

Rother District Council

Report to: Licensing and General Purposes Committee

Date: 27 November 2023

Title: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023

Report of: Electoral Services Manager

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To recommend to Council that the scheme of polling districts and polling places detailed in Appendix 2 is adopted and that the Chief Executive's current delegated authority to agree necessary changes of polling place, after consultation with the Chair of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee, relevant District Ward Member(s), County Council Member and parish or town council, should continue.

Officer

Recommendation(s): **Recommendation to COUNCIL:** That:

- 1) the Polling Scheme in Appendix 2 be approved; and
- 2) the Chief Executive's current delegated authority to agree necessary changes of polling place after consultation with the Chair of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee, relevant District Ward Member(s), County Council Member and Parish Council should continue. Should any of the consultees not agree the proposed change, the decision to be brought to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee and full Council for determination.

Introduction

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.
2. The following definitions may be helpful when reading the report and Appendices.
 - "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.
3. 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.

4. Under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review was required be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
5. In addition, the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) has recently undertaken a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The Commission has now published its final recommendations, and Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries are due to be made before the end of November 2023. The new boundaries will be used for the next general election, which must take place by 28 January 2025.
6. In accordance with the above, the Council began its current review on 2 October 2023. This included a six-week public consultation period which concluded on 13 November. The full timetable and review process are detailed below. Resulting changes to electoral arrangements will be included in the revised register of electors, which is due to be published on 1 February 2024.
7. The review considers the arrangements for polling districts and polling places at UK Parliamentary elections and thus covers the arrangements in place for the parts of Bexhill and Battle and the Hastings and Rye constituencies that fall within Rother. These arrangements remain in place for other elections.
8. It is important to note that the review does not cover parliamentary, local government or parish boundaries, or the naming of these electoral areas, which are subject to separate review processes conducted by the BCE or Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), as appropriate.
9. Rother currently has 72 polling districts, each of which are aligned with parish or parish ward boundaries.

The Review Process

10. The statutory criteria for a review of polling districts and polling places is attached to this report as Appendix 1. In particular, as part of the review process the Council must:
 - seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
 - seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to those who are disabled; and
 - when considering or reviewing the designation of a polling place, have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
11. The Council was required to publish notice of the holding of a review and a consultation document. Information about the review was made available on the Council's website and could also be obtained in person at the Town Hall in Bexhill-on-Sea.
12. The Council was required to consult the (Acting) Returning Officer (ARO) for every Parliamentary constituency that is wholly or partly within its area.
13. The consultation document was also sent to the local Members of Parliament, District Councillors, County Councillors, Parish and Town Councils, local

political parties and other stakeholders, including local disability groups, to seek comments on the current polling arrangements and draft proposals. Additionally, members of the public were invited to comment.

14. In addition to responses received as part of the consultation, feedback from polling station staff and Polling Station Inspectors has also been considered. In particular, all Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors are given a survey to complete at each election, to provide feedback on the polling station venue. This feedback is reviewed post-election and informs the recommendations made during the review.
15. The timetable for the review is set out below:

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| Letter and questionnaire sent to current polling station venues | Monday 21 August 2023 |
| Publication of notice of review | Monday 2 October 2023 |
| Beginning of public consultation | Monday 2 October 2023 |
| Publication of initial proposed polling scheme | Monday 2 October 2023 |
| End of public consultation | Monday 13 November 2023 |
| Publication of final proposed polling scheme | Wednesday 22 November 2023 |
| Report to Licensing & General Purposes Committee | Monday 27 November 2023 |
| Recommendation to Full Council for approval | Monday 18 December 2023 |
| Publication of all correspondence connected with review | Monday 8 January 2024 |
| Publication of a revised register of electors | Thursday 1 February 2024 |

Outcome of the Consultation Process and Summary of Recommendations

16. A total of 23 responses to the consultation were received. These are included in Appendix 2.
17. Comments were received regarding the location of polling stations in relation to voters in BHKE2 (Bexhill Kewhurst) and BHPE1, BHPE2 and PHPE3 (Bexhill Pebsham & St Michaels). In both cases it was queried why voters have to travel to a polling station that is further away than an alternative polling station which is closer to them. However, both of these issues relate to local government boundaries which have been set by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), and therefore are outside of the remit of this review. It is suggested that these issues are instead considered when the LGBCE conduct their next boundary review.
18. The ARO's comments and proposals regarding polling places and polling stations are included in the consultation document for this review and are detailed in the attached Appendix 2. There are **six** changes to the existing polling places and polling stations that the Committee is asked to recommend:

- i. **BHKE2 (Bexhill Kewhurst), BHSS1 & BHSS2 (both Bexhill St Stephens)** – The current polling place for these three polling districts, Bexhill Leisure Centre, is not considered ideal as it is located outside BHKE2 and BHSS1 and at the border of BHSS2. The previous polling place for all three polling districts, St Stephen’s Church Hall, is no longer available for use and we have been unable to identify any other suitable alternatives within the polling district. It is therefore proposed that the whole polling district is designated as the polling place to allow for an alternative venue to be used, if one becomes available.
- ii. **BHSA1 & BHSA2 (both Bexhill Sackville)** – The current polling place is Manor Barn. However, we have received several comments from members of the public (both before and as part of the review) that the previous polling place, St Mary Magdalene’s Church Hall, was preferable due to its location. Unfortunately, it is currently unavailable due to repair works, with no estimated re-opening date. St Barnabas Church in Sea Road has been identified as a suitable alternative, and it has been agreed to use the venue at an upcoming parish by-election. It is proposed that the whole polling district is designated as the polling place, to allow for the use of St Barnabas Church again, if it is deemed to be satisfactory, or alternatively for St Mary Magdalene’s Church Hall to be used again if it becomes available again in the future.
- iii. **BHSI1 (Bexhill Sidley)** – The previous polling place, All Saints Community Hall, is no longer available. Sidley Freedom Church was used as a polling place at the most recent elections, however it is not in the polling district. We have investigated alternative venues but have not been able to identify a suitable alternative in the polling district that is available. It is therefore proposed that the whole polling district is designated as the polling place, to allow for an alternative venue to be used if one becomes available.
- iv. **RYF (Rye Foreign)** - The current polling place, Playden Women’s Institute Hall, is not in the polling district. However, we are not aware of any suitable alternatives within the polling district. Hub on Rye Hill has been suggested by a member of the public as part of the review and is currently under consideration as a possible polling station venue. It is proposed that the whole polling district is designated the polling place to allow for Hub on Rye Hill to be used if it is deemed to be suitable.
- v. **TCFL (Flimwell)** - The previous polling place was Flimwell Playing Field Pavilion. However, the whole polling district was designated as the polling place at the last polling review in 2019, as the new Flimwell Village Hall was under construction and nearing completion. The venue is now available for hire and is considered suitable for use. It is therefore proposed that Flimwell Village Hall is designated the polling place.
- vi. **WFWL (Westfield)** - The current polling place, Westfield Church Hall, is not in the polling district. However, we are not aware of any suitable alternatives within the polling district. It is proposed that the whole polling district is designated as the polling place to allow for an alternative venue to be used if one becomes available.

Implications

Financial Implications

19. There are no financial implications for the proposals within this report.

Legal Implications

20. There are no legal implications for the proposals within this report. This review has been undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Human Resources Implications

21. There are no Human Resource implications for the proposals within this report.

Environmental

22. The locations of Polling Places are determined by the ward boundaries and whilst every effort is made to ensure that Polling Places are easily accessible and walkable to many electors, this is not always possible, particularly where residents live on the ward boundary.

Equalities and Diversity

23. The statutory criteria states that 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.

Risk Management

24. It is a statutory duty of the Council to review and approve Polling Districts and Polling Places arrangements at least every five years. The changes proposed in this review are minor and can only benefit voters. There are therefore no risks associated with this report.

Conclusion

25. The Committee is asked to recommend to Council that it adopts the scheme of polling districts and polling places detailed in Appendix 2.
26. Additionally, the Committee is asked to recommend to Council that the Chief Executive's current delegated authority to agree necessary changes of polling place after consultation with the Chair of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee, relevant District Ward Member(s), County Council Member and Parish or Town Council should continue. Should any of the consultees not agree the proposed change, the decision to be brought to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee and full Council for determination.

| Other Implications | Applies? | Other Implications | Applies? |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Human Rights | No | Equalities and Diversity | Yes |
| Crime and Disorder | No | External Consultation | Yes |
| Environmental | Yes | Access to Information | No |

| Risk Management | Yes | Exempt from publication | No |
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| Chief Executive: | Lorna Ford | | |
| Report Contact Officer: | Richard Adams | | |
| e-mail address: | Richard.adams@rother.gov.uk | | |
| Appendices: | 1 Statutory Criteria 2 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023 | | |
| Relevant Previous Minutes: | N/A | | |
| Background Papers: | None | | |
| Reference Documents: | None | | |