

# REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES

Report of the Electoral Registration Officer and Acting Returning Officer

Date: 25 September 2023

Agenda Item: x

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Key Decision? NO

Local Ward Members  
All Members



## REGULATORY AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council is required to complete a review of all parliamentary polling districts and polling places at least every 5 years.
- 1.2 A polling district is an area whose electorate are all invited to vote at the same polling place. A polling place is a location in which one or more polling stations are provided to allow the electorate to vote. A polling station is a room, or part of a room, where voting takes place.
- 1.3 The review is a function of the Council and the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) or (Acting) Returning Officer (ARO).
- 1.4 The next compulsory review must take place between 1 October 2023 and must be completed by 31 January 2025.
- 1.5 Due to the Parliamentary By-election in Tamworth currently underway and the potential for a UK Parliamentary general election to take place in 2024, it seems sensible that the review is undertaken no earlier than June 2024. However, issues highlighted in the last election in May 2023 are advised to ensure any issues are addressed in time for the Police and Fire Commissioner Elections in May 2024, initial notifications for which are sent out in late October.
- 1.6 The review is conducted in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1982 and guidance issued by the Electoral Commission.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The committee is requested to approve the attached project plan and programme for the review.
- 2.2 The committee considers and identifies any further issues it considers relevant to include within the review for the impending Parliamentary by-election and ready for PFCC elections in May 2024.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 The Council is obliged to review the polling Districts and polling Places that it uses to support the running of parliamentary elections. Such a review considered the number of voters in a polling district and the suitability of the polling places which are used to provide the polling stations.
- 3.2 Whilst the Review needs to be undertaken for parliamentary reasons, in practice, the Council uses the same polling districts and polling places for other elections and referenda. Set out the

context/background/evidence base/statement of reasons which underpin the recommendations. Previous reports are included as links below.

3.3 Such a review is a formal process, and its recommendations are considered and approved by Council but, of course, more informal reviews are undertaken by the Returning Officer's team ahead of each election to ensure that polling places remain suitable and relevant in each case.

3.4 Definition of terms:-

- **Parliamentary constituencies:** these cannot be changed by the review. The division of these constituencies into polling districts and places is the subject of the review.
- **Polling district:** the geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts, within which a polling place is identified which is convenient to electors.
- **Polling place:** the building or area in which polling stations will be located.
- **Polling station:** the room, part of a room, or building where the poll takes place.

3.5 The boundaries of polling districts and the location of polling places are for the Council to determine, and the locations of the polling stations are the responsibility of the Returning Officer.

3.6 The review allows the council to identify optimum polling districts and polling places. There is no requirement to change any existing arrangements however any change, or decision not to change, must be justified.

## Programme

3.7 The proposed programme of the review next year is as follows:

May 2024	PFCC Elections
June	Reference documents prepared and published to council website. Such documents include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Definition of the review and evaluation criteria for selecting districts and places</li><li>• Electorate figures by district wards and polling districts</li><li>• Details of existing polling places and polling stations</li><li>• Details of potential alternative polling places</li><li>• Maps of polling districts and polling places.</li><li>• Key issues identified.</li><li>• Links to consultation system.</li></ul>
June	Publicity issued to promote forthcoming review
June	Council writes to both Acting Returning Officers for the constituencies that are in the district seeking their views on the polling district and polling places.
June	Publication of notice to undertake review. Notice is published on the council's website and is sent to key stakeholders including local

	politicians and political parties, parish councils, polling station providers and other stakeholders.
June	Consultation period formally opens Responses are invited on the suitability of existing polling places and potential alternatives given the criteria for selecting polling places.
August	Consultation period ends
September	Review findings presented to Regulatory and Licensing Committee with a view to confirming recommendations for Council
October 2024	Council to consider recommendations.

### Criteria for Polling Places

3.8 Polling Places contain one or more polling stations, and the following criteria are used when identifying a suitable Polling Place:

- Must be available for elections between 6.30am and 10.30pm and that the council has priority for bookings for elections.
- Must have facility for deliveries and collections outside of polling hours.
- Each polling station to have no more than 2,250 voters, this is double the amount previously approved by the electoral commission for the last formal review.
- Proximity to voters
- Accessible for all, including those with mobility or sensory difficulties
- Safe, warm, and well-lit
- Cost
- Permanent buildings are preferred but mobile polling stations can be utilised but only as a last resort.

### Key Emerging Issues

3.9 The council uses around 60 polling places and the vast majority remain suitable. However, there are a number of issues that are emerging that may need further consideration that were born out of recent changes to use of schools and issues identified at the last district and parish election lessons learned report. These issues include:

**Elmhurst / Shenstone Wood End** – these polling districts have a very low number of voters. The review should look at whether these districts could be combined into other districts on the grounds of value for money.

**Leomansley** – use of Friary Grange Leisure Centre as an alternative to a mobile polling station was identified as an issue due to limited parking and difficulty to access for non-drivers. Alternatives have been suggested of re-instating the mobile station (subject to negotiation with Morrisons supermarket on location and drop-off-collection) or an additional station at St Chads on Leasowe where two Chadsmead stations are now located to avoid using the Chadsmead Primary School.

**Chase Town** – since the last review, the Mining College rooms have become unavailable as all their unit are now let and meeting spaces are located on first floor. In consequence, voters were relocated to Chasetown Methodist Church, which is in Hammerwich with Wall ward, which also hosts 2 polling stations there. Is there a better alternative available within the ward boundary?

**Chase Town** –Cherry Orchard Youth Club building has become unavailable and St Joseph and St Theresa R.C. Primary School are no longer willing to host election polling. As a consequence, all 3 stations are spread throughout Burntwood Leisure Centre (two in studio 1 and one in the squash courts). There was a complaint from squash court users and the walking distance to the squash courts was also a concern. Is there a better alternative for the stations required in this area?

**Highfields** – Highfields Primary School has asked to be removed as a polling place – no alternative sites have been identified as yet. The additional station may be accommodated in the Burntwood Memorial Institute, but this would then be the only station for this ward.

**Boley Park** – Darwin Hall is a location insistent on immediate payment for bookings before the polling day and confirmation of nominations, contrary to our contract procedure rules and before the site requirement confirmed.

**St John’s** - All 3 schools currently on rota for this polling ward ( St Michaels’, Five Spires and St Josephs need to be advised imminently of the future pattern of use and potential need for additional unplanned use due to Parliamentary election. In future the District Council House can only accommodate one polling station at the rear of the Chamber, which is in place of the mobile at University Car Park for Leomansley ward.

**Streethay** – the polling station is currently provided in a mobile facility at Streethay Primary Academy. Development continues in this area so consideration of any suitable permanent polling place being available in future should be assessed.

**Gentleshaw** – request at the recent district and parish election to use the Gentleshaw Christ Church, which they refused as an alternative to using the village school. Instead, the Village Hall has been suggested as it is currently used by Cannock Chase District Council for polling as it is within their boundary. This site is only around 100 yards from the school and of sufficient size and layout to accommodate both district stations, provided they accept the booking when requested.

**Longdon** – the school location in this village has been super ceded by use of the village hall, when available at the request of parents at the school.

**3.10 The use of Primary Schools** –at every election, the Council receives complaints from parents whose children’s school is closed. The review can assess whether there are better alternatives than schools, these have been incorporated wherever possible, but other sites may become available.

***It should be noted that schools are the only locations that the Returning Officer can invoke under statute to hold polling if other venues are not available.***

Remaining schools not mentioned above are:

**Chase Terrace Primary (Boney Hay & Central)** – Nursery block only so no major disruption, **Ridgeway Primary School (Highfields)** limited options in this area and Highfields primary has already asked to be removed as a polling place.

**3.11** The Committee is invited to identify any other issues that may need considering as part of the review.

Alternative Options	<div>1. The review can be undertaken in a myriad of different ways but must be completed before the deadline of 31 January 2025.</div> <div>2. We can delay such a review until after the potential election, however it seems appropriate to ensure that polling places are as up to date as possible for a potential election.</div>
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Consultation	1. The proposed consultation programme is attached. Statute dictates the prescribed consultees.
Financial Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The cost of undertaking this review is limited to staff time and limited advertising costs. Choice of venues and their hire costs/use of mobile facilities may increase the cost of delivering elections which are recoverable.</li> <li>2. ARO must demonstrate 'best value' in selecting their venues and may be challenged by the Electoral Commission to identify why schools and other free venues available to them were not used. In this instance, the Electoral Commission may not compensate returning officers for what it considers unnecessary spend for hire of rooms or mobiles.</li> </ol>
Approved by Section 151 Officer	Yes/no*
Legal Implications	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The review is conducted in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1982 and guidance issued by the Electoral Commission.</li> <li>2. Failure to undertake an adequate review can lead to an appeal requiring intervention by the Electoral Commission.</li> </ol>
Approved by Monitoring Officer	Yes/no*
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	1. To enable the democratic process whereby voters elect those councillors and members of Parliament that will drive through changes to improve the quality of life for people in the district/Parliamentary constituencies.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	1. The aim of the review is to seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting, including having particular regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
EIA logged by Equalities Officer	Yes EIA completed and submitted March 2023 – to be updated throughout planning and consultation process
Crime & Safety Issues	1. Locations should allow voters to attend in confidence and without interference.
Data assessment	1. Ward data will be considered from previous elections to ensure barriers to turnout can be assessed and mitigated where practicable.
Environmental Impact (including Climate Change and Biodiversity).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Polling places should be easily accessible by walking wherever possible. In rural areas this is difficult given the population density and areas covered, and may result in more stations of fewer voters.</li> <li>2. Local facilities that can be accessed without the need for cars are selected wherever possible to encourage people to walk to vote.</li> <li>3. However, parking should be available for disabled voters to access sites wherever possible.</li> </ol>
GDPR / Privacy Impact Assessment	Not required for this report

	Risk Description & Risk Owner	Original Score (RYG)	How We Manage It	Current Score (RYG)
A	No response to the review	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	A comprehensive list of consultees has been compiled who will be informed individually of the review and information will be widely available on our website	Likelihood Green (tolerable) and Impact Assessment .Green (tolerable)
B	Insufficient staff time available for the review	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	Staff time has been designated and work prioritised to ensure the review is conducted in a timely manner, without detriment to the other work of the electoral services team	Likelihood Green (tolerable) and Impact Assessment .Green (tolerable)
C	Overwhelming response	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	As B above. This particular consultation closes on 14 November. Further reviews can be instigated as and when required.	Likelihood Green (tolerable) and Impact Assessment .Green (tolerable)
D	Election called during Review	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	Work will be re-prioritised to ensure the review concludes before January 2025, should an election be called before the end of the current planned project. Consideration will be given to the delayed publication of the register of electors to allow more time where changes to boundaries are required.	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)
E	That suitable sites are not available in key locations	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	Continually identify suitable sites to use and respond to notification of sites no longer suitable. Where necessary seek a site for a mobile location as a last resort.	Likelihood Green (tolerable) and Impact Assessment .Green (tolerable)
F	That facilities do not meet the new requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022.	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	Undertake regular inspections and seek feedback from users on equipment and processes that may assist them further.	Likelihood Green (tolerable) and Impact Assessment .Green (tolerable)

### Background documents

[Agenda for Regulatory and Licensing Committee on Thursday, 3rd October, 2019, 6.00 pm \(lichfielddc.gov.uk\)](https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/documents/s14958/RL%202023%20Polling%20Places%20report.pdf)  
<https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/documents/s14958/RL%202023%20Polling%20Places%20report.pdf>  
<https://democracy.lichfielddc.gov.uk/documents/s14956/RL%202023%20Polling%20Places%20App%20A.pdf>

### Relevant web links

Any links for background information which may be useful to understand the context of the report