

This Report will be made public on 8 October 2019

Report Number **A/09/14**

To: Council
Date: 16 October 2019
Status: Non-Key Decision
Responsible Officer: Paul Butler – Democratic Services Manager
Cabinet Member: Councillor David Monk, Leader of the Council

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2019

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 (as Shepway District Council) in November 2014. This Report outlines the steps the Council is taking to comply with this duty and seeks approval from Council to approve the recommendations made.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report A/09/14.
2. To approve the proposals listed in this report as the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Stations for the next four years, or until an ad-hoc review triggered by the Council in the interim.
3. To adopt the proposals as outlined in Appendix 2, with the implementation to coincide with the revision of the register on 01 December 2019.
4. To note that in response to a recommendation received at Audit & Governance, the consideration on the use of public houses will be a part of any future polling reviews.

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 2018 and will end on 31 January 2020.
- 1.2 The last review concluded in November 2014, with the current set up of polling districts and stations proposed as final recommendations. The current review started on Wednesday 01 July 2019 and will conclude at the revision of the Electoral Register on Sunday 01 December 2019.
- 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, 54 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 Manager on Tuesday 30 July 2019 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 Wednesday 03 July 2019. 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, a total of 46 organisations and charities 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 and Parish/Town councillors
 - All Parish and Town councils and meetings
 - All political parties that took part in the last local election
 - 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 published on Wednesday 24 July 2019 on the website and was also available to view at the Civic Centre. Anyone could make comment on this representation up until 04 September 2019.
- 2.4 General representations from the public, and those people, organisations and charities personally invited had until Wednesday 14 August 2019 to submit their views to the Democratic Services Manager. 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	Wednesday 03 July 2019
Acting Returning Officer's representation published	Wednesday 24 July 2019
Submission of Representation deadline	Wednesday 14 August 2019
Submission of Comments on ARO statement deadline	Wednesday 04 September 2019
Proposals submitted to Audit & Governance Committee	Wednesday 18 September 2019
Recommendations reported to Full Council	Wednesday 16 October 2019
Revised Electoral Register published with changes	Sunday 01 December 2019

5. REVIEW

- 4.1 A total of 18 representations and 3 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. Officers will comment on each representation at the meeting.
- 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:

CH2	Cheriton West
CH3	
EF1-3	East Folkestone
FC1-4	Folkestone Central
HY1	Hythe East
NR2	New Romney Town
NDE6 & NDE10	Swingfield and Acrise
NDW9	Lyminge
WDM8	Lydd

6. 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 (CS)

The author of this report has confirmed to finance that any financial implications arising from this report can be contained within existing budgets.

7.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (PR)

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

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 Manager
Telephone: 01303 853497
Email: paul.butler@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

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

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Notice of Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations – dated 01 July 2019

Appendix 2: Polling district and polling stations proposals

Appendix 3: Representations and comments received (including officer notes)