



North  
Northamptonshire  
Council

## Democracy and Standards Committee Monday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023

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

### List of Appendices

**Appendix A- Acting Returning Officer recommendations**

**Appendix B- Details of new polling districts and the future parliamentary constituencies as they relate to each polling district**

### 1. Purpose of Report

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1.1 To update members on the response to the polling district and polling place review consultation and to seek approval for the Executive Director of Customer and Governance to make a Polling Place Order which sets out the allocated polling place for each polling district.

### 2. Executive Summary

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2.1 The polling district and polling place review commenced on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2023. The consultation period was open until 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The report summarises the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as part of the review including the recommendations of the Acting Returning Officer.

- 2.2 The responses to the consultation are published on the North Northamptonshire Council website
- 2.3 The Acting Returning Officer's report is published on the North Northamptonshire Council website at:.

### **3. Recommendations**

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It is recommended that the Democracy and Standards Committee

- 3.1 Considers the content of the consultation responses published at <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/elections-and-voting/polling-district-and-polling-place-review/have-your-say-pdppr>
- 3.2 Considers the Acting Returning Officer report published at <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/elections-and-voting/polling-district-and-polling-place-review/have-your-say-pdppr>
- 3.3 Considers the Acting Returning Officer recommendations detailed at Appendix A and approves the ongoing monitoring of polling districts and polling places to enable updates to be made to the arrangements where necessary to reflect community identity, accessibility and convenience for voters.
- 3.4 The Executive Director of Customer and Governance be authorised to make a Polling Places Order by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 in accordance with the recommendations at Appendix A.
- 3.5 Authorises the Executive Director of Customer and Governance to make changes to the above-mentioned Polling Places Order in the event that a polling district or place needs to be changed at short notice and there is insufficient time for the change to be considered by Democracy and Standards Committee.
- 3.6 Notes that the Register of Electors will be published on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023 incorporating details of new polling districts where necessary and the future parliamentary constituencies as they relate to each polling district as detailed at Appendix B.
- 3.7 Reason for Recommendations
  - To enable the statutory review to be completed 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 updates to polling districts and polling places to ensure voting arrangements remain current and reflect future housing development and changes in the size of the electorate.
- To ensure that polling places remain suitable and accessible taking account of the requirements of the Elections Act 2022.
- To enable polling places to be designated at short notice only in the event that an existing polling place is no longer available due to an unanticipated event, unforeseen circumstances, or emergency.

3.8 Alternative Options Considered- This is a statutory review under Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to be completed between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025. Members agreed at a previous meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023 that the review commence on 2<sup>nd</sup> October and be completed by 30<sup>th</sup> November to enable the Register of Electors to be updated ready for republication on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023. Extending the review timetable to enable a longer consultation period was considered, however, this would have resulted in the register of electors having to be republished twice within a two-month period and could cause confusion in the run up to the May 2024 elections.

## 4 Report Background

4.1 The review timetable that was agreed at a meeting of Democracy and Standards Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023 was as follows:

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

- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 When designating areas as polling districts, each parish must be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply.
- 4.5 A polling place must be designated 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.
- 4.6 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)
- 4.7 The formal consultation period began on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2023 and respondents were able to make representations via the Council’s dedicated consultation hub, in writing, by telephone or by email.
- 4.8 The consultation documents were also made available for inspection at the Council Offices, Bowling Green Road, Kettering NN15 7QX
- 4.9 A total of 93 responses were received via the dedicated engagement hub of which 53 were complete responses and 40 were incomplete responses. Details of all responses received are available at <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/elections-and-voting/polling-district-and-polling-place-review/have-your-say-pdppr>
- 4.10 Six responses were received via email of which 3 were representations from persons with a disability.
- 4.11 The review was also raised at a meeting of the Local Disability Network hosted by West Northamptonshire Council. Comments were invited from the

group's perspective of their experience (positive or negative) regarding polling places in general that they had visited themselves.

- 4.12 Feedback was generally positive although some concerns were raised around parking at some venues and the availability of wheelchair access. In some cases, busy, loud venues could be off-putting. The group provided very positive feedback around the equipment for voters in the polling stations.
- 4.13 As required by legislation the (Acting) Returning Officer for each constituency situated wholly or partly within the Council area was also consulted. The Acting Returning Officer report was made available for inspection at the Council Offices, Bowling Green Road, Kettering, NN15 7QX and on the Council's website. The recommendations of the ARO for each polling district are included at Appendix A.
- 4.14 The ARO for West Northamptonshire Council was invited to make representations in relation to the polling districts and polling places that fall within the Daventry constituency. No representations were received during the consultation period.
- 4.15 In undertaking the review consideration was also given to the amendments needed to the Register of Electors to reflect the final recommendations of the Boundary Commission for England's review of constituency boundaries.
- 4.16 Details of the future constituencies which should be reflected in the Register when it is republished on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023 are included at Appendix B.

## **5 Issues and Choices**

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- 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 was therefore essential to undertake this review at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.2 The final recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission in respect of their review of Electoral Arrangements for North Northamptonshire may impact the designation of polling districts and polling places in the future. In order to ensure polling districts and polling places remain suitable it will be necessary to undertake a further interim review during 2024 to ensure suitable arrangements are in place prior to the full council elections scheduled for May 2025.

## **Next Steps**

Following agreement from Members

- 5.3 The Executive Director of Customer and Governance will make a Polling Place Order that will detail the allocation of electors within each polling district to a designated polling place.
- 5.4 The register of electors will be updated to reflect changes to polling districts including the allocation of streets and properties within polling districts and the letter codes that define each area.
- 5.5 The register of electors will be updated to reflect the future constituency boundaries as published in the final recommendations of the Boundary Commission for England's review of constituency boundaries.
- 5.6 The outcome of the review and reasons for decisions will be published along with:
  - all correspondence sent to an (A)RO 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 meeting held by the council to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review
  - details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review
  - details of the places where the results of the review have been published

## **6 Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **6.1 Resources and Financial**

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

### **6.2 Legal and Governance**

- 6.2.1 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.

### **6.3 Relevant Policies and Plans**

**6.3.1** 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.

#### **6.4 Risk**

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

#### **7.1 Consultation**

- A designated period of formal consultation was undertaken. The consultation was publicised on the website, via the engagement hub, in the Leader's Update, via internal communications with staff, and on social media channels. The documents were made available for inspection at the Council Offices, Bowling Green Road, Kettering. In addition those with an interest or expertise in disability were invited to attend a meeting at which accessibility of polling places was discussed and to provide feedback.
- Easy read versions of a questionnaire were also delivered to Drovers Hall. The responses to these easy read surveys are available in the document titled Representations made by other channels which is included on the website at <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/elections-and-voting/polling-district-and-polling-place-review/have-your-say-pdppr>.
- The (Acting) Returning Officer prepared a report and recommendations.

#### **8.1 Equality Implications**

8.1.1 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.

8.1.2 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.

#### **9.1 Climate Impact**

9.1.1 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.

9.1.2 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.

## **10.1 Community Impact**

- 10.1.1 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.

## **11.1 Crime and Disorder Impact**

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

## **12 Background Papers**

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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>
2. North Northamptonshire Council dedicated boundary review webpage information: <https://www.northnorthants.gov.uk/elections-and-voting/boundary-reviews-and-polling>