

**Meeting: COUNCIL**

**Date: 20 DECEMBER 2023**



## **REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2023 – OUTCOME OF REVIEW**

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### **PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This report sets out the steps taken in the 2023 review of Parliamentary Polling District and Polling 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.
- 1.3 In addition, an Electoral Review of Stevenage Borough Council was undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) between 2021 and 2023. This established new Borough Wards for Stevenage. The final recommendations of the Review were laid in Parliament on 18 April 2023 and The Stevenage (Electoral Changes) Order 2023 was made on 16 June 2023. These new Ward Boundaries will be in force at the next scheduled elections on 2 May 2024.
- 1.4 This review relates to Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places but Members are being recommended to adopt the proposals for use in all elections.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Borough, as set out in Appendix A, be adopted and applied to all elections from May 2024 onwards.
- 2.2 That power to designate Polling Places in accordance with section 18 and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 outside of a compulsory review is delegated to the Chief Executive.

## **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.
- 3.2 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 2023 (i.e. by 31 January 2025).
- 3.3 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 2028.

## **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 2025. In order to ensure that the new Polling Districts and Polling Places are in force to accommodate the changes to Ward boundaries as a result of the Electoral Review of Stevenage, the review commenced on 2 October 2023 so that a revised register of electors could be published on 1 February 2024 (following Council approval), in advance of the scheduled elections in May 2024. All stages of the review have been completed subject to consideration and approval by the Council of the recommended Polling District and Polling Places.
- 4.2 Outside of a compulsory review, a Polling Place could become unavailable at short notice due to unforeseen circumstances. Given the potential need to identify alternative locations as polling stations where a Polling Place has become no longer suitable, this is to be delegated to the Chief Executive.

## IMPLICATIONS

### Financial Implications

- 5.1 The review has been accommodated within existing resources.

### Legal Implications

- 5.2 Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amended the timetable for which Polling District and Polling Places reviews are undertaken. Section 17 of the 2013 Act requires that a Polling District and Polling Places review is undertaken within 16 months commencing on 1 October 2023. Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 sets out the legal framework of the review.

### Risk Implications

- 5.3 The principal risk associated with the review is that it is not completed as required by law and approved by Council in advance of the scheduled elections in May 2024. The setting of a timetable and identification of specific groups of consultees was designed to mitigate against that risk.

### Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.4 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.

## DETAILS

- 6.1 A **Polling District** is a geographical electoral area into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided. The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts and for keeping these under review.
- 6.2 A **Polling Place** is the building or area designated by the Council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person. Legislation states that 'the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station'.
- 6.3 A **Polling Station** is the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place where voting takes place.
- 6.4 Local authorities must comply with the following legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places:
- each parish in England and community in Wales is to be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply,
  - the Council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that

the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors,

- the polling place must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified in the district),
- the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station.

- 6.5 As part of the compulsory review, local authorities must consider the accessibility of potential polling stations when considering designating or reviewing a polling place. In doing so they must 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,
  - so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled.
- 6.6 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.
- 6.7 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.
- 6.8 The Council is required to consult the Acting Returning Officer for every parliamentary constituency that is wholly or partly within its area.
- 6.9 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.
- 6.10 In reviewing polling districts and polling places, the Council is required to seek representations from such persons interested as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.
- 6.11 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.
- 6.12 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 an Acting Returning Officer in connection with the review,
- 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 designations of polling districts and polling places agreed as a result of the review,
- details of where the results of the review have been published.

6.13 Although this review concerns itself explicitly with the review of Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Borough, it is normally the case that Local Government Polling Districts and Polling Places will be modified to accommodate and mirror the same Polling Districts and Polling 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.

6.14 Although the Electoral Commission has no role in the review process itself, it has an 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; or
- Take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.

6.15 It should be noted that, as detailed in the final proposals set out at Appendix A, 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.

6.16 The proposals for Polling Districts and Polling 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)

6.17 The revised Register of Electors is to be republished on 1 February 2024 and will be prepared on the basis of the new Polling Districts and Polling Places, if approved by the Council on 20 December 2023.

6.18 The number of Polling Districts proposed across the Borough totals 46. This is an increase of 5 from the current arrangements (which have 41 Polling Districts).

6.19 Where a County Division boundary runs through a Borough Ward, a separate polling district has been created.

6.20 The statistical data included in the proposals is from the 1 August 2023 electoral register.

- 6.21 The proposals are set out in Appendix A of this report.
- 6.22 The proposals were available on the Council's website or could be inspected at the Council's offices from 2 October 2023 to 13 November 2023. 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 13 November 2023:
- Members of Stevenage Borough Council
  - Members of Hertfordshire County Council for the Divisions within the Borough of Stevenage
  - Member of Parliament for Stevenage Constituency
  - Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire
  - Local Constituency Parties/Associations for registered political parties
  - The Acting Returning Officer for Stevenage Constituency
  - Local organisations, public bodies, schools and community groups
- 6.23 The responses received are set out at Appendix B.

#### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- BD1 Published Notice of the Review  
([stevenage.gov.uk/documents/elections/polling-district-and-places-review-2023/notice-of-review-of-polling-districts-and-polling-places.pdf](https://stevenage.gov.uk/documents/elections/polling-district-and-places-review-2023/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