

## Wiltshire Council

### Electoral Review Committee

26 September 2023

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### Polling District and Polling Place Review 2023

#### Purpose

1. To consider and approve commencement and timeline of the review.
2. Approve the documentation below for public consultation to run from 2 October to 31 October 2023:
  - Appendix A – Notice of Review (awaiting web page links)
  - Appendix B – Current Polling Arrangements and (Acting) Returning Officer (ARO) Comments
  - Appendix C - Electoral Commission Polling Review Guidance

#### Background

3. The Council is required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 to undertake a compulsory review of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places which must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive).
4. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amended the Representation of the People Act 1983 to require relevant authorities to undertake regular reviews of both polling districts and polling places within its area. The definitions between a district, place and station are:
  - A **polling district** is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area (an electoral area being a UK Parliamentary constituency, a European Parliamentary electoral region, a parish, parish ward or an electoral division).
  - A **polling place** is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.
  - A **polling station** is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district. The Returning Officer for the particular election must provide a sufficient number of polling stations and allocate the electors to those polling stations in such a manner as they think is the most convenient.
5. As the relevant authority for Wiltshire, Wiltshire Council will need to complete a review by 31 January 2025. The purpose of this review will be to ensure that as so far as is reasonable and practicable: all electors have reasonable facilities for voting and are accessible to electors who are disabled.
6. The Act requires the Council to publish notice of a Polling District and Polling Place

review. The (Acting) Returning Officer (ARO) for Parliamentary elections will comment on the review and the Council will consult with organisations and persons whom the Council considers have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have disabilities. In addition, anyone may comment on the review.

7. A program of work has been undertaken by the ARO, as set out below, with specific considerations for the Committee.

### **Main Considerations**

8. In relation to the 1 October 2023 – 31 January 2025 period, (Acting) Returning Officers will need to consider the following:
  - The annual canvass: conducted between July and December 2023.
  - Publication of the register: revised electoral register scheduled to be published on 1 December 2023.
  - Elections during the review period: there are no scheduled elections in 2023 but by-elections and neighborhood planning referendums may take place. The program of work should reflect the ability to be flexible with dates in the event of an unscheduled national poll.
  - Scheduling approval of the proposals: implementation of any amendments to polling districts to co-ordinate with the publication of the revised register in December 2023.
  - Proposals to be submitted to the Electoral Review Committee in good time for prior approval to publication.
  - This review is an opportunity to assess the polling districts that were created as a consequence of Community Governance Reviews and Wiltshire Council unitary boundary changes that took effect for 2021 elections. As a result there may be polling districts or places that do not correlate directly back to the last review in 2019.
  - Revised parliamentary constituency boundaries. Legislation was laid in Parliament in July 2023 with the Orders due to be made in October 2023. The new constituencies will take effect for the next UK Parliamentary elections which must be held by January 2025. Whilst this review is based on the current constituency boundaries it will also have regard to the new constituency boundaries.

### **Preliminary review**

9. The local authority has undertaken a preliminary review of the current polling districts and polling places with a view to establishing their suitability and identify any potential alternatives where required.
10. There is no requirement to change any of the polling districts and polling places if they continue to be deemed suitable, but any 'no change' decision must be fully justified as part of the overall proposals.

### **Formal review process**

11. The Electoral Commission's guidance is attached at **Appendix C** which provides more

detailed requirements on the formal review process and accessibility considerations at polling stations.

12. In accordance with the guidance when carrying out the review, a local authority must:

- Publish the Notice of Review.
- Consult the ARO for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area.
- Publish all representations made within 30 days of receipt.
- Encourage public participation in the consultation and seek representations from such persons and organisations that have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who face barriers when voting at the polling station.
- On completion of a review, give reasons for the decisions and publish:
  - a) all correspondence sent to an (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review.
  - b) all correspondence sent to any persons and organisations that have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who face barriers when voting at the polling station.
  - c) 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.
  - d) details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review.
  - e) details of the places where the results of the review have been published.

13. The proposed timetable for the review is set out below:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Adjusted date</b>
Start of preliminary review	June 2023
Information gathering from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polling station venue site visits</li> <li>• Councillor engagement</li> <li>• Existing records and mapping</li> </ul>	August 2023
Report to the Electoral Review Committee on the process, timeline and consultation period	September 2023
Publish the Notice of Review	2 October 2023
Publish current arrangements and ARO comments	2 October 2023
Consultation website created and made live. (Includes an interactive map, online response form, the polling review proposals (ARO proposals), Appendix A and Appendix B).	2 October 2023
Consultation period	2 October 2023 to 31 October 2023
Information provided to Area Boards	October 2023

Engagement with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groups and organisations in Wiltshire with an interest in the review and under-represented demographics.</li> <li>• Elected representatives</li> <li>• Parish Councils</li> <li>• Area Boards</li> <li>• (A)RO for the new South Cotswolds constituency</li> </ul>	2 October 2023
Publication of representations made during the consultation	Early November 2023
Consultation feedback is collated and report prepared	Early November 2023
Electoral Review Committee to amend or approve recommendations as appropriate	Mid November 2023
Publication of the conclusion of the review	Mid November 2023
Publish the revised Electoral Register	1 December 2023

## Proposal

14. The Committee is asked to:

- a) Authorise the Director of Legal and Governance in consultation with the Chairman of the Electoral Review Committee to carry out the consultation in accordance with the arrangements outlined in this report.
- b) Consider and approve the final recommendations following the conclusion of the consultation.

### To Note when considering the proposals:

15. Appendix B may be subject to minor amendments before the document goes to public consultation as the document is undergoing final checks before publication.

16. Polling district changes approved will be reflected in the revised electoral register published 1 December 2023 and polling station scheme will be reflected at elections called after 1 December 2023.

## **Perry Holmes – Director, Legal and Governance**

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Report Author: Caroline Rudland, Electoral Services Specialist Manager,  
[caroline.rudland@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.rudland@wiltshire.gov.uk)

## Appendices

Appendix A - Notice of Review (Draft)

Appendix B - Current Polling Arrangements and (Acting) Returning Officer Comments

Appendix C - Electoral Commission Polling Review Guidance

## Background Papers

None