

Meeting:	Audit and Governance Committee
Meeting date:	27/11/2024
Report of:	Bryn Roberts, Director of Governance
Portfolio of:	Cllr Claire Douglas, Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

Audit and Governance Committee Report: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Subject of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to notify the Committee of the review process, including details of the consultation process and timeline.
2. The Representation of the People Act 1983 places a duty on the Council to divide the authority area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each polling district for the purpose of holding elections.
3. The council must review polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.

Policy Basis

4. The outcome of the review will be to:
 - Improve the way the council and its partners work together to deliver better services
 - Improve our focus on the needs of customers and residents in designing and providing services

Recommendation and Reasons

5. That Members note the commencement of the polling district and polling place review and the associated consultation process and review timeline.

Reason: To comply with statutory requirements.

Background

6. The following rules must be adhered to when designating polling districts and polling places:
 - each parish in England and community in Wales must be a separate polling district, unless there is a good reason for this to not be the case.
 - a polling place must be designated for each polling district, unless the district is so small or remote that it doesn't matter where the polling station is.
 - the polling place must be in the district, unless there's a good reason to put it outside the district (for example, if there's no accessible polling place in the district).
 - the polling place must be small enough so that electors in different parts of the district can easily find it.
7. The following definitions may be helpful when reading the report and Appendices:
 - “Polling districts” are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
 - “Polling places” are the buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
 - “Polling stations” are the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.
8. At the commencement of the review, the local authority is required to publish formal notice to this effect. A copy of the draft notice is attached at Annex A. The notice must state the date that the review will commence, and must invite comments and representations. The proposed timetable for the review is encompassed within the Notice.

9. As part of the consultation process, the authority will make direct contact with elected representative, including ward councillors, parish councils, local Members of Parliament and the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority Mayor. Local political parties, local disability awareness groups and local community groups will also be contacted and invited to make comments or representations.
10. At the May 2024 Combined Authority Mayoral polls, all Presiding Officers were requested to complete an accessibility audit of their polling station. The audit was compiled by the Council's Access Officer, working closely with the Electoral Services team. The outcome of that audit will be taken into consideration alongside the consultation responses when preparing the revised schedule of polling places for consideration by this Committee and approval by full Council. Details will be presented with the final report.
11. The Electoral Services team has, following the two major polls held during 2024, annotated the current schedule of polling places to advise of known issues with existing stations (including the provisional outcome of the accessibility audit) and potential new or replacement polling stations. That annotated schedule is shown at Annex B and will form the basis for the (Acting) Returning Officer's formal comments on the proposed polling plan, to be published alongside the Notice of Review.
12. The Electoral Services team has been working with officers from the Communications team to develop a robust communication strategy to ensure as many electors as possible are made aware of, and encouraged to engage with, the review.
13. The consultation period will last for just over one month. All comments and representations received will be reported to Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 29 January 2024, and Members will be requested to make recommendations to Council on a revised schedule of polling districts and polling places.

Consultation Analysis

14. Consultation will commence with the publication of the 'Notice of Review' on 28 November 2024. The consultation period will run until 3 January 2025.

Risks and Mitigations

15. Failure to undertake the review would represent a risk to the authority as the review is a statutory requirement.

Implications

Financial – None directly arising from this report.

Human Resources – None directly arising from this report.

Equalities – The Council's Returning Officer has a duty to ensure that polling places are accessible. This will be reflected in the final schedule of polling places, at the end of the review process.

Legal - In accordance with S18A-E of the Representation of the People Act 1983, local authorities must undertake a review of all polling districts and polling places used for parliamentary elections every five years. The current compulsory review period began on 1st October 2024 and ends on 31 January 2025.

Crime and Disorder, Information Technology and Property – None directly arising from this report.

Wards Impacted

16. All wards are involved in the review process.

Contact details

For further information please contact the authors of this report.

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Background papers

- [Electoral Commission Guidance: Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations | Electoral Commission](#)

Annexes

- Annex A: Draft Notice of Review and timetable
- Annex B: Annotated list of current polling stations