

**HITCHIN COMMITTEE
1 OCTOBER 2019**

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - COUNCILLOR STEARS-HANDSCOMBE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPONSIVE AND EFFICIENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To outline and report on the outcome of the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations consultation following a review required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Hitchin Committee:

- 2.1. designate the Polling Places as illustrated in the Returning Officer's Proposals attached as Appendix A and maps attached as Appendix C to the submitted report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places. The compulsory review must commence and conclude between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive).

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. Although the review is of polling districts and polling places it is accepted that polling stations are inexorably linked. Appendix A is the Polling District Schedule that identifies the polling districts, polling places and polling stations for the entire District, along with justification as to any proposed changes.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The consultation stage is for representations and comments to be made on the existing and proposed arrangements for polling districts, polling places and polling stations. When conducting the review the Council must:

- Consult the (Acting) Returning Officer for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in North Hertfordshire;
- Seek representations from electors and other interested persons and bodies including elected representatives and such persons that have a particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

5.2 Formal notice of the review required the Council to give notice of the review by displaying the Notice on its website, which was also published in both the Royston Crow and the Comet on Thursday 15 August 2019.

5.3 Information was circulated via the Members' Information Note, publicised through the Council's Communications Team via a Press Release and social media channels, the Community Engagement Team promoted the Review via the Engage North Herts Facebook Group, and emails and letters were circulated to the over 200 contacts including the Council's Citizens Panel, MPs and MEPs.

5.4 The representations received during the consultation are summarised in Appendix B, along with the considerations given when determining whether to relocate a polling station.

5.5 Both the Acting Returning Officers for Stevenage Borough Council, and St Albans City and District Council, have responded and have no comments to make to any proposals in respect to the areas they have responsibility for in a Parliamentary election.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The Council must conduct a full review by 31 January 2020, and thereafter every five years from the 1 October 2018. The last full review was completed in January 2014.

7.2 Definitions:

Polling District - the geographical area created by sub-dividing an electoral area. All wards within North Hertfordshire are divided into polling districts, which form the basis upon which the register of electors is produced. Unless there are special circumstances, each parish must be in a separate polling district.

Polling Place - the designated area in which a polling station is located. In the absence of any legal definition, this can be regarded as widely as a polling district or as narrowly as the building in which a polling station is located.

Polling Station - the actual area where the process of voting takes place, e.g. a room in a community centre or school.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Review Timetable:

Event	Date
Consultation Period	14 August – 16 September 2019
Final Recommendations to presented to the Area Committees:	
Hitchin Committee	1 October 2019
Baldock and District Committee	7 October 2019
Royston and District Committee	9 October 2019
Southern Rural Committee	10 October 2019
Letchworth Committee	16 October 2019
Republish Register of Electors	1 December 2019

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. 9.8.1 (f) of the Terms of Reference for Area Committees states '*To designate polling places and review the boundaries of polling districts*'.
- 9.2. The Review is compulsory and must be concluded by 31 January 2020. Presenting the proposals to the October cycle of Area Committee meetings will mean changes can be incorporated into the Register prior to its publication on 1 December 2019.
- 9.3. Subsequent compulsory reviews must commence and conclude within the period of 16 months on 1 October every fifth year (i.e. the next review must commence on 1 October 2023).

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As the population of the District, and consequently the number of electors increase as new residential developments proceed, will mean new polling stations may be required and therefore have ongoing cost implications.
- 10.2 The anticipated costs of the various elections are taken into account during the annual budget setting process.
- 10.3 For a Town/Parish/County Council elections the costs are recharged to the respective authority (unless a year when a District Council election is held in which case the costs are proportioned between the respective Councils).

- 10.4 For other elections claims are made to the Cabinet Office for reimbursement of the fees incurred i.e. Parliamentary/European elections, which are not always wholly successful.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. The current practice of ensuring that Polling Places are coterminous with Polling Districts means that the (Acting) Returning Officer may act without delay to relocate a polling station where access or other issues arise unexpectedly.

- 11.2. Following conclusion of the review, certain persons have a right to make representations to the Electoral Commission. If, on receipt of such representations, the Electoral Commission finds that the Council did not:

- Meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or
- Take sufficient account of the accessibility for disabled persons of a polling station within a designated polling place.

The Electoral Commission may direct the Council to make any alteration to the polling place as deemed necessary, and if the alterations are not enacted within 2 months, the Electoral Commission may make the alterations themselves.

- 11.3 The requirement to undertake the review, including the associated consultation, provides the Council with the opportunity to assess the suitability of polling arrangements, to ensure that facilities provided are accessible to all and do not present any barriers to people's participation in elections.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 12.2. As part of the review the Council must:

- Seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report. However, as a Polling Place must be an area within the district (unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district) a local provider will usually be used to deliver this.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. Staffing an election can be highly resource intensive. Dependent on the type of election requirements differ, for instance, a By-election or Neighbourhood Plan Referendum would require less resource than a Parliamentary election. However, in terms of this report, other than officer time required to put together proposals and research alternative locations, there are no impacts.

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1. Appendix A Returning Officer's Proposals
- 15.2. Appendix B Consultation responses
- 15.3. Appendix C Maps (Polling District boundaries are shown in green).

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1. When conducting the review, North Hertfordshire District Council used the guidance and resources published by the Electoral Commission:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/electoral-administrator/polling-place-reviews>

- 17.2 Council's Website 'Polling District Review' page:

<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/elections-and-voting/polling-district-review>