

Bassetlaw District Council

Council

21st September 2023

Report of the Chief Executive

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Cabinet Member: Corporate & Financial Services
Contact: Cara Hopkinson

1. Public Interest Test

The author of this report, Cara Hopkinson, has determined that the report is not confidential.

2. Purpose of the Report

2.1 To propose a full Interim Polling Places Review commencing on 29th September 2023.

2.2 To seek Council's approval for the establishment of an all-party Member Working Group to undertake the review and make final recommendations to Council.

3. Background and Discussion

3.1 To comply with Section 17 of the Electoral Administration Act 2013, the Council is required to conduct a review of all parliamentary polling districts and polling places within every five years, the next compulsory review is to be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

3.2 The last full review was undertaken in 2019, concluding with a report to full Council on 7th November 2019.

3.3 In May 2021 there were significant changes that had to be made to ensure that the elections could be delivered safely and within government guidance in relation to Covid-19. This guidance included not using schools as polling stations. There were also a number of polling stations that were unavailable and a reduction in the number of polling staff due to some feeling uncomfortable working on a polling station during the pandemic. As a result, the 2021 elections gave the Council the opportunity to trial several new buildings which met the requirements as a polling station and also move away from the need to use schools in some locations.

3.4 In addition with the introduction of Voter ID this has led to additional requirements at polling stations such as the space for a private area to check ID in private that need to be considered.

3.5 Some of the changes were retained for the May 2023 elections and it is therefore proposed to conduct a Polling Places review to meet not only the requirements of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 but also to consult members, electors, the Returning Officer and relevant stakeholders on retaining some of the

changes made. The Member Working Party will then formulate recommendations for Council's consideration.

4. Aim of the Review

4.1 In conducting this review, the Council must seek to ensure that:

- All electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
- Polling places are accessible to all electors and all sections of the community; and
- When considering or reviewing the designation of a polling place, have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

5. Definitions

5.1 Polling district: this is the area created by the division of a constituency or ward. Within this area, a polling place must be determined which is convenient to electors registered in that area.

5.2 Polling place: the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.

5.3 Polling station: the room or building where the poll takes place. This is chosen by the Returning Officer for the election and is published on various official notices and communicated to the electorate via a poll card.

6. Timetable for Review

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| 29 th September 2023 | Publication of formal notice of review |
| 29 th September 2023 – 10 th November | Public consultation on the review |
| 24 th November 2023 | Publication of the RO's comments and final proposals |
| 22 nd December 2023 | Deadline for receipt of public comments on the RO's comments and proposals |
| 25 th January 2024 | Meeting of full Council at which the recommendations from the review will be considered. |
| 1 st February 2024 | Changes come into force |

7. Implications

a) For service users

To ensure that polling stations are provided in such a way that facilitate the democratic process and provide reasonable accessible facilities for voting.

b) Strategic & Policy

Effective, transparent and equitable democratic and decision making processes are an essential pre-requisite to the delivery of all the Council's priorities.

c) Financial - Ref: 24/263

All public resources are subject to budgets, and this includes electoral matters, whether they are determined nationally, countywide or locally. For national elections allocations are made for each area, usually on a formulaic basis. If there is any excess to the formula allocation there may be a local cost to this Council as Bassetlaw will have to demonstrate that its costs are proportionate.

Schools may only charge a statutory fee of for use as a polling station. Alternative venues will be subject to negotiated individual charges.

d) Legal – Ref: 095/09/2023

The legal provisions are set out within the report.

e) Human Resources

None.

f) Climate change, Environmental

None.

g) Community Safety, Equality and Diversity

As indicated in the report, the review will need to give consideration to access arrangements for polling places/stations. Local authorities have a duty to 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'.

h) GDPR

All GDPR requirements will be adhered to. Personal data will not be published, only the name of the person making the representation.

i) Whether this is a key decision, and if so the reference number.

Key Decision No. **988**

8. Options, Risks and Reasons for Recommendations

8.1 The Council has no alternative but to undertake the review as set out in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

8.2 The Returning Officer is responsible for the provision of suitable polling stations within designated polling places.

8. Recommendations

That Council approves:

8.1 The commencement of a full Review of Polling Places within the District of Bassetlaw.

- 8.2 The review be undertaken by an all-party Member Working Group on a 3:1:1 basis.
- 8.3 The following Members be appointed to the Member Working Group:
- Councillor Jo White
 - Councillor Neil Sanders
 - Councillor Lynne Schuller
 - Councillor Lewis Stanniland
 - Councillor Joan Sanger
- 8.3 The timetable for the Review as set out in the report be approved.
- 8.4 The Terms of Reference of the Review Working Group as set out in Appendix 'A' be approved.

Background Papers

Location