

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S
REPORT TO COUNCIL**

24 January 2024

Report Title: Polling Districts and Polling Places Review

Submitted by: Chief Executive

Portfolios: One Council - People and Partnerships

Ward(s) affected: All wards

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Council to the polling districts and polling places within the borough, following a review as required by legislation.

Recommendation

That Council approves the amendments to the polling districts and polling places set out in this report

Reasons

Having carried out a Review of Polling District and Polling Places, a decision by the Council on that review is now required to ensure that polling districts and polling places remain beneficial to the electorate.

1. Background

- 1.1** A Review of the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations has been carried out in the Parliamentary Constituencies in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006). 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.
- 1.2** The main purpose of the review is to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting and that all polling stations are accessible to electors who are disabled. However, it should be noted that community

buildings are becoming more difficult to find in some areas compared to previous years.

- 1.3 Existing polling arrangements were assessed and the views of interested groups and individuals were invited. These included electors, political parties, Members of the Council, those organisations who cater for the specific needs of people with different disabilities and the individual Acting Returning Officers for Stoke North, Stone and Staffordshire Moorlands.
- 1.4 In addition, the Boundary Commission for England has recently undertaken a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The Commission have now published its final recommendations, and Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries were made on 1 November 2023. The new boundaries will be used for the next general election. If a parliamentary by election is called in the meantime, it would be run on existing boundaries.
- 1.5 Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission stipulates how reviews should be conducted in four stages. The first stage requires the Council to give public notice of its intention to conduct the review. The second requires the Council to review the existing polling arrangements to determine their suitability, or otherwise. The third stage requires the Council to consult widely. This includes local electors, interested groups and bodies, including political parties, elected Members and organisations experienced in assessing the needs of people with disabilities. The final stage relates to the consideration of proposals for changes to polling district boundaries and polling places by the Council, as these can require alterations to be made to the electoral register.
- 1.6 Any comments, suggestions and requests received were explored and those found to be achievable and in the best interests of the electors affected are outlined in the table below and, in further detail, in Appendix A.
- 1.7 One submission was received during the consultation period, noting two concerns in the ward of Silverdale. The initial concern was that due to demolition of bungalows at St Luke's Close, the polling station – Meeting Hall, The Brighton, which serves an electorate of 569 in the polling district NPB, Silverdale ward would no longer be in use. The second concern noted that polling stations were not spaced out enough across the ward of Silverdale, particularly affecting the east side of the ward after Sacred Heart, ST5 6MG where new housing on Silverdale Road, Ironbridge Drive etc. remains a long way from any polling station and involves voters crossing a busy junction.

2. Issues

- 2.1 The location and accessibility of polling places has a direct effect on electors' ability to exercise their democratic right to vote.

3. Recommendation

3.1 To take all submissions, representations and alternative places suggested into consideration and to amend and update existing polling districts to reflect the changes with future parliamentary boundary constituencies.

3.2 That the Electoral Registration Officer is authorised to take the necessary measures as soon as possible to give effect to parliamentary constituency changes, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new constituencies, until the boundaries are fully in force.

4. **Reasons**

4.1 It is essential to designate polling places that are most beneficial to the electorate

5. **Options Considered**

5.1 Every local authority is required to complete a review, identifying designated polling places for each polling district. Legislation requires that the scheme is kept under review. As required by Section 27 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 this report proposes a full review of the scheme.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 Each local authority is obliged according to section 18C (1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013) to conduct a review of polling districts and polling places within its area. The review must be carried out during the 16-month period commencing 1 October 2013 and every fifth year after that.

6.2 Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 prescribes the statutory steps for an authority conducting a polling district review.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 The Council must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled. Any amendments to the current polling districts, polling places and polling stations will take into account the provisions of the Equalities Act, Representation of People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006), and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1** There are no significant financial implications arising directly from the proposals in this report. Costs associated with the hire of venues for use as polling stations are recovered in full for all elections, except Borough Council elections

9. Major Risks & Mitigation

- 9.1** The Council is obliged to conduct a review of polling districts and polling stations on a regular basis and to undertake such Community Governance Reviews as are required to keep the electoral arrangements within its area up to date.
- 9.2** The Council must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

- 10.1** There is no anticipated environmental impact associated with the recommendations in the report.



11. Key Decision Information

- 11.1** Effects all wards within the borough

12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

N/A

13. List of Appendices

- 13.1** Appendix A – Schedule of Proposals following the Review of Polling Districts and Places 2023/202

14. **Background Papers**

- 14.1 Section 18C (1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983
- 14.2 Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006
- 14.3 Electoral Commission Guidance on Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations/best practice