

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 6 November 2023

Report Title: Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023

Report By: Natasha Tewkesbury, Head of Community and Regulatory Services

Key Decision: Y

Classification: Open

Purpose of Report

To report the findings and evaluation of the recent interim review of Polling Places and the (Acting) Returning Officer's subsequent recommendations.

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 interim review**
- 2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to amend any decisions made under this review with regard to polling places or polling stations, should there be an urgent or necessary need.**

Reasons for Recommendations

Due to the recent completion of the Boundary Commission for England's review of parliamentary constituencies, the council were advised to carry out an interim review of its polling districts and places.

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.

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 fully reviewed every 5 years .
2. The council's last full review under the legislation was completed and approved in October 2019.
3. Due to the recent completion of the Boundary Commission for England's review of parliamentary constituencies, it was advised to undertake a short, interim review now with a full review taking place in 2024.
4. Although there have been no changes to the Hastings & Rye constituency boundaries within our own register area, we deemed it an appropriate time to review our polling districts and polling places prior to a potential UK parliamentary election in 2024.
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 with disabilities and specific needs.
6. The same arrangements made for UK parliamentary elections are also used at other elections.
7. The final recommendations will be reported to Full Council on 22 November 2023. Assuming these are agreed, the revised electoral register will be published on 1 December 2023.
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 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 public 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, or accessibility needs. 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 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 interim review process

12. The timetable for the interim review is set out as:

Notice of start of review: 2 October 2023

(Acting) Returning Officer's representations published: 2 October 2023

Closing date for representations: 22 October 2023

Final recommendations heard by Cabinet: 6 November 2023

Recommendations considered and decision made by Full Council: 22 November 2023

Revised electoral register published: 1 December 2023

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

Conclusion of the review / publishing stage

14. The (Acting) Returning Officer is recommending to keep the existing polling place arrangements in place and to make changes only where exceptional circumstances require. The changes in venues are:

Polling district N2

The Bridge Community Centre, Priory Road to Calvert Church Hall, Mount Pleasant Road.

The Bridge Community Centre is no longer available. Calvert Church Hall was used successfully in 2022 elections with no reduction in turnout.

Polling district O2

West St Leonards Primary Academy, Harley Shute Road to West St Leonards Community Centre, Bexhill Road.

West St Leonards Primary Academy is no longer available. The community centre was used successfully in 2021 and 2022.

15. Throughout the interim review, any documentation, correspondence, etc. have been available for public inspection through the Electoral Services office at Muriel Matters House. All relevant items (correspondence, representations etc.) will be published when the review has been completed.

16. Once Full Council have agreed the recommendations they will be published on the council's website.

The (Acting) Returning Officer's representations and other representations, including risk management

17. In addition to contacting the various stakeholders, the council consulted the (Acting) Returning Officer for the Hastings & Rye constituency. They are required to make representations to the council 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 (Acting) Returning Officer in respect of those wards that fall within Rother but form part of

the Hastings and Rye constituency. Rother District Council will make a decision in respect of these.

18. The (Acting) Returning Officer 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.

19. Appended to this report is a summary of the (Acting) Returning Officer's comments and recommendations to the council.

20. 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 interim review, the majority of existing polling places were found to be satisfactory.

21. 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.

22. In N2 polling district (Tressell ward), one of the ward councillors raised concerns over the location of the new proposed polling place at Calvert Church Hall as it was not as well located as the previous venue. They asked that we investigate using The Bridge Community Centre, should it become available again. Officers attempted to contact the venue to discuss this on several occasions, without success. As such, it was agreed with the (Acting) Returning Officer to proceed with the proposal to move the polling place to Calvert Memorial Hall.

23. In O2 polling station (West St Leonards ward), one of the ward councillors objected to the use of West St Leonards Community Centre as a dual polling station with O1. Reasons for this included that the proposals would mean that ward would only have one polling place, and poor public transport links to the proposed polling place from Harley Shute Road and surrounding areas. They suggested siting a mobile polling station within the polling district in order for voters in the area to more easily cast their vote. Having explored this option previously in the area, the costs of a portable unit far exceeds the polling station budget, and there were challenges in finding a suitable and secure site to locate a mobile station together with a power supply (most likely a generator). In light of these challenges, the (Acting) Returning Officer agreed to proceed with the proposal to move the polling place to West St Leonards Community Centre. The (Acting) Returning Officer has directed that officers continue to seek suitable venues within O2 polling district and if one were to be identified, the (Acting) Returning Officer would use delegated powers to change the polling station.

24. 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 (Acting) Returning Officer 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

25. 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.
26. More detailed information is available on the Electoral Commission website - www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Timetable of Next Steps

27. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Incorporate any agreed changes to polling district boundaries to electoral register	Publication of revised electoral register	1 December 2023	Katrina Silverson

Wards Affected

(All Wards);

Policy Implications

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

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Y
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	N
Risk Management	Y
Environmental Issues & Climate Change	N
Economic/Financial Implications	N
Human Rights Act	N
Organisational Consequences	N
Local People's Views	Y
Anti-Poverty	N
Legal	Y

Additional Information

Proposal document, including (Acting) Returning Officer recommendations
Interactive Map [Consultation Interim Polling Place Review 2023 \(hastings.gov.uk\)](http://Consultation Interim Polling Place Review 2023 (hastings.gov.uk))

Officer to Contact

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