

Report to:	Civic Affairs Committee	12 September 2023
Lead Officer:	Liz Watts, Electoral Registration Officer, Returning Officer & Chief Executive	

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023

Executive Summary

1. This report presents a plan to undertake a review of the Council's polling districts and polling places, including an indicative timetable and proposed amendments to existing arrangements.

Key Decision

2. No

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Civic Affairs Committee agrees to commence the Council's review of Polling Districts and Polling Places for 2023 in accordance with the attached consultation document and included timetable.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The Civic Affairs Committee has responsibility for oversight of the Council's electoral arrangements. Upon completion of the public consultation the Committee will make recommendations to Council to update the scheme of polling districts and places.
5. This report provides the Committee an opportunity to review proposed consultation documents and changes and to feed into the consultation process before it begins.

Details

6. The Council is required to split its geographical area into polling districts. These districts are the "building blocks" of all electoral areas (such as parishes, wards, divisions and constituencies). The Council is required to keep these areas under review to ensure convenient and effective access to local democracy is maintained for residents.

7. For each polling district, the Council must also define a polling place, within which the Returning Officer will site their polling station.
8. In South Cambridgeshire most polling district boundaries are drawn along parish boundaries. Some larger parishes (or those spread across multiple centres) are split into two polling districts. Maintaining polling district boundaries along parish boundaries where possible is a consistent approach and is easy for voters to understand.
9. All Councils will be required to complete a new polling district review within 16 months of October 2023. With a general election due within the next 16 months it is sensible to commence our review as early as possible. The proposed indicative timetable suggests commencement of an 8-week consultation process starting at the beginning of October.
10. A small number of proposed changes to existing arrangements are detailed in the consultation document. In summary, these are:
 1. Creating new polling district arrangements for Cambourne
 2. Deleting the obsolete polling district SD2
 3. Updating arrangements at Marleigh
 4. Updating arrangements at Impington South
11. We expect these proposals to improve voting arrangements for electors.
12. Polling stations are not a formal part of the review as required by statute (they are determined by the Returning Officer). However, recent legislation (Elections Act 2022) has introduced new requirements as to the accessibility of polling stations for disabled voters.
13. In response, we have undertaken a full accessibility audit of our polling stations, which we are sharing as part of this review. To ensure that we continue to offer the best service possible for all voters, we also welcome comments on our polling stations and the results of our audit, particularly where alternative provision could improve our arrangements.
14. It should be borne in mind that South Cambridgeshire is a predominantly rural district, and venue options that might be used as polling stations are sometimes limited. Where a polling station is not fully accessible (and no suitable alternatives exist) we work hard to ensure our polling station staff are trained to support voters to ensure fair access to elections.
15. If approved, details of the consultation will be shared widely with parish councils, district and county councillors, with neighbouring registration officers and with other interested parties.

Options

1. The Committee could decide to amend the proposed timetable or make other changes to the proposed consultation arrangements, though the Committee should be aware that varying the proposals could compromise the ability of the Returning Officer to run effective elections.

Implications

16. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Legal

17. This review must be completed within the statutory period.

Risks/Opportunities

18. The risk of a short notice / snap General Election will increase over the next year. An early review of our polling arrangements will reduce the risk of election failure.

Equality and Diversity

19. An EqIA has not been completed, as there are no equality implications within the statutorily required polling district and places review. We have however, taken the opportunity to undertake an accessibility audit of our polling stations. We welcome feedback and comments from disabled voters as to their experiences of voting in South Cambridgeshire.

Consultation responses

20. Consultation responses will be incorporated when the item returns to Civic Affairs Committee before the end of the year.

Background Papers

None.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Polling district review consultation document
- Appendix A: List of existing polling districts and places
- Appendix B: Polling station accessibility audit
- Appendix C: Proposed polling districts for Cambourne ward

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