2019 so as not to waste time and resource in republishing the electoral register.
- 1.3 The review covers, Polling Districts (a geographical area, which tend not to cross Ward or Parish Boundaries), Polling Place (a building or area where Polling Stations are located) and Polling Stations (the room or area where polling takes place, the decision on location of the polling station is decided by the (Acting) Returning Officer).
- 1.4 The review consists of four stages:
 - Stage 1 – Notification
 - Stage 2 – Consultation
 - Stage 3 – Concluding the Review
 - Stage 4 – Publication

A timetable for agreement is included in Appendix 2. Essentially this time table will allow for time for initial consultation and a chance for stakeholders to comment on the final proposals before the review is concluded at the end of November.

- 1.5 The (Acting) Returning Officer must make a submission regarding current and any proposed polling stations.

- 1.6 Consultation will involve writing to all interested parties and stakeholders including All Ward Councillors, MPs, County Councillors, Parishes and organisations that deal with different forms of disability where voting in person could pose a difficulty. Officers will be contacting individuals or organisations that have commented on their own polling station and invite them to make representations. In addition any Elector within the constituency may make a submission to be considered as part of the review.
- 1.7 Once complete certain people or organisations may appeal to the Electoral Commission to have changes made if they feel the Local Authority hasn't met reasonable expectations of the electorate or taken into account the needs for accessible polling stations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 that the timetable for the review in appendix 2 be agreed;

2.2 that the review formally commences on 17 July 2019.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 Subject to the Committee's final decisions, there may be some minor financial implications for the Council which arise directly from this review, but which can be contained within existing budgets.
- 3.2 Depending on the outcome of the review there may be additional costs or savings regarding polling stations that are to be used in future elections.

Legal Implications

- 3.3 The Review will be undertaken as required under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Electoral Administration Act 2013, and in accordance with relevant Electoral Commission Guidance.
- 3.4 a) Authority to set Polling District boundaries and to designate Polling Places rests with the Council or relevant Committee (Statutory elements of the Council's Constitution under the Local Government Act 2000).
- b) Decisions about the situation of Polling Stations within designated Polling Places are for the (Acting) Returning Officer. Arrangements must comply with relevant provisions of the Representation of the People Acts and Regulations and the Equality Act 2010.

3.5 "Relevant authorities" (such as Redditch Borough Council) must

"a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances"; and

"b) seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled and, when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons. If it is necessary to use a place where the access is not ideal, then every reasonable adjustment must be undertaken to provide access for all electors."

Service/Operational Implications

The review will take up a large amount of Officer in time in dealing with consultation, producing statistics, maps and reporting back to this Committee.

3.6 Officers have already started working on:

- Current Polling Stations – Polling Station Inspectors reviewed all of the current stations within the area at the Local and Euro Parliamentary Elections in May.
- Polling Districts – Polling Districts are being assessed in conjunction with the Planning Department regarding new builds within the area.

Customer/Equalities and Diversity Implications

3.7 The Council's Customer Care / Equalities policies directly cross-relate, particularly in relation to Access issues. Accessibility for members of minority or disadvantaged groups is a key issue in the selection of suitable Polling Stations.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

4.1 Any changes agreed must be likely to be sustainable for a reasonable number of years, as frequent changes of Polling Station are not helpful for electors and undermine their knowledge of, and confidence in, electoral systems.

4.2 Choice of Polling Place / Polling Station should not give rise to significant grounds of complaint which might put election results at risk of challenge.

4.3 In terms of Environmental risks, it is of course preferable that choice of Polling Station location can help minimise unnecessary additional journeys by motorised vehicles.

4.4 In terms of Human Resources risks, the (Acting) Returning Officer must provide adequate levels and standards of staffing to secure proper polling arrangements.

5. APPENDICES

- 1 Electoral Commission Guidance
- 2 Review Timetable

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Previously published Polling Stations Review reports / Minutes.
- Relevant Statutory provisions.

7. KEY

Redditch Returning Officer, Sue Hanley, is designated (Acting) Returning Officer for Parliamentary Elections.

This is because formally the Returning Officer for a County Constituency such as Redditch is the High Sheriff for that County, which is a purely honorific title/role.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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