

Report to:	Civic Affairs Committee	14 December 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 the outcomes of a review of the Council's polling districts and polling places and requests that Civic Affairs Committee recommends to Council some proposals for change.

Key Decision

2. No

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that Civic Affairs Committee recommends to Council the adoption of a revised schedule of polling districts and polling places as laid out at Appendix A.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The Civic Affairs Committee has responsibility for oversight of the Council's electoral arrangements. Now that a period of consultation has passed, the Committee and then Council will need to confirm adoption of a revised schedule of polling districts and places.
5. This report updates the Committee with feedback received during the consultation and lays out proposed changes.
6. These changes will support the Returning Officer in the delivery of elections that are accessible and convenient to voters in the district.

Details

7. 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.

8. For each polling district, the Council must also define a polling place, within which the Returning Officer will site their polling station.
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 was appropriate to start our review as early as possible.
10. In September 2023 the Civic Affairs Committee approved commencement of a review and an indicative timetable.
11. Consultation started on 2 October and ended on 27 November 2023.
12. A small number of changes were actively proposed to existing arrangements. These changes were featured in the consultation documents and focussed on:
 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
13. Details of the consultation were shared widely – with neighbouring principal area councils, various local disability groups (Cambs Deaf Association, Cam Sight, Disability Cambridgeshire and Age UK), SCDC District Councillors and all South Cambridgeshire parishes. Full details of the review were also hosted on the Council website, with a press release and frequent social media postings throughout the consultation period.
14. Specific attention was drawn for those parishes where active proposals for change were being proposed.
15. A handful of responses were received as part of the consultation, and these appear at Appendix B (anonymised where they were received from residents).
16. Several parish councils indicated they were satisfied with existing arrangements.
17. Cllr Corinne Garvie raised an issue regarding arrangements for Eddington, part of which is in the Girton ward. We agree with this response and have drafted new proposals which will create a new polling district with dedicated polling station, which will be called Eddington and Girton South.
18. A map outlining the boundary of this proposed new polling district can be seen at Appendix C. The outcome of this proposal will be that residents in the South Cambridgeshire part of Eddington, along with Girton residents south of the A14, will be invited to vote in a dedicated polling station much closer to where they live.
19. Some discussion took place with Fulbourn Parish Council and Cllr Graham Cone about the long-term viability of the Fulbourn Beechwood Polling Station. The

Parish Council and Cllr Cone have been reassured that extensive work has been undertaken in this area over recent years. It remains the view of the Returning Officer that the mobile polling station in the Tesco car park offers the best available voting experience for residents.

20. One Histon resident has suggested splitting existing polling arrangements in Histon and Impington. The Returning Officer has looked at arrangements in these parishes several times in recent years. There has been no negative feedback from voters around those current arrangements, and the RO is keen to take care not to upset arrangements that many residents are happy with. This is also the case with a consultation response regarding Gamlingay. The RO does not propose any immediate changes in these areas but will keep both under review over the next couple of polls.
21. The final response focussed on accessibility requirements of polling stations. Whilst it is not practicable or feasible to have all staff trained in using sign language, we were able to explain a lot of the good work we already do to support voters in polling stations.
22. There were no responses or concerns received from the public regarding the proactive changes mentioned in paragraph 10. Since these changes will all improve voting arrangements (or strengthen existing arrangements) for residents, it is proposed that they are all taken forward.
23. Cllr Mark Howell provided his views at the September Civic Affairs Committee meeting on the proposed new arrangements for West Cambourne. The Returning Officer is live to the growing community at West Cambourne and has agreed to keep the possibility of dedicated polling station arrangements under review.

Options

1. The Committee could decide to recommend to Council retention of the existing arrangements or make alternative proposals. The Committee must be aware that varying these proposals would likely compromise the ability of the Returning Officer to run effective elections.

Implications

24. 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

25. This review must be completed within the statutory 16-month period.

Risks/Opportunities

26. 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

27. As part of our consultation, we have welcomed feedback and comments from disabled voters as to their experiences of voting in South Cambridgeshire. We continue to be open and available for voters to ask questions or make suggestions. They can do so by emailing elections@scambs.gov.uk.

Consultation responses

28. Consultation responses are all available to view at Appendix B.

Background Papers

Introductory reports to Civic Affairs Committee in September 2023

Appendices

Appendix A: Proposed revised schedule of polling districts and places with changes clearly identified

Appendix B: Consultation responses

Appendix C: Proposed polling district boundary for new polling district of Eddington and Girton South

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