



Title of meeting:	Governance and Audit and Standards Committee
Date of meeting:	2 October 2024
Subject:	Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places
Report by:	Electoral Services Manager
Wards affected:	All
Key decision:	No
Full Council decision:	Yes

1. Purpose of report

To detail the outcomes of the review of polling districts and polling places recently undertaken and to invite members to consider the recommendations made.

2. Recommendations

- 1) That no changes are made to the current polling scheme for the reasons set out in this report**
- 2) That it be reconfirmed that the Returning Officer has delegated authority to make such variations to polling places as may be necessary arising from the availability of premises for use at a particular election**

3. Background

3.1 The Council is required under section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) to divide each electoral ward into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each polling district. These regulations also require the Council to conduct a review every five years, including in the period between October 2023 and January 2025. The requirement for such a review to be conducted every five years was to align with the requirements of the now repealed Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 with the review to take place in advance of scheduled UK Parliamentary elections.

3.2 Definitions:

- i) A polling district is a sub-division of an electoral ward into a smaller geographical unit comprising a number of streets and properties

ii) A polling place is a building or location in which polling stations will be designated by the Returning Officer

iii) A polling station is the actual room or building in which the poll is held

3.3 The duties of the Council in the review process are:

a) To ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances

b) To seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons

3.4 Certain practical limitations such as the availability and suitability of venues must also be considered when designating polling places.

3.5 The Council has been proactive in completing interim reviews to ensure that polling arrangements are kept up-to-date. Interim reviews were completed in both 2022 and 2023 which included a significant reconfiguration of polling arrangements in Baffins, Copnor, Fratton, Hilsea and Milton wards.

4. The Boundary Commission's review of wider electoral arrangements

4.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is currently conducting a review of Portsmouth's wider electoral arrangements. It is looking at the number of councillors, the number of wards, the ward boundaries and ward names. The electoral review is entirely separate and independent of the Council's review of polling districts and polling places.

4.2 The first public consultation on the Council's future warding arrangements opened on 27 August and will run until 4 November. A further consultation stage will run from 14 February to 14 April 2025 on the Commission's draft recommendations. The electoral review is expected to be completed in 2025 and the new ward arrangements will be implemented at the local elections in May 2026.

4.3 It is likely that there will be significant changes to the current ward boundaries which in turn will have an impact on the Council's scheme of polling districts and polling places. For example, the new ward boundaries may split some existing polling districts between two or more wards. This potential fragmentation of polling districts will require a further comprehensive review of polling districts and polling places to take account of the new warding arrangements and rationalise any anomalies that may have been created.

4.4 The context of this year's review of polling districts and polling places is therefore significantly impacted by the LGBCE's separate electoral review. Any changes to the current polling districts or polling places may not align with the outcome of the new warding arrangements.

5. Comments on the review of polling districts and polling places

5.1 A six-week consultation period was undertaken between 29 July and 9 September. However, the only formal response received was from the Returning Officer.

5.2 The Returning Officer is a statutory respondent to the review and submitted comments on the current polling scheme (see Appendix A). For the following reasons, the Returning Officer does not propose that any changes are made to the current arrangements:

- Reviews were completed in both 2022 and 2023 to ensure that arrangements are appropriate and up-to-date
- The current arrangements worked effectively at the Police & Crime Commissioner and City Council elections in May 2024 and the General election in July 2024
- On completion of the LGBCE's electoral review, a further review of polling districts and polling places will be required to address the new warding arrangements

5.3 Following each election, feedback is sought from polling station staff as to the suitability of each venue. Although not part of this formal review, the comments following this year's elections suggests that the current polling places are appropriate. A concern was raised about the use of Solent Infant School due to the gradient of the approach to the venue. However, after reviewing other venues in the area, no suitable alternatives were identified. Currently, additional stewards are allocated to Solent Infant School to provide assistance to voters where required.

5.4 Regular engagement with accessibility groups, including post-election meetings, has provided reassurance that the current polling places are suitable based on the available options. Further work is ongoing to continue to develop and expand the provision of materials to improve the overall accessibility of the voting process.

6. Recommendations

6.1 As set out in section 3, the LGBCE is conducting a review of Portsmouth's wider electoral arrangements. The outcome of that review is likely to include significant changes to the current ward boundaries and cause some fragmentation of the existing polling district structure. A comprehensive review of polling districts and polling places will therefore be required to reconfigure polling arrangements in



order to operate effectively on the new ward boundaries. In addition, no elections are scheduled to take place in 2025. For these reasons, no changes to the current scheme are recommended.

6.2 A full schedule of the current polling districts and polling places is set out in Appendix B.

7. **Integrated impact assessment**

7.1 The review of polling districts and polling places takes into consideration matters regarding accessibility and post-election feedback on polling arrangements is sought as a matter of course.

7.2 An Integrated Impact Assessment is attached.

8. **Legal implications**

All legal issues are dealt with in the body of the report.

9. **Director of Finance's comments**

The activities proposed within this report are expected to be funded from the existing service portfolio budgets, as approved by Full Council. Where there are any activities which have additional financial requirements, funding will need to be identified prior to their commencement.

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Signed by:

Appendices:

- Appendix A - Returning Officer's comments
- Appendix B - Current schedule of polling places
- Appendix C - Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)



Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Map of current polling district boundaries	Hard copy available at the Election Services Office

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by on

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Signed by: