



Democracy and Standards Committee Monday 25th September 2023

Report Title	Polling District and Polling Places Review 2023
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Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

List of Appendices None

1. Purpose of Report

To seek approval of plans for a statutory review of polling districts and polling places within the administrative boundary of North Northamptonshire Council.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The report sets out the legal framework that underpins a statutory review of polling districts and places and proposes a plan for completion of the review by 30th November 2023.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee

- 3.1 Approve the commencement of the compulsory polling district and places review on Monday 2 October 2023
- 3.2 Approve the outline timetable for the review as set out in paragraph 5.4

- 3.3 Authorise the Electoral Registration Officer to take the necessary measures to give effect to parliamentary constituency changes, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new constituencies, until the boundaries are fully in force.
- 3.4 Authorise the Electoral Registration Officer to take the necessary measures to give effect to any new or amended polling districts on completion of the polling district review, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new boundaries, until the boundaries are fully in force.
- 3.5 Delegate power to designate polling places in accordance with section 18 and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to the Executive Director of Customer & Governance. Such power to be exercised in circumstances where a decision is required at short notice and it is not possible to await a decision of Democracy & Standards Committee.
- 3.6 Reason for Recommendations
- To enable the statutory review to be undertaken in accordance with legislation
 - To enable the Register of Electors to be updated to take account of future Parliamentary constituency boundaries and other changes to electoral arrangements.
 - To enable polling districts and polling places to be reassessed in relation to their continued suitability and accessibility taking account of the requirements of the Elections Act 2022 as well as the impact of increased development in some areas.
 - To enable polling places to be designated at short notice in the event that an existing polling place is no longer available due to an unanticipated event, unforeseen circumstances, or emergency.
- 3.7 Alternative Options Considered- This is a statutory review under Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to be completed between 1st October 2023 and 31st January 2025. The options considered refer to the timing of the review bearing in mind the need to update the register in time for republication following the annual canvass 2023.
- 3.8 Commence the review on 2nd October 2023 with slightly extended periods for consultation and consideration of responses. This option means that it would be unlikely the review will be complete until January 2024.
- 3.9 The electoral register would need to be republished at the beginning of February 2024 to take account of any changes to polling districts. The proposed timetable for this option is:

Review of polling districts and places 2023	
Preparatory work	started 1 st August 2023
Resolution from Democracy and Standards Committee providing for commencement of review	25 th September 2023
Notice of review published	Monday 2 October 2023
Commencement of formal consultation	Monday 2 October 2023
End of formal consultation	Friday 10 th November 2023
Consider responses	By 24 th November 2023
Publish electoral register (in existing format)	1 st December 2023
Final proposals published via meeting agenda papers and website	December 2023 (TBC)
Democracy and Standards Committee meeting	January 2024 (TBC)
Conclude review	By end January 2024
Republish electoral register (if any new or amended polling districts)	1 st February 2024
Scheduled elections on new polling districts, places and stations scheme	2 May 2024

- 3.10 This option would create additional pressure on staff and resources as it would require the register of electors to be republished twice within a two-month period. Initially the register would be published on 1st December 2023 and then republished again on 1st February 2024. This has the potential to cause confusion in respect of the new polling districts and electoral numbers in the run up to the scheduled Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections taking place on 2nd May 2024. It also creates additional pressure on other resources such as printing and postage costs.

4 Report Background

- 4.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district.
- 4.2 The following definitions may be helpful when reading the report.
- “Polling districts” are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
 - “Polling places” are the buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
 - “Polling stations” are the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.

- 4.3 The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.
- 4.4 Under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 4.5 The Boundary Commission for England is currently undertaking a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The Commission has published its final recommendations, and Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries will be made by 1 November 2023.
- 4.6 Once the Orders for new parliamentary constituencies have been made, the new boundaries will be used for the next general election. If a parliamentary by election is called in the meantime, it would be run on the existing boundaries.
- 4.7 It is important that the polling district and places review is carried out as soon as possible, so that North Northamptonshire Council has agreed polling districts and places ready to be used for the next parliamentary election as well as the scheduled Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024. It will also ensure that a polling scheme is in place which reflects the new constituencies.
- 4.8 Timing of the polling district and places review**
- 4.9 Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 does not allow the review to commence before 1 October 2023.
- 4.10 It is recommended that the compulsory polling district and places review commences on Monday 2 October 2023.

5 Issues and Choices

- 5.1 This is a statutory review that must be undertaken during the prescribed 16-month window, however as noted above, changes to constituency boundaries will impact the existing arrangement of polling districts. It is therefore essential to undertake this review at the earliest opportunity.

- 5.2 Although the review itself cannot commence earlier, there is a degree of preparatory work that can be undertaken prior to the review, as well as informal preliminary consultation.
- 5.3 It would be desirable for any changes in polling districts to be reflected in the next published version of the electoral register on 1st December 2023. This therefore requires a compact timetable.
- 5.4 It is proposed that the review will commence on 2nd October and conclude by 30th November 2023 in order to publish the outcomes in the revised register on 1st December 2023. The proposed timetable is:

Review of polling districts and places 2023	
Preparatory work	started 1 st August 2023
Resolution from Democracy and Standards committee providing for commencement of review	25 th September 2023
Notice of review published	Monday 2 nd October 2023
Commencement of formal consultation	Monday 2 nd October 2023
End of formal consultation	Monday 30 th October 2023
Consider responses	By 3 rd November 2023
Final proposals published via meeting agenda papers and website	10 th November 2023
Democracy and Standards Committee meeting	20 th November 2023
Conclude review	By end November 2023
Publish electoral register (including any new or amended polling districts)	1 st December 2023
Scheduled elections on new polling districts, places and stations scheme	2 May 2024

5.6 This timetable would enable all the changes to be made to the Register prior to its publication on 1st December 2023 following the annual canvass. From an administrative perspective the period of the annual canvass when the register is being updated is the most logical time.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 Following agreement from members to commence the review, the consultation period will commence with publication of Notice of Review on 2nd October 2023 and following consideration of the consultation responses, the Acting Returning Officer's representations and feedback from any person or body with expertise in access for persons with any form

of disability, the final proposals will be presented to Democracy and Standards Committee at its meeting on 20th November 2023.

- 6.2 Following agreement from Members of the Democracy and Standards Committee on the final proposals, the Register of Electors will be updated to reflect the revised polling districts and future parliamentary constituencies.

7 Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 The costs of undertaking the review and preparing and publishing the register of electors are already included within the existing 2023/2024 budget provision.

7.2 Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1 The process for the review is set out in Schedule A1, Electoral Administration Act 2006. Failure to follow due process could lead to legal challenge and risk damage to the Council's reputation.

7.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1 Designating polling districts based on identifiable communities and utilising local venues as polling places facilitates greater participation in the democratic process, enabling communities to influence local representation and policies that impact them. It helps to promote community identity, contributes to local economic development, and provides opportunities for greater sustainability.

7.4 Risk

- 7.4.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

8.1 Consultation

- 8.1.1 A designated period of formal consultation is included within the review timetable. As part of the review a comprehensive consultation exercise will be undertaken which aims to seek the views and feedback of:
- local residents, particularly those with disabilities
 - organisations with a special interest or expertise in disabled access
 - the (Acting) Returning Officer for each parliamentary constituency wholly or partly within the administrative area of North Northamptonshire Council
 - elected representatives, local political parties and other stakeholders
- 8.1.2 Notice of the review inviting feedback on the proposals will be published on 2nd October 2023. Submissions may be made via a number of channels including a dedicated online consultation portal.

9.1 Equality Implications

- 9.1.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and submitted to the Equalities Team. Feedback will be sought from the Council's equality officer and from those with a disability or with special expertise in disability matters.
- 9.1.2 The review will seek to ensure that all electors in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which North Northamptonshire Council is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled.

10.1 Climate Impact

- 10.1.1 The review is primarily an office based administrative exercise. Some visits will be made to venues within the council area to assess their suitability for use as polling stations and their continued accessibility and fitness for voting purposes.
- 10.1.2 In considering the designation of polling places consideration will be given to the proximity of the venue to urban settlements, accessibility via local public transport networks, and other routes such as walking and cycling networks.

11.1 Community Impact

- 11.1.1 When considering the geographical designation of polling districts and the allocation of electors to polling places, consideration will be given to the identification of communities within natural or other defined boundaries.

11.2 Crime and Disorder Impact

- 11.2.1 The process of the review is unlikely to impact crime and disorder in the Council area.

12 Background Papers

1. Electoral Commission guidance – Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations
<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/reviews-polling-districts-polling-places-and-polling-stations>