

Committee:	Governance, Audit and Performance Committee	Date:	Monday, 13 January 2020
Title:	Polling District and Polling Places Review 2019 – Saffron Walden Parliamentary Constituency		
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Summary

1. The Electoral Registration and Administrations Act 2013 places a statutory responsibility on Councils, via the Returning Officer, to carry out a UK Parliamentary polling district and polling places review every 5 years. The next compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020.
2. In parallel with this review, the Chelmsford City Council's Returning Officer has conducted a similar review exercise of polling district and places; this includes for the electoral area within the City Council's administrative boundary that lies in the Saffron Walden Parliamentary Constituency.

Recommendations

3. That approval be given to the Returning Officer's recommendations for a revised Scheme of Polling District and Polling Places for the Saffron Walden Parliamentary Constituency with effect from 31 January 2020, as set out in Appendix 1.

Financial Implications

4. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any recommendations for change have been based on what is considered to offer voters the best experience; it may be that venue hire costs vary marginally to those venues currently used but in all cases, other than for district council elections, the costs can be recovered.

Background Papers

5. All papers referred to by the author in the preparation of this report are already published and are widely available, including the Electoral Commission's guidance.

Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	Full public consultation has been carried out as part of the statutory review process
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	There is a requirement to take account of the need for full accessibility in the buildings selected for polling and organisations that represent individuals with a wide range of needs have been consulted.
Health and Safety	The consideration of health and safety issues is included in the review process.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	Rules set out in legislation must be followed in designating polling arrangements.
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	N/A
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

Situation

7. By law the Council is required to review UK Parliamentary polling districts and places every five years. The last full review exercise was carried out in 2014. The Council can review only those parts of the Saffron Walden Constituency included within the Uttlesford district and the same polling arrangements are then used for all other elections such as for county, district, parish and all referendums.
8. A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a Parliamentary constituency. In England, each parish must be a separate polling district but where the parish includes more than one ward (or parish ward) the polling district must not cross the ward boundary. For reasons of practicality, it is sensible to ensure that a single polling district does not include more than 3,000 electors.
9. A polling place is the building or area within each polling district in which polling stations will be located by the Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district (small enough to be readily identified), must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.
10. The duty to designate polling places means taking into account the convenience of electors living in the area and to ensure compliance, as far as is practicable, with the accessibility needs of disabled electors.

11. As delegated by full council, this committee has been authorised to consider these recommendations and approve any amendments.
12. At its meeting of 17 May 2018, the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee approved interim changes to the scheme of polling districts and places in the Uttlesford District, to be applied from 29 May 2018. This scheme was utilised for the local district and parish elections and also European Parliamentary elections that were held in May 2019.
13. However at the meeting, the Committee was advised that the Returning Officer would be undertaking a full parliamentary constituency review exercise as soon as practical to meet the legal requirements. Given that preparations were underway between January and May 2109 for the local elections, which was then followed by the European Parliamentary election, the first opportunity to undertake the review was from August 2019, with the aim of completing this in time for the new register, which would normally have taken effect on 1 December 2019.
14. The calling of the Parliamentary General Election has further impacted on the timetable to approve a new scheme but the consultation stages had been completed prior to rescheduling the consideration of the report by the Governance audit and Performance Committee .
15. Bearing in mind that the Council has over the last 2 years undertaken interim reviews of polling district and polling places to resolve practical issues, in specific locations, the review exercise has been light touch, aimed at highlighting key areas. This is also appropriate, given the limitations on options for changes especially in venues that can be made available across the Council's large geographical area, which is predominantly rural.
16. The Returning Officer was keen, as part of this review, to consider reasonable alternatives to the use of schools as polling places where possible. With the rise in frequency of unscheduled elections/referendums, it can be very difficult for the staff to manage the impact on the education of children, particularly when the school has to close as the only effective measure to manage the safeguarding risks. In addition, considerable inconvenience can be caused to parents and carers.
17. As a consequence of a number of unscheduled elections, alternative arrangements to schools and other polling places have had to be made due to unavailability and this has provided the opportunity to assess the suitability of other venues, not previously used.
18. Public consultation with stakeholders, parish councils, community groups, political parties, charities and other interested bodies took place between 16 August and 7 October. During this period a number of comments and observations were received via the Council's website.

19. All the representations received have been examined and a final set of proposals for designated polling stations has been prepared as the Returning Officer's draft recommendations.
20. Public notice of these draft recommendations has been placed on the Council's website and further comments have been sought. The deadline for any comments on the Returning Officer's draft recommendations was 31 October 2019 and to date only one set of comments have been received.
21. The proposed revised scheme for polling districts for Saffron Walden Parliamentary Constituency, together with full details of the consultation responses, is set out at Appendix 1.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
There is a risk that existing polling arrangements will not meet the needs and expectations of the public	2 – It is necessary to review polling arrangements in some areas as specified in the report to prevent them proving inadequate at future elections	3 – If changes are not put in place there is a danger of confusion leading to reduced turnout at future elections	Carry out a review of those areas where concerns are known to exist so that all interested parties including the general public have an opportunity to suggest suitable polling arrangements

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.