

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 7 October 2019

**Report Title:** Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019

**Report By:** Jane Hartnell  
Director of Corporate Services and Governance

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### **Purpose of Report**

To report the findings and evaluation of the recent review and the Acting Returning Officer's subsequent recommendations.

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### **Recommendation(s)**

- 1. To recommend that Council adopts the Acting Returning Officer's recommendations (as appended to this report) and publish the results of the review**
- 2. Delegate authority to the Director of Corporate Services and Governance to amend any decisions made under this review with regard to polling places or polling stations, should there be an urgent or necessary need.**

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### **Reasons for Recommendations**

The council must regularly review the division of its parliamentary constituency area (within the borough boundary) into polling districts and the places where electors are asked to vote. The council must comply with the requirements of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Section 16, EAA 2006) and complete regular reviews of all polling districts and polling places. The council has a duty to ensure that the most suitable premises are used as polling places with regard to the needs of the electorate, subject to availability.

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## Introduction

1. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Section 16, EAA 2006) introduced a duty for all UK parliamentary polling districts and polling places to be reviewed by the end of 2007 and thereafter to be reviewed periodically.
2. The Council's last full review under the legislation was completed and approved in February 2013. An interim review was completed and approved in January 2017. This was necessary due to changes made following a ward boundary review as completed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
3. Due to the changes made as part of the boundary review, it has been necessary to review the polling districts in some wards as there is a large disparity in electorate numbers between each polling district. The polling district boundaries in 6 of the 16 wards were reviewed in order to achieve, where possible, a more equal number of electors. This will mean a number of polling station changes for electors within the borough. The wards affected are:
  - Ashdown (A1, A2, A3)
  - Gensing (G1, G2, G2A)
  - Old Hastings (J1, J2)
  - St Helens (L1, L2)
  - Silverhill (M1, M1A, M2, M2A, M2A, M2B)
  - Wishing Tree (P1, P1A, P2)
4. We have taken into consideration logistical issues within the polling district, e.g. public transport links and natural geographic terrain. We have also endeavoured to ensure that electors are not greatly disadvantaged by any move in polling district boundaries.
5. The Council must seek to ensure that, until the next full review, all electors within the borough boundary of the Hastings and Rye parliamentary constituency, have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances, and to ensure that, as far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.
6. The arrangements made for UK parliamentary elections are also used at other elections.
7. The final proposals will be reported to Full Council on 23 October 2019. Assuming the proposals are agreed, the revised electoral register will be published on 1 December 2019.
8. The Electoral Commission has no role in the review process itself. However, it can consider comments if people do not think the review has met the reasonable requirements of electors or taken sufficient account of the needs of disabled electors.

9. The following are not covered by the review:

- Boundaries of UK parliamentary constituencies;
- Borders and names of local authorities and electoral areas within local authorities; and
- Electoral ward boundaries

### **Local People's Views**

10. The consultation has actively sought comments from people who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Any elector within the Hastings and Rye parliamentary constituency may make representations. Although not specifically required in law, the consultation carried out by the Council has included local political parties and elected representatives.

### **Equalities and Community Cohesiveness**

11. Electoral Services staff have previously visited every polling place to carry out an access audit, taking account of the needs of disabled voters. Questionnaires were also issued to each polling place under consideration, in order to provide us with a detailed overview of facilities and accessibility.

### **The Review Process**

12. The timetable for the Review is set out as:

- Notice of start of review: 15 July 2019
- ARO's Representations published: 15 July 2019
- Closing date for representations: 26 August 2019
- Final proposals heard by Cabinet: 7 October 2019
- Recommendations considered and decision made by Full Council: 23 October 2019
- Revised electoral register published: 1 December 2019

13. The council consulted the Acting Returning Officer (ARO), Jane Hartnell, who is also the Returning Officer for all other elections and referenda.

14. A cross party review group was set up with Councillors Patmore and Rogers, Jane Hartnell (ARO and Director of Corporate Services and Governance), Chris Barkshire-Jones (Chief Legal Officer), Katrina Silverson (Electoral Services Manager) and Sam Townshend (LLPG & GIS Technician). The group has met at regular intervals; they have considered representations received and reviewed proposals for polling district boundary changes. Their comments and recommendations have been taken into account and incorporated where appropriate over the course of the review.

15. Following the conclusions of the review group, the council consulted the ARO in respect of the proposed polling district boundary changes and one potential polling

station change. She agreed with the proposals made and would further investigate the use of the proposed alternative polling station.

### **Conclusion of the review / publishing stage**

16. Due to the disparity in electorate numbers between some polling districts, as highlighted above, the review group and ARO have proposed the following changes in the 6 affected wards:

- Ashdown ward - move approximately 660 electors from polling district A1 to polling districts A2 (475 electors) and A3 (185 electors)
- Gensing ward - move approximately 600 electors to from polling district G1 to polling district G2
- Old Hastings ward - move approximately 540 electors from polling district J1 to polling district J2
- St Helens ward - move approximately 200 electors from polling district L1 to polling district L2 and approximately 30 electors from polling district L2 to polling district L1
- Silverhill ward - move approximately 770 electors from polling district M2 to polling district M1
- Wishing Tree ward - move approximately 700 electors from polling district P1 to polling district P2

17. A list of streets and properties affected by the proposed changes can be found appended to this report.

18. The ARO is proposing to keep the existing polling place arrangements and to make changes only where circumstances require. An alternative polling station suggestion was raised by Councillor Patmore towards the end of the review and this will be investigated as soon as possible. The venue suggested is:

- Polling district M2 (currently St Luke's United Reformed Church Hall, Alma Terrace to Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Ledsham Avenue)

19. Throughout the review, any working papers, correspondence, etc. have been available for public inspection through the Electoral Services office at Muriel Matters House. All relevant items (correspondence, representations, notes of meetings, ARO's proposals etc.) will be published when the review has been completed.

20. Once the council has agreed on the proposals they will be published on the council's website.

### **The ARO's representations and other representations, including risk management**

21. In addition to contacting the various stakeholders, the council consulted the ARO for the Hastings & Rye constituency. The ARO is required to make representations to the authority and in doing so must include information as to the location of polling stations (existing or proposed) within polling places (existing or proposed). Rother

District Council has consulted the ARO in respect of those wards within Rother that form part of the Hastings and Rye constituency. Rother District Council will make a decision in respect of those.

22. The ARO must also take account of the following:

- The council must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- The council must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.
- Ideally, the polling place should be in its own polling district.
- Ideally, no polling place should be shared by two wards.
- Where possible, “natural” boundaries should be used, e.g. railways, major roads, etc.
- All properties in a minor road or estate should, ideally, be in the same polling district.
- Polling places should be “logical”; that is, electors should not have to pass another polling place to get to their own polling place.

23. Appended to this report is a summary of the ARO's comments and recommendations to the council.

24. Each polling district has one or more polling places allocated to it and the polling place is the premises, including the exterior access points, in which polling stations are situated. During this review, most existing polling places were found to be satisfactory.

25. The paragraphs below highlight areas where concerns have been identified or about which comments have been received. In each case every effort has been made to identify an alternative location or to resolve the problem.

26. In M2 polling district (Silverhill ward), the ward councillors raised concerns over the location of the polling station, citing difficulty in parking and also a fair distance from electors in the polling district. An alternative venue has been recommended and will be investigated as soon as possible.

27. In D3 polling district (Castle ward), the county councillor suggested that electors in the lower part of the polling district may be better served by the D2 polling station as it gave easier accessibility. The review group considered this suggestion, in consultation with the ARO, but concluded that the current boundary was satisfactory.

28. In L2 polling district (St Helens ward), the ward councillor suggested that a small number of properties in St Helen's Park Road, sited between Fearon Road and Keppel Road, should be moved into polling district L1 as the polling station for this polling district is sited within a very short distance. The review group, in consultation with the ARO, were happy to accept this proposal.

29. Any risk associated to changing a polling district boundary, polling place or polling station has been taken into account as part of the review and the ARO has been consulted at each stage of the process. None of the proposals offered within this are considered high risk in the context of the review and its remit.

### **Challenging the outcome of the review**

30. Following the conclusion of the local authority's review, certain persons have a right to make representations to the Electoral Commission. There are only two grounds on which a representation may be made. These are that the local authority has failed to meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency and that insufficient account of accessibility to disabled persons of the polling station(s) within a polling place has been made.

31. More detailed information is available on the Electoral Commission website - [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

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### **Wards Affected**

All wards

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### **Implications**

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	Yes
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	No
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	No
Local People's Views	Yes
Anti-Poverty	No

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### **Additional Information**

Proposal document, including ARO recommendations

List of properties affected by proposed polling district boundary changes

Ward maps for areas affected by proposed polling district boundary changes

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### **Officer to Contact**

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