

This Report will be made public on 16 January 2024

Report Number **A/23/21**

To: Full Council
Date: 24th January 2024
Status: Non-Key Decision
Responsible Officer: Susan Priest, Chief Executive

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2023

SUMMARY: Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by Part 4 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006) places a duty on the Council to conduct a review of polling places and polling districts every four years. The last review was concluded by Folkestone & Hythe District Council in September 2019. This report outlines the steps the Council is taking to comply with this duty and seeks approval from Council to approve the recommendations made in the latest review which concluded on 17 November 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report A/23/21.
2. To adopt the recommendations as outlined in Appendix 2, with the implementation to coincide with the revision or alteration of the electoral register on 01 February 2024.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Local authorities are responsible for dividing their constituency into polling districts for UK Parliamentary elections. Polling districts, polling places and polling stations are kept under review to maintain electorate balance and the suitability of venue choices. There is a duty on the Council of the local authority to conduct a review at least once every four years. The compulsory review period started on 01 October 2023 and will end on 31 January 2025.
- 1.2 The last review concluded in September 2019, with the current set up of polling districts and stations proposed as final recommendations. The current review started on Monday 02 October 2023 and will conclude at the revision or alteration of the Electoral Register on Thursday 01 February 2024.
- 1.3 The length of the review process is not prescribed under legislation, provided that all points in the review schedule are covered and a suitable consultation period is planned to allow sufficient time for anyone wishing to submit their comments on matters are able to.
- 1.4 There are currently 62 polling districts, 53 polling places and 58 polling stations across the Folkestone & Hythe Parliamentary constituency.
- 1.5 In line with the Council's constitution, the responsibility of this review is with the Audit and Governance Committee. A presentation by the Democratic Services and Elections Lead Specialist on Wednesday 13 September 2023 outlined the details of this review and the importance of keeping to the regulations set by the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Electoral Administration Act 2006.
- 1.6 This review concentrates on the following elements of a parliamentary constituency:
 - 1.6.1 Polling district

A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts. The "administrative" boundary lines of a polling district can be changed, however the governed lines that form Parish, District and County wards/divisions can't be changed as part of this review.
 - 1.6.2 Polling place

A polling place is a building or geographical area in which a polling station is located. It is good practice to specify where a polling place is, as a building instead of an area to ensure there is a clear indication to electors within and outside of a polling district.
 - 1.6.3 Polling station

A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Polling stations are chosen by the Returning Officer for each election, and not by the Council.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The consultation for this review began at the publishing of the review notice on Monday 02 October 2023. A notice was placed on the Parish, Town and District notice boards and on the website which was shared via Facebook and Twitter. A press release was also published to newspapers to invite representations.
- 2.2 In addition to a notice, over 900 authority contacts across community groups, organisations and professional bodies from the area were contacted directly to seek their views on the current set up of our polling places/stations. The following were also contacted:
- Damian Collins MP,
 - Kent County councillors for the Folkestone & Hythe area,
 - District councillors,
 - All Parish and Town councils and meetings,
 - All political parties that took part in the last local election; and
 - Susan Priest, the (Acting) Returning Officer for the Parliamentary constituency of Folkestone & Hythe area.
- 2.3 The Acting Returning Officer's representation, which included various proposals based on pre-requisite work carried out by the elections team, was also published on Monday 02 October 2023 on the website and was also available to view at the Civic Centre. Anyone could make comment on this representation up until Friday 17 November 2023.
- 2.4 General representations from the public, and those people, organisations and charities personally invited had until Friday 17 November 2023 as well, to submit their views to the Democratic Services and Elections Lead Specialist. The representations and comments that were received in time can be found in Appendix 3 of this report.

3. REVIEW SCHEDULE

- 3.1 Legislation sets a specific review schedule that must be adhered to, I am happy to confirm that Folkestone & Hythe DC have conducted this review within these obligations.
- 3.2 The review timetable, against the guidelines set by legislation is below for your information:

Notice of Review published & start of consultation	Monday 02 October 2023
Acting Returning Officer's representation published	Monday 02 October 2023
Submission of Representation deadline	Friday 17 November 2023
Submission of Comments on ARO statement deadline	Friday 17 November 2023
Proposals submitted to Audit & Governance Committee	Wednesday 06 December 2023
Recommendations reported to Full Council	Wednesday 24 January 2024
Revised Electoral Register published with changes (if any)	Thursday 01 February 2024

3. REVIEW

- 4.1 A total of 11 representations and 13 comments on the Acting Returning Officer's representation were received during the consultation period. Each representation was used to consider any changes that could be introduced for future elections.
- 4.2 In addition to the representations and comments, information collected at polling stations during the full local elections and European Parliamentary elections was utilised to form a better understanding of how staff and visiting electors perceive the current venue choices.
- 4.3 Statistical data and information was collected as part of this review to establish the potential for an increase or decrease in electorate over the next 4 years. The Electoral Commission guidance recommends that a manageable number of electors allocated to a polling station is capped at 2,500.
- 4.4 All polling districts boundary lines were considered (where possible) to understand where amendments may have been made to the lineage to group electors differently to balance out numbers and avoid breaching the 2,500 recommended by the Electoral Commission.
- 4.5 Using the current list of polling places, polling stations and any contributory information known to the elections team. A check of the historic availability of each premises has been considered going forward, likewise some information received on certain polling stations has been considered when sourcing potential replacements or alternative venues.
- 4.6 This review has resulted in proposals that affect the following polling districts:

BR1	Broadmead Ward
CH2 / CH3	Cheriton Ward
HR1 / HR2	Hythe Rural Ward
RM1	Romney Marsh Ward
RM2	Romney Marsh Ward

4. RISKS/CONTROLS

- 4.1 In light of the fact that there are minimal proposals as part of this review, there are no significant risks identified.

7. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

7.1 Legal Officer's Comments (AK)

The legal issues have been dealt with in the Report.

7.2 Finance Officer's Comments (OO)

There are no additional financial implications associated with this report. The ongoing consultation process and review will be conducted within the existing service budgets.

7.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

The outcome and recommendations of a review of polling districts and polling places are specifically designed to ensure that all voters can exercise their right to vote and where voters chose to vote in person at polling stations, that these are accessible to all regardless of disability.

The report demonstrates that extensive consultation has taken place with community groups, organisations, professional bodies, and members of the general public. Representations and comments received on proposals have been included in appendix 3 of this report.

8. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

Paul Butler
Democratic Services and Elections Lead Specialist
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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

- The Representation of the People Act 1983
- The Electoral Administration Act 2006
- Electoral Commission Guidance – Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations
- Association of Electoral Administrators – Review or polling districts, polling places and polling stations training

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Notice of Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations – dated 02 October 2023

Appendix 2: Polling district and polling stations recommendations

Appendix 3: Representations and comments received with officer comments.