

Governance and Ethics Committee

23 November 2023

Report title	Statutory Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023-2025	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Electoral Services	
Accountable employee	Laura Noonan	Electoral Services and Scrutiny Manager 01902 55 5050 Laura.noonan@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Full Council	6 December 2023

Recommendations for decision

The Governance and Ethics Committee recommends that Council:

1. Approve the polling district and polling place scheme contained in Appendix 1.
2. Approve the necessary amendments to polling districts for the publication of 2 January 2024 electoral register.
3. Approve the delegation of authority to the Returning Officer and Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities, Leader and Leader of the Opposition to make minor alterations to the polling station scheme prior to the next compulsory statutory review.

Recommendations for noting:

The Governance and Ethics Committee is asked to note:

1. The annual publication of the revised register has been delayed to 2 January 2024 due to a by-election taking place during the annual canvass period.
2. The submissions made to the Council as part of the polling district and station consultation and the Returning Officer response to these are contained in Appendix 2.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 This report presents the proposals polling district and polling place scheme for 2024 until the next statutory review in five years time. It is recommended that the Council approves this scheme.

2.0 Background

2.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. The following definitions may be useful when reading the report:

- Polling districts are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
- Polling places are the buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
- Polling stations are the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.

2.2 Under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

2.3 Wolverhampton commenced its review on 2 October 2023, and carried out preliminary consultation with Councillors during August – September 2023. The public consultation closed on 29 October 2023.

3.0 Summary of final proposal

3.1 The final proposal recommends a total of:

- 127 polling districts (increase of 1 since 2023)
- 17 Schools (increase of 2 since 2023)
- 4 Temporary polling stations (decrease of 2 since 2023)

4.0 Schools as polling stations

4.1 Where schools are required to be used it is because there are no other suitable or available venues in the polling district, details for this can be found in Appendix 1. Legislation also dictates that schools can be used as polling stations, therefore the elections claim unit will not justify spend for a temporary station where there was a suitable school that could have been used.

4.2 All schools that are used as polling stations have been written to advising them of the schedule of elections for the next 5 years so they can plan inset days around these to mitigate the impact of having to close the school for an additional day due to polling day.

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
2023 – Local Election	15
2024 – Local, PCC, CAM and possible Parliamentary	17

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1 Whilst legislation states that Returning Officers can use schools free of charge, they have been paid £275 to cover the costs of heating, lighting and caretaking duties. Non-school venues typically charge much more for hire. With the reduction of the use of schools in recent years, polling station costs have increased. For the 2023 local elections the cost of polling station hire including temporary polling stations was £40,000.
- 5.2 The current annual budget to cover the cost of local elections is £277,000. In the event of combined elections or fallow years underspends against the annual local elections budget can occur and subject to necessary approvals would be requested to transfer balances to the Elections reserve for future standalone election costs which can exceed the annual local elections budget. In these instances, the additional costs would be funded from the Elections Reserve.
- 5.3 The Local Elections in 2022 and 2023 were standalone elections, the costs exceeded the annual budget for these elections. The Elections reserve was utilised to contribute to the costs of the elections. This has fully utilised the current balances of the Elections reserve. [LD/09112023/T]

6.0 Legal implications

- 6.1 The process undertaken and all recommendations arising from this report are in line with the statutory provisions covering the review of polling districts and polling places. Electoral Commission guidance for conducting polling district and polling place reviews has been complied with. The steps to delegate power to designate polling places are in accordance with section 18 and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

[SZ/13112023/P]

7.0 Equalities implications

- 7.1 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'. All polling stations that have been proposed are either accessible for disabled voters or provisions will be made to make them accessible for disabled voters on polling day.
- 7.2 Groups and individuals with expertise in access issues within Wolverhampton were invited to respond to the ARO's representations during the public consultation phase.

8.0 All other Implications

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

9.0 Schedule of background papers

- 9.1 Boundary Commission for England Parliamentary Boundary Review Recommendations, Governance and Ethics Committee, 7 September 2023.

10.0 Appendices

- 10.1 Appendix 1: Polling district and polling place scheme 2024
- 10.2 Appendix 2: Summary of representations received in the polling district and polling place review consultation.