

**Meeting: COUNCIL**  
**Date: 16 OCTOBER 2019**



## **REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2019 – OUTCOME OF REVIEW**

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### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This report sets out the steps taken in the 2019 review of Parliamentary Polling District and Places and the outcome of that review, which complies with the relevant statutory obligations.
- 1.2 Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 we are required to conduct a review of all Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Borough every five years.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Borough, as set out in Appendix A, be adopted.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In compliance with Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (review of polling districts and places in Great Britain), the statutory responsibility for reviewing Parliamentary Polling Districts and Places in England and Wales rests with each relevant local

authority for so much of any constituency as is situated in its area. The Authority must have undertaken and completed a review of all Parliamentary Polling Districts and Places in its area within 16 months, commencing 1 October 2018 (i.e. by 31 January 2020). To be effective for the Revised Register of Electors to be published on 1 December 2019 the review had to be completed in time for Council to consider any proposals on 16 October 2019.

- 3.2 Following this review a further review will need to take place within the period of 16 months commencing on 1 October every fifth year thereafter. Accordingly the next review will commence on 1 October 2023. However, the Council is not prevented from carrying out a review of all or some of the polling districts and places in its area at other times.
- 3.3 A **Polling District** is a geographical area created by a sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election. In England, each parish is to be a separate polling district (unless there are special circumstances). The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts and for keeping these under review.
- 3.4 A **Polling Place** is a geographical area in which polling stations will be selected. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are in close proximity to all electors in the polling district. It is possible to designate an entire polling district as the polling place and it is also possible to designate it more tightly (such as a particular building). The Council must designate a polling place for every polling district unless the size or other circumstances of the polling district are such that the location of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electorate. The designated polling place must be within the area of the polling district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside of the polling district.
- 3.5 A **Polling Station** is the room or area in which the voting takes place. This must be located within the polling place that has been designated for the particular polling district. In some cases there is more than one polling station within a polling place, dependent upon how many people vote there. Unlike Polling Districts and Polling Places, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for the election.
- 3.6 In addition to the above, Local Authorities must comply with the following access requirements;
- (a) seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area 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 every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled.

- 3.7 The Council must give notice of holding a review, which requires publication in the Council's Office, in at least one conspicuous place within the Council's area, and on the Council's website. Such notice was given for this review.
- 3.8 The content of the Notice is not prescribed, but it would include key information such as the timetable of the review, that it welcomes responses and suggested alternatives, where documents can be inspected and who to make representations to.
- 3.9 The Council is required to consult the Acting Returning Officer for every parliamentary constituency that is wholly or partly within its area.
- 3.10 In respect to any representations from the Acting Returning Officer received, the Borough Council would be required to publish the said representations within thirty calendar days of their receipt, as a minimum.
- 3.11 In reviewing polling districts and polling places, the Council is required to actively seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must be given the opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the Returning Officer.
- 3.12 A key factor the Council considered at the outset of the review was the identification of those persons/organisations it feels have particular expertise in accessibility issues. In addition, any elector in the constituency may make representations on the designation of polling places to the Council.
- 3.13 On completion of a review, the Council is required to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of both polling districts and polling places. In addition, the Council must publish the following:
- ☐
  - all correspondence sent to a Returning Officer in connection with the review, and all correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability; ☐
  - all representations made by any person in connection with the review;
  - the minutes of any meetings held by the authority where details of the review have been considered; ☐
  - details of the actual designations of polling districts and polling places agreed as a result of the review; and ☐
  - details of where the results of the review have been published.
- 3.14 Although this review concerns itself explicitly with the review of Parliamentary Polling Districts and Places in the Borough, it is normally the case that Local Government Polling Districts and Places will be modified to accommodate and mirror the same Polling Districts and Places as will apply to Parliamentary constituencies. The principal exception to this rule would be if the proposed Polling Place was outside of the electoral area concerned.

- 3.15 Although the Electoral Commission has no role in the review process itself, it has an extremely important role in respect of considering representations and observations made that a council has not conducted a review so as to:
- Meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or a body of them (i.e. the reasonable requirements of a particular area of the Authority have not been satisfactorily met); or
  - Take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.
- 3.16 It should be noted that, as detailed in the final proposals set out at Appendix A, that this Review has considered the latest housing trajectory forecasts, following data provided by the Borough Council Planning Group on future residential developments within the Borough.
- 3.17 The proposals for Polling Districts and Places, identified by Parliamentary Constituency and Borough Ward are available at the following link:  
[www.stevenage.gov.uk/polling-district-review](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/polling-district-review)
- 3.18 The revised Register for Electors is to be published on 1 December 2019 and will be prepared on the basis of the new Polling Districts and Places, if approved by the Council on 16 October 2019.
- 3.19 Should a by-election be called prior to 1 December 2019 these arrangements would not be in force.
- 3.20 The number of Polling Districts proposed across the Borough totals 41. This is an increase of three from the current arrangements (which have 38 Polling Districts).

#### **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The Council is under a duty to conduct this review and it must be concluded by 31 January 2020. The next publication date for the Revised Register of Electors is 1 December 2019 and this is an appropriate point to adopt the new Polling Districts and Polling Places following the conclusion of the review, as the register can then be published taking account of any changes arising from the review.
- 4.2 The proposals are set out in Appendix A of this report.
- 4.3 The proposals were available on the Council's website or could be inspected at the Council's offices. Each of the groups listed below were sent a schedule of draft proposals of Polling District and Polling Places. Responses were to be received no later than 2 September 2019:
- Members of Stevenage Borough Council
  - Members of Hertfordshire County Council for the Divisions within the Borough of Stevenage

- Member of Parliament for Stevenage Constituency
- Members of the European Parliament for the Eastern Region
- Local Constituency Parties/Associations for registered political parties
- The Acting Returning Officers for Stevenage Constituency
- Age Concern
- Invisibilty
- SPACE
- Crossroads
- Phoenix
- Stevenage Resource Centre

- 4.4 The responses received are set out at Appendix B. Some of the comments received related to the venues used for Polling Stations which are outside of the scope of the review but have been included to assist Council in its consideration of the appropriate Polling Districts and Polling Places.

#### **Financial Implications**

- 4.5 The review has been accommodated within existing resources.

#### **Legal Implications**

- 4.6 Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amended the timetable for which Polling District and Places reviews are undertaken. Section 17 of the 2013 Act requires that a Polling District and Places review is undertaken within 16 months commencing on 1 October 2018. Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 sets out the legal framework of the review.

#### **Risk Implications**

- 4.7 The principal risk associated with the review is that it is not completed as required by law. The setting of a timetable and identification of specific groups of consultees was designed to mitigate against that risk.

#### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 4.8 In preparing this report, due consideration has been given to the Council's statutory Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, as set out in Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010.

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- BD1 Published Notice of the Review  
([http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/content/15953/28832/219359/Notice\\_of\\_Review\\_of\\_Polling\\_Districts\\_and\\_Polling\\_Places.pdf](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/content/15953/28832/219359/Notice_of_Review_of_Polling_Districts_and_Polling_Places.pdf))
- BD2 Copy of correspondence sent to those listed in the Report

## **APPENDICES**

- A Proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places
- B Responses to Consultation