

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	<h1>Governance and Ethics Committee</h1> <p>7 July 2022</p>
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Report title	Boundary Review Implementation Plan and Polling District and Polling Place Review	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Electoral Services	
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Report to be/has been considered by	Election Board	23 June 2022

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Governance and Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the proposed approach and timetable for the polling district and polling place review.

The Governance and Ethics Committee is asked to note:

1. That the proposed scheme at this stage is intended as a starting point for discussion to aid the consultation.
2. The revised timetable for the scheme has been amended slightly since the report taken on 25 February to account for the new municipal year calendar of meetings.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 To present the approach and timeline to carrying out the polling district and polling place review, which is the next step towards implementing the new ward boundaries.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) published their final recommendations for Wolverhampton ward boundaries on 18 January 2022.

2.2 The Order for Wolverhampton's Electoral Review was made on 15 June 2022. The new warding arrangements will apply for the May 2023 council elections where all 60 councillor seats will be up for election. The council will then return to a cycle of election by thirds with elections in 2024, 2026 and 2027. The councillor with the highest number of votes will be elected to the four-year term, the second highest to the three-year term and the lowest to the one-year term.

2.3 A review of polling districts and polling places is required to ensure that polling districts align to the new ward boundaries. The purpose of a polling district and polling place review is to ensure that all electors have reasonably practicable facilities for voting and that polling places are reasonably accessible to electors who are disabled.

2.4 The differences between a district, place and station are as follows:

- A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area (ward in this instance), as well as parliamentary constituency boundaries.
- A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.
- A polling station is room or area within the polling place where voting takes places. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for the election. The Returning Officer for the particular election must provide a sufficient number of polling stations and allocate the electors to those polling stations in such manner as they think the most convenient.

2.5 The new ward boundaries for Wolverhampton do not align with the current parliamentary constituencies as St Peters is split across three constituencies, and part of Oxley is split across two constituencies. This creates an additional three small polling districts, which are temporary pending the outcomes of the parliamentary constituency boundary review.

2.6 The Boundary Commission for England is currently undertaking a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The second round of consultation has closed and the proposals for the new constituency boundaries align with the existing wards, not the new wards.

2.7 The Returning Officer/Chief Executive has responded to the Boundary Commissions consultation to request that these are reviewed so that whole wards are placed within a constituency as they have just been through a review process to reflect communities of identity. The proposals as they stand would also create significant administrative challenges splitting multiple wards across multiple constituencies. There is a risk that the ward boundaries may not align with the final parliamentary boundaries, and then another review of polling districts and polling places would be required. The final recommendations will be made in June 2023. Polling district boundaries will be reviewed again at this point. A map to show the new wards against the proposed parliamentary constituencies can be found in **Appendix 4**. A map to show the new wards against the current parliamentary constituencies can be found in **Appendix 5**.

3.0 The review

3.1 In accordance with the requirements set out in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the following steps must be carried out for the formal review:

- Publish a notice of the holding of a review
- Consult the ARO for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area
- Publish all representations made by an ARO within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area and, if the authority maintains a website, by placing a copy on the authority's website.
- Seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the AROs.
- On completion of a review, give reasons for its decisions and publish:
 - all correspondence sent to an (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review.
 - all correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.
 - all representations made by any person in connection with the review.
 - the minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review.
 - details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review.

- details of the places where the results of the review have been published.

4.0 Consultation proposal

- 4.1 A draft scheme of polling districts and polling places can be found in **Appendix 1**. The associated map for the whole city can be found in **Appendix 3**. This has been worked up based on data on the 2026 forecast electorate, feedback from councillors from recent elections, electors and staff on the recent elections and site visits to venues. It is intended as a starting point for discussion.
- 4.2 This scheme has reduced the number of polling districts by two to 121 polling districts. The number of temporary polling stations (portacabins) has reduced by one to two.
- 4.3 A total of 81 polling districts remain the exact same as the existing arrangements. 23 have changes to polling district boundaries only. 12 have changes to polling stations, and five have changes to both polling districts and polling stations.
- 4.4 There are 11 new polling station venues proposed.
- 4.5 There are 19 double polling station venues proposed, which is a total of 102 venues used as polling stations.
- 4.6 The consultation will be held online and publicised on the council's various communication channels. A leaflet promoting the consultation will be included in the annual canvass forms. It will be shared more specifically with councillors, MP's, community groups, polling station venues and will allow all interested parties in Wolverhampton to express their views on the proposed polling district boundaries and polling places through an online questionnaire and give them the opportunity to make alternative suggestions for consideration.
- 4.7 Councillors have a unique expertise and knowledge of their communities, and as such, Electoral Services will be working with Councillors to prepare the final scheme. Face to face drop in sessions will be held for each ward and all ward councillors will be invited to attend to contribute to the discussion and development of the final polling district and place scheme. These sessions will be held in Committee Rooms at the Civic Centre at 5pm – 6pm. The schedule is below:

Ward	Date	Ward	Date
Bilston North	19 July	Fallings Park	4 August
Bilston South	19 July	Merry Hill	4 August
Blakenhall	21 July	Oxley	16 August

Bushbury North	21 July	Park	16 August
Bushbury South and Low Hill	26 July	Penn	8 August
East Park	26 July	St Peters	8 August
Graiseley	1 August	Tettenhall Regis	9 August
Heath Town	1 August	Tettenhall Wightwick	9 August
Ettingshall North	2 August	Wednesfield North	15 August
Ettingshall South and Spring Vale	2 August	Wednesfield South	15 August

An additional drop-in session will be held on 16 August at 12pm for any councillor who cannot make the designated date for their ward.

5.0 Schools as polling stations

- 5.1 The initial proposal has reduced the number of schools from 24 to 14 and two of these stay open. Of the 12 that do close six have indicated that they plan to use polling day as one of their inset days.
- 5.2 The number of schools has significantly reduced over the years. The number of schools used as polling stations over the last five years is below:

Year – Election	Number of schools used
2017 - Combined Authority Mayoral Election	37
2017 – General Election	38
2018 – Local Election	38
2019 – Local Election	34
2019 – European Parliamentary Election	33
2019 – General Election	33
2021 – Local, PCC and CAM election	28
2022 - Local Election	24

6.0 Portacabins as polling stations

- 6.1 It is not always possible to place a portacabin in the same polling district as the school as there may not be suitable land to site the temporary polling station on. Suggestions for areas to host portacabins on are welcome as part of the consultation. Further work would need to be done to risk assess the sites to ensure that there is adequate space for electors to park and safely queue.
- 6.2 Portacabins are small in comparison to ordinary polling station venues. Typically, only one or two electors can enter at a time. The general principal Wolverhampton has worked to with the existing temporary stations is one unit per 1,000 electors to manage the flow of voters, so the majority of areas would need space for two portacabins.
- 6.3 Portacabins also comes at a significant cost as each temporary polling station is £1,768 + VAT. To place temporary stations within the polling districts of areas where there are no alternatives to schools would cost in the region of £60,000. This is compared to £3,000 for the hire of schools to cover caretaking, heating and lighting costs.
- 6.4 For years, Returning Officers have been strongly encouraged by the Government to take account of the legal provisions in place and use publicly funded buildings to reduce the cost of elections. This is why it has always been a council priority to keep the use of temporary polling stations down where there are suitable venues within the polling district.
- 6.5 It is also extremely difficult to recruit and retain staff to work in a temporary polling station as the environment and facilities are not as comfortable as other buildings over for a 16 hour working day.

7.0 Review timetable

Activity	Date
Publish notice of holding review and start of public formal consultation	18 July 2022
Drop-in sessions with ward Councillors to share feedback on proposals	18 July 2022 – 26 August 2022
End of formal consultation	26 August 2022
Collate results from consultation and prepare final scheme of polling districts and stations	29 August 2022 – 30 September 2022
Attend political group meeting to share final scheme of polling district and stations for comment	September 2022
Final scheme of polling districts and stations taken to Governance and Ethics	20 October 2022

Committee for recommendation to full council	
Final recommendations presented to the council	2 November 2022
Publish electoral register on new boundaries	1 December 2022
Poll cards will be sent to electors with polling station details on	March 2023

8.0 Access to electoral registers

- 8.1 On 1 December 2022, the revised electoral register will be published on the new wards. As such, existing members of the council will only be entitled to the parts of the register that they are currently elected members for as per the regulation 103 of the Representation of the People Rules 2001. For example, this would mean receiving parts of the register for the existing St Peters ward, not the full St Peters ward as per the new boundary.
- 8.2 Political parties are entitled to the full electoral register at any time on request.
- 8.3 All candidates standing for election will be entitled to the electoral register for the ward they are standing for on 27 March 2023.

9.0 Financial implications

- 9.1 The consultation will largely take place online or in small groups with relevant stakeholders and will be co-ordinated utilising existing resources within the Elections team.
- 9.2 The leaflet to be included as part of the canvass form will be met within the existing electoral registration budget as part of the annual canvass postage costs. The total Electoral Registration budget for 2022-2023 is £362,000. [SR/28062022/B]

10.0 Legal implications

- 10.1 All preparations outlined in this report are in line with the statutory provisions covering the review of polling district and places. [SZ/01072022/P].

11.0 Equalities implications

- 11.1 An equalities analysis has been undertaken to identify the positive and negative impacts against the key equality themes and solutions identified to mitigate against negative impacts. The analysis is in **Appendix 2**.
- 11.2 Local authorities have a duty to review the accessibility of all polling places to disabled voters and ensure that every polling place, and prospective polling place, for which it is responsible is accessible to disabled voters 'so far as is reasonable and practicable'.

11.3 Groups and individuals with expertise in access issues within Wolverhampton will be invited to respond to the ARO's representations during the public consultation phase.

12.0 All other Implications

12.1 There are no other implications arising from this report at the current time.

13.0 Schedule of background papers

13.1 Electoral Commission, Reviews of polling districts, polling place and polling stations: [Polling place reviews | Electoral Commission](#)

13.2 Boundary Commission for England 2023 review: 2023 Review | Boundary Commission for England (independent.gov.uk)

13.3 The Wolverhampton (Electoral Changes) Order 2022: The Wolverhampton (Electoral Changes) Order 2022 (legislation.gov.uk)

13.4 Local Government Boundary Commission for England report Implementation Plan, Governance and Ethics Committee, 25 February 2022.

14.0 Appendices

14.1 Appendix 1: Polling district and polling place proposal for consultation

14.2 Appendix 2: Equality Analysis

14.3 Appendix 3: Map to show proposed polling districts and polling places

14.4 Appendix 4: Parliamentary boundary proposals and new wards

14.5 Appendix 5: Existing Parliamentary constituencies and new wards