

Harborough District Council

Report to Council Meeting of 26th February 2024



Title:	Review of Polling Districts & Places 2023/2024
Status:	Public
Key Decision:	N/A
Report Author:	Electoral Services Manager Sheena Mortimer
Portfolio Holder:	Corporate Portfolio Holder – Councillor Paul Beadle
Appendices:	Appendix A Guidance on Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations Appendix B Polling station review comments correspondence received 2023-2024 Appendix C Returning Officer Recommendations 2024

Executive Summary

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 as amended introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years. Under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window by 31st January 2025. More information regarding polling station reviews can be found in Appendix A.

In addition, the Boundary Commission for England has undertaken a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries, and orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries were made in November 2023. These new boundaries will be used for the next general election.

Recommendations

To recommend changes to a number of existing polling place arrangements to ensure that the facilities for voting are reasonable for all electors and are accessible to all voters including those with disabilities.

That Council approves the Returning Officer's recommendations –

- St Cuthberts Community Hall Great Glen is designated as the polling station for Glen Ward
- MH Church of St Nicholas extension is ratified as a designated polling station for Little Bowden Ward
- MH Congregational Hall is designated the polling station for voters within the airfield farm area of Lubenham Ward until a suitable building is available within the area
- Community Hub in Scraftoft is designated as a polling station for the Thurnby & Houghton Ward
- Tur Langton Village hall is ratified as a designated polling station for the Kibworths Ward

More detailed information regarding the recommendations can be found in Appendix C

Reasons for Recommendations
That the Council complies with the legislation to carry out a review of polling districts and places and ensure that polling places within the area are convenient and accessible to all users.

1. Purpose of Report

To recommend changes to a number of existing polling place arrangements to ensure facilities used for voting are reasonable and accessible for all electors.

2. Background

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 places a statutory duty on councils to review their polling stations once every five years. We are now in the process of completing this review which will be in place for any future General Election. Polling places should be facilities which are accessible to voters and be situated within the relevant polling district. Further information, regarding polling districts and places can be found in Appendix A.

3. Details

As part of the review of polling districts and places a two-part consultation exercise was carried out from November 2023 to February 2024 regarding the existing arrangements. Information regarding the polling station review and the existing polling places were placed on the Council's website for public consultation, relevant persons and bodies were notified of the review and where the information could be found regarding the review. The responses received in relation to this consultation can be found in Appendix B.

Consideration was given to comments and proposals received from the consultation exercise, and information gained from polling station staff at the district elections in May 2023 in order that the Returning Officer could ensure that the polling places within the district were both practical and accessible to as many voters as possible. The following recommendations from this review are –

- St Cuthberts Community Hall Great Glen is designated as the polling station for Glen Ward
- MH Church of St Nicholas extension is ratified as a designated polling station for Little Bowden Ward
- MH Congregational Hall is designated the polling station for voters within the airfield farm area of Lubenham Ward until a suitable building is available within the area
- Community Hub in Scraptoft is designated as a polling station for the Thurnby & Houghton Ward
- Tur Langton Village hall is ratified as a designated polling station for the Kibworths Ward

Further details of these recommendations can be found in Appendix C.

4. Implications of Decisions

All polling stations should be in building that are both accessible and convenient to all electors including those with disabilities who choose to vote in person. It is the duty of the Council to continually review these facilities, in order that voters are not discouraged or prevented from voting and can also increase participation in the democratic process. The recommendations to Council to approve the above changes will assist in ensuring that we meet our duty in using the most suitable facilities for this purpose.

4.1 Corporate Priorities

Community leadership to create a sense of pride and belonging.

4.2 Financial

The review of polling districts and places has been undertaken within existing resources. The cost for the use of polling stations within the district is met through the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities for all national elections, by Leicestershire County Council for County elections, by the relevant parish for Parish elections. The Council pay the cost for polling stations at District Ward elections only, which is financed through annual contributions to an earmarked reserve.

4.3 Legal

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 places a requirement for Councils to undertake a periodic full review of all polling districts and places throughout their area.

To ensure that the Council fulfil its duty under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 as amended, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window by 31st January 2025.

4.4 Policy

No direct policy implications.

4.5 Environmental Implications including contributions to achieving a net zero carbon Council by 2030

No impact on the Council's commitment.

4.6 Risk Management

Potential risk of disenfranchisement of voters if Council does not act on the recommendations within the report.

4.7 Equalities Impact

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on Local Authorities to promote equal opportunities. These considerations sit alongside the statutory obligations set out in the Electoral Administration Act in relation to improving the engagement in the electoral process by ensuring polling stations are accessible to all.

Council has a duty to ensure adequate facilities are provided with consideration given to the provision of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Failure to do so may result in electors being disenfranchised.

4.8 Data Protection

The report contains no private information.

5. Summary of Consultation and Outcome

The consultation exercise carried out from November 2023 to February 2024 aimed to gauge views on the existing arrangements in place. Information regarding the review were available on the consultation area of the Council's website, newsletters as well as sent directly to specific groups. Consideration was given to the comments and proposals received in order that the Returning Officer could ensure the most practical and accessible arrangements were in place for voters. Several changes to polling places are recommended as well as ratification of temporary arrangements. Further details of the recommendations can be found in Appendix C of this report. The following recommendations that Council are asked to approve are –

- St Cuthberts Community Hall Great Glen is designated as the polling station for Glen Ward
- MH Church of St Nicholas extension is ratified as a designated polling station for Little Bowden Ward

- MH Congregational Hall is designated the polling station for voters within the airfield farm area of Lubenham Ward until a suitable building is available within the area
- Community Hub in Scraftoft is designated as a polling station for the Thurnby & Houghton Ward
- Tur Langton Village hall is ratified as a designated polling station for the Kibworths Ward

6. Alternative Options Considered

The alternative would be to continue with the arrangements in place at this time which may lead to issues with access for voters.

7. Background papers

- Guidance on Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations
- Polling station review comments correspondence received 2023-2024
- Returning Officer Recommendations 2024