

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL – MONDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2024
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND RETURNING OFFICER

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 For electoral purposes, the Council is required to divide each parliamentary constituency in the area into polling districts for parliamentary elections and to designate polling places for each of those polling districts. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, all Polling Districts, Places and Stations should be reviewed on a regular basis.
- 1.2 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of the review of polling arrangements and it is required that the next review must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive) and every five years thereafter.
- 1.3 This report informs the Council of the responses received to the recent consultation exercise carried out and recommends some minor amendments be made to the current arrangements. If Council agrees with the changes, they will be implemented with immediate effect.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Council notes the small number of responses received to the consultation and agrees, in the light of these, to make minor amendments to the current arrangements for polling districts, places and polling stations as detailed in this report.

3. Explanation

- 3.1 Each local authority in Great Britain is responsible for reviewing polling districts and polling places in its area on a regular basis. The Council must complete its review by 31 January 2025.
- 3.2 The purpose of the review is to:
- Seek to ensure that all electors should continue to have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

- Seek to ensure that so far as it is reasonable and practicable, the polling places designated are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.
- Provide additional polling stations where applicable given the increase in electorate in certain areas, and make it more practical and reasonable for electors to vote.

3.3 Responsibility for deciding how many polling stations are required for each polling place lies with the Returning Officer who must allocate electors to the polling stations in such a manner that is most convenient.

3.4 The last review of polling districts, places and stations in Welwyn Hatfield was agreed at Council on 7 January 2020.

3.5 Public notice of the current review was given on 18 October 2023 at which representations were invited from key stakeholders, interested groups and organisations or individuals on the appropriateness of the polling places and any other comments on the scheme in general. The deadline for submission of comments was 29 November 2023.

3.6 It is proposed that there should be changes to Hollybush (see proposed changes outlined in Appendix A) and Peartree wards (see proposed changes outlined in Appendix B). The other wards will remain unaltered which meet the current legislative criteria.

3.7 There have only been two responses to the consultation both of which relate to the Peartree Ward and are included in Appendices C1 and C2.

3.8 Hollybush Ward

3.8.1 Within the Hollybush Ward, some electors currently need to travel further to their polling station to vote than they need to. In order to redress this imbalance, it is proposed that the list of addresses in all of the Polling Districts are reviewed to ensure electors could, as far as possible, vote at a polling station nearer to them, whilst ensuring that the number of voters going to each of the polling stations are roughly equal.

3.8.2 No responses have been received about the proposed changes and it is recommended that the proposed changes are implemented.

3.9 Peartree Ward

3.9.1 There have been two responses concerning these proposed changes, both of which are supportive of the changes to add an additional polling district and the change in polling station from Peartree Primary School to WGC & Hatfield Sea Cadets.

- 3.9.2 The first response confirmed that the proposals as outlined are sensible.
- 3.9.3 The second response also endorses the proposals and confirms that these 'solution(s) is probably appropriate'. In addition the question was raised concerning publicising the change in polling station and the possible reduction in voters travelling further to vote from what they have been used to as a result of the change in polling station. It has been very difficult to source a new polling station which is convenient to all. The council will endeavour to publicise the review outcome by methods other than through social media and the council's website. Details of the changes would also be shown on all poll cards.
- 3.9.4 With previous changes in polling stations, there has been no noticeable change in voting numbers. In addition, as with all changes to any polling stations the subject of a review, with permission of the former polling station, the council arranges for notices to be shown outside them confirming the change and giving directions to the new polling station.
- 3.9.5 Finally, the response refers to the proposed Shredded Wheat development and the increase that will bring with new properties being built. The council has taken this into consideration in this current review in not only situating the new polling station nearer to this area, but also adding in an additional polling district incorporating additional electors around this area to reflect the recent builds. All developments are always taken into consideration in advance. The council is not limited in having a review of polling districts and polling stations every 5 years, as this can be done anytime when it is deemed necessary.

4. Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 Reviews of Polling Places, Polling Districts and Polling Stations are carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

5. Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There would be slightly more additional costs involved in the change of a polling station in the Peartree Ward in that the cost of hiring a private hall would be slightly more than a publicly funded school but it is estimated that this would be around £100.

6. Risk Management Implication

- 6.1 There are no risk management implications arising directly as a result of this report. Risk assessments are carried out for all polling places and polling stations on a regular basis to ensure that they are safe and fit for purpose.

7. Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising from this report.

8. Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

9. Link to Corporate Priorities

9.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority: "Run an effective council."

10. Climate Change Implication(s)

10.1 None specifically as a result of this report.

11. Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

11.1 The proposed changes will be communicated to voters via a variety of methods.

12. Equality and Diversity

12.1 An EqlA was completed (Appendix D) and found that there is the potential for positive impacts as the Review sought to ensure that so far as it is reasonable and practicable, the polling places designated are accessible to all electors.

13. Background Papers

13.1 Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations – Guidance from the Electoral Commission

13.2 Consultation documents and responses
Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
Representation of the People Act 1983
Electoral Administration Act 2006
The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006

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