

Polling District and Polling Place Review

Purpose

1. To consider the data gathering arrangements and a programme of work for the **preliminary** and **formal** polling district and polling place review.

Background

2. 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 2018 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive).
3. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amended the Representation of the People Act 1983 to require the Council to undertake regular reviews of both polling districts and polling places within its area. The differences 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 manner as he or she thinks the most convenient.
4. The purpose of such a review is ensure that all electors have reasonably practicable facilities for voting and that polling places are reasonably accessible to electors who are disabled. The review will need to be completed by 31 January 2020.
5. The Act requires the Council to publish notice of a Polling District and Polling Place review and to consult both the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) for Parliamentary elections 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.

6. This report therefore focuses on the programme of work to be undertaken by the ARO and considerations the Committee need to be mindful of.

Main Considerations

7. In relation to the 1 October 2018 – 31 January 2020 period, (Acting) Returning Officers will need to consider the following:

The annual canvass

Conducted between July and December 2019

Publication of the register

Revised electoral register scheduled to be published on 1 December 2019

Elections during the review period

There are no scheduled elections in 2019, and the programme of work should reflect the ability to be flexible with the dates in the event of a 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 2019.

Proposals to be submitted to Full Council in good time for approval prior to publication.

Changes to electoral boundaries

Anomalies created by previous Community Governance Reviews can be adjusted where possible to reduce the number of very small polling districts

As the polling district and polling place review is to be carried out before the new electoral boundaries are fully in force, it will need to be based on the current electoral boundaries. A further review will be undertaken prior to the unitary and parish elections in 2021 to reflect the new boundaries.

Preliminary review

8. The local authority should undertake 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. This may be done before the start of the specified review period.
9. There is no requirement to change any of the polling districts and polling places if they are suitable, but any 'no change' decision must be fully justified as part of the overall proposals.

Formal review process

10. The Electoral Commission's guidance is attached at **Appendix A** which provides more detailed requirements on the Formal Review Process (para 4.5) and Considering Accessibility Issues (para 4.6).

11. In accordance with the guidance, when carrying out the review, local authorities must:

- publish a notice of the holding of a review
- consult the ARO for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area
- publish all representations made by an ARO within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area and, if the authority maintains a website, by placing a copy on the authority's website
- seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the AROs.
- on completion of a review, give reasons for its decisions and publish:
 - a. all correspondence sent to an (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review
 - b. 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
 - c. all representations made by any person in connection with the review
 - d. 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
 - e. details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review
 - f. details of the places where the results of the review have been published

12. The Committee will initially need to determine a pattern of activity (formal meetings and workshops) for itself in order to achieve the deadline of the publication of the revised register (1 December 2019).

13. The following has therefore been provisionally identified as a suggested timetable:

Activity	Suggested date
Preliminary review commences	December 2018
Information gathering from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polling station venues • External reviews • Wiltshire disability groups • Wiltshire Carers groups 	December 2018
Information to Area Boards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 Jan – Malmesbury • 10 Jan – Trowbridge • 14 Jan – Devizes • 16 Jan – Bradford-on-Avon • 17 Jan – Amesbury • 18 Jan – Pewsey • 19 Jan – Calne • 20 Jan – Corsham and Royal Wootton Bassett 	January/ February 2019

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 Jan - Salisbury • 28 Jan – Tidworth • 29 Jan – Marlborough • 30 Jan – South West Wiltshire • 31 Jan – Southern Wiltshire • 4 Feb – Chippenham • 13 Feb – Melksham • 14 Feb - Warminster • 21 Feb – Westbury 	
Gather and analyse evidence, including representations from Area Boards and electoral forecasts.	January to May 2019
Report to the Committee on the outcome of the preliminary review, including boundary maps and electorates	6 June 2019
Publish a notice of the holding of the review	10 June 2019
Publish ARO representation	11 June 2019
Consultation period	12 June to 9 September 2019
Committee to consider draft recommendations	26 September 2019
Full Council to consider recommendation from Committee	15 October 2019
Revised register	1 December 2019

Proposal

14. The Committee is asked to:

- 1) note the two stages of the polling district and polling place review; preliminary and formal reviews (*para 8 -10*);
- 2) consider the approach to be taken for the preliminary and formal reviews (*para 10*), and;
- 3) determine the indicative timetable for the review (*para 13*).

Ian Gibbons, Director of Legal and Democratic Services (and Monitoring Officer)

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Appendices

Appendix A – Electoral Commission; Guidance on the review of polling districts and polling places