

## Report to Governance Committee

Monday, 27 November 2023  
By the (Acting) Returning Officer  
**DECISION REQUIRED**



Not Exempt

### Polling Places and Polling Districts Review

#### Executive Summary

The council is required to undertake a review of all polling districts and polling places to be completed by 31 January 2025.

Accordingly, a review of the provision of polling places, and the polling district boundaries has been undertaken to satisfy this requirement within the requisite timeframe. A number of changes were proposed to the schedule of polling places. The consultation process in respect of this is now complete and the recommendations are set out in Appendix 1.

#### Recommendations

That the Committee is recommended:

- i) To recommend that Council approves the revised schedule of polling districts and polling places, as set out in Appendix 1, for all elections

#### Reasons for Recommendations

- i) To ensure that polling districts, polling places and polling stations are relevant and fit for purpose.
- ii) To ensure statutory compliance.

#### Background Papers

Schedule of polling districts, places and stations  
Responses to consultation.

**Contact:** Aisha Nottage, Democratic Services and Elections Manager.

## **Background Information**

### **1 Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 The Council has a legal duty to complete a review of polling districts and polling places in its area by 31 January 2025, with subsequent compulsory reviews undertaken every five years. If approved, the changes will take effect from 1 January 2024 and the electoral register will be republished to incorporate any changes, if required. The last compulsory review took place in 2019.
- 1.2 Polling districts are geographical areas created by sub-dividing the Horsham District electoral area into smaller parts for voting. Each polling district must be allocated a polling place which is a building or area in which the polling stations will be situated. The polling place must be within the boundaries of the polling district for which it serves, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside of that polling district.
- 1.3 Although the statutory requirement is to review the polling districts and places in relation to UK Parliamentary General Elections, the polling places and districts adopted pursuant to this review will be used at all future elections taking place within the district.

### **2 Relevant Council policy**

- 2.1 To ensure statutory compliance and the successful delivery of elections.

### **3 Details**

- 3.1 The review of polling districts and polling places in the Horsham area began on 2 October 2023 and closed on 30 October 2023.
- 3.2 The Notice of Review and schedule of existing and proposed polling districts and places were published on the Council's website on 2 October 2023. The schedule included comments from the (Acting) Returning Officer. A press release was also issued. A consultation was undertaken, whereby District and County councillors, parish and neighbourhood councils, local MPs and party agents were advised directly of the review and their comments sought.
- 3.3 The principles underlying the proposals were, as far as practicable:
  - To ensure that all electors in the District have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
  - To ensure that where possible, in line with Electoral Commission's guidelines, no more than 2,250 electors are allocated to each polling station.
  - To ensure that polling places are accessible to people with disabilities.
- 3.4 Where possible, the proposed polling place allocated to a polling district is within the boundaries of that polling district. There are circumstances where this has not been possible, however a full investigation of the options has been undertaken.

3.5 The schedule, as published, proposed the following changes:

- The polling place for polling district HGGB would be the Function Room at Broadbridge Heath Parish offices. This is considered more convenient for electors than the previous polling station at the Bridge, as it is accessible by foot for many within the polling district, whilst also providing sufficient parking.
- The polling place/station for polling district HHNP would be Park Barn, North Street, as it is more central within the polling district, than the previous polling station at London Road Methodist Church.
- The polling place/station for polling district HHXG would be Horsham Youth Centre, Hurst Road, as it is within the polling district. Voters in HHXG have previously voted at the Youth Centre, however have recently voted at Park Barn, North Street, when the Youth Centre was unavailable.
- The polling place/station for polling district HLVA would be The Millennium Hall, as it is within the polling district and is a suitable venue for a double polling station.

3.6 Representations were received from a local Member in relation to the polling stations within the Forest ward. Following investigation, it is proposed that no changes are made to the polling stations within the ward as no suitable alternative venues have been identified. It has been agreed that this will be kept under review, should a suitable venue become available.

3.7 Representations were also received from a local Member in relation to the polling station within the Nuthurst ward. Voters in Nuthurst have voted at Mannings Heath Village Hall since 2019. Turnout at the local elections in 2019 and 2023 were 42% and 40% respectively. The turnout in the 2023 elections was the highest across the District. Further to this, we have received no adverse comments from voters in relation to the use of this venue. It should be noted that a number of parishes of this size and larger have only one polling station/place (e.g. Ashington, Itchingfield, Rudgwick, Slinfold, Steyning, Thakeham, Warnham, West Chiltington) so this is not an unusual situation. It is therefore proposed that the existing arrangements remain unchanged.

3.8 A representation was further received from a County Councillor in relation to the use of the Holbrook Club for HKXC. The polling district does not have a suitable venue within its boundaries, and currently voters attend the Holbrook Club. Following discussions with ward Members, it is proposed that voters in HKXC continue to attend the Holbrook Club. If voters in HKXC were to attend the Horsham Youth Centre, there are concerns that there would be pressure on parking and traffic at the venue. There is also a concern regarding the administration of the West Sussex County Council elections. Should the voters in HKXC attend Horsham Youth Centre, as well as the voters of HHNP, the polling station staff would be administering the poll for two county divisions (Holbrook and Horsham Hurst). This would introduce an element of risk in relation to the issuing of ballot papers, and ensuring the ballot papers are contained within the correct ballot box. Further to this, we have not received any adverse comments from voters in relation to the location of this polling station. For these reasons, it is proposed that the existing arrangements remain unchanged.

- 3.9 Further, it is proposed that the polling district boundaries remain unchanged, however due to the Parliamentary Boundary Review there are proposed amendments to the naming of the polling districts within Cowfold, Shermanbury and West Grinstead. The polling districts are currently named to signify the Parliamentary constituency that they form part of. Those polling districts that fall within the Arundel & South Downs constituency begin with “A”, whereas those in the Horsham constituency begin with “H”. As such, it is proposed that polling districts in the Cowfold, Shermanbury and West Grinstead ward are renamed so that the first letter of the polling district code is “H”, to represent that following the next UK Parliamentary General Election, these polling districts will form part of the Horsham constituency.
- 3.10 Consideration has been given to accessibility of all polling stations, and the use of ramps will be investigated further at relevant polling stations. Where there are concerns that cannot be addressed with a ramp, and there are no suitable alternatives, staffing levels will be adjusted accordingly.
- 3.11 Where there is a change to the polling station for a given polling district, the poll card for voters within that polling district will be amended to highlight that voters should check the location of their polling station, as there has been a change.
- 3.12 Details of all consultation responses and the local authority/(Acting) Returning Officer’s comments are attached (Appendix 2).

## **4 Next Steps**

- 4.1 If approved, the recommendations in relation to the polling districts and polling places set out in Appendix 1 will be implemented with effect from 1 January 2024.

## **5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations**

- 5.1 Consultation has been carried out as set out in Section 3 above and comments received incorporated where appropriate. All Horsham District Councillors were consulted directly, and as such the views of a Policy Development Advisory Group were not sought.

## **6 Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected**

- 6.1 Alternative venues and arrangements were considered and investigated, as outlined in section 3.
- 6.2 The option of conducting the review at a later date was considered but rejected given that a UK Parliamentary General Election could take place, at short notice, at any time until January 2025. Conducting the review at this stage should ensure that the selection of polling stations are the most appropriate for the upcoming elections and that the Council has sufficient resource to undertake the review and service any general election held at short notice.

## **7 Resource Consequences**

- 7.1 The total cost for the hire of the polling stations in the May 2023 elections was £19,851. The projected cost of hiring the revised polling stations (as contained in the schedule) for the elections in May 2024 is £19,750. This will be subject to any annual price increases applied by the individual venues. Horsham District Council recharges the cost of the UK Parliamentary General Election, Police and Crime Commissioner elections, West Sussex County Council and Parish Council elections to the relevant body. As such, the cost of these polling stations to Horsham District Council is limited to district council elections, by-elections and local referenda, such as Neighbourhood Plan Referenda.
- 7.2 The review was undertaken by council officers. Therefore, other than officer time, there are no other resource consequences associated with conducting the subject review.

## **8 Legal Considerations and Implications**

- 8.1 The power to designate polling districts and places rests with the Council.
- 8.2 The Council is required under section 17 the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and section 18c of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to carry out a review of polling places and districts at least every five years. In conducting the review, local authorities must follow the rules set out in Schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- 8.3 In formulating the proposals contained in this report, it is noted that the Electoral Commission's guidance on polling district and polling place reviews was followed.

## **9 Risk Assessment**

- 9.1 The review was undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements and after due consultation. Accordingly, there should not be any risks associated with undertaking the subject review.
- 9.2 Otherwise, risk assessments in relation to polling stations will be undertaken at appropriate times.

## **10 Procurement implications**

- 10.1 There are no procurement implications arising from undertaking the subject review.

## **11. Equalities and Human Rights implications / Public Sector Equality Duty**

- 11.1 The Council has had regard to its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. This provides, inter alia, that local authorities should have due regard to (i) the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, (ii) the need to

advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not, and, (iii) the need to foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not. (The protected characteristics are as follows: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation).

- 11.2 The Council does not think that the change in polling places and polling stations would have an adverse impact on individuals with protected characteristics. Individuals who may be impacted by polling station changes are likely to be those who may find it difficult to physically go to or access a polling station, whether due to age, disability, pregnancy or otherwise. However, all polling stations are reviewed to ensure adaptations are made where possible to improve accessibility for voters and disabled parking is provided. Staff at all polling stations will offer assistance to any voters that may require it. The Elections Team can offer support with alternative ways of voting, such as by post or proxy.
- 11.3 The proposals will have no detrimental impact on human rights. Officers attempted to seek the views of a group representing residents with accessibility needs however no such group operating in the District was identified. The proposals aim to provide accessible polling stations to voters, within their polling district where possible. Where this is not possible, the closest suitable venue has been selected. There will always be a need for some electors to use private transport to access their polling station and for those who are not able to do so alternative methods are available (e.g. postal and proxy voting). Where possible, a dedicated accessible parking bay will be reserved for those who require it. In administering all elections, the Returning Officer has regard to the need to consider equality and diversity issues. The accessibility of polling places is constantly reviewed and whenever possible fully accessible premises are used.
- 11.4 In addition, in avoiding the use of schools as polling stations, this would ensure that the education of young people in the District is not disrupted.

## **12 Environmental Implications**

- 12.1 There are no environmental implications.

## **13 Other Considerations**

- 13.1 There are no other considerations.