

**Committee:** Audit and Standards Committee  
**Title:** Polling District and Polling Places Review –  
Uttlesford District and 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 (Acting) Returning Officer (ARO), to carry out a UK Parliamentary polling district and polling places review every 5 years. At the same time, the Returning Officer will review his polling scheme across the whole of the Uttlesford district. The next compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (16-month legal timeframe).
2. The current scheme as approved by the then Governance and Audit Committee on 13 January 2020 with delegated authority on behalf of the Council approved changes to the scheme of polling districts and places in the Uttlesford District.
3. The first opportunity to undertake the review is from the 1 October 2023, with the aim of completing this in time for the publishing a revised scheme in December 2023 ahead of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024.
4. Bearing in mind that the Council has over the last 5 years undertaken mini reviews of polling places/stations to resolve practical issues such as due to the unavailability of polling stations for various reasons ahead of scheduled elections, any review exercise will be light touch, aimed at highlighting key areas. This is also appropriate given the limitations on options for changes especially venues that can be made across the Council's geographical area.
5. In parallel with this review, the Chelmsford City Council's (Acting) Returning Officer will conduct a similar review exercise of polling district and places for those electoral area that lie in the Saffron Walden Parliamentary Constituency. Liaison and consultation will take place with the (Acting) Returning Officer for Chelmsford City Council. The Chelmsford City Council Returning Officer has already indicated they are not looking at changes for the 17 polling places that would come under this Council's ARO responsibility at a Parliamentary General Election. These are shown at the end of our polling scheme in Appendix 1.
6. Under the Parliamentary Boundary Review, the Saffron Walden Constituency is to be renamed the North West Essex Parliamentary Constituency and four wards will come under different Parliamentary Constituencies – as shown in

Appendix 1. However, for the purposes of this review all polling districts will be reviewed, and liaison/consultation will take place with the two councils respectively, Braintree and Harlow.

7. Public consultation with stakeholders, parish councils, community groups, political parties, charities and other bodies including any interested individuals will take place during the 6-week consultation period from 2 October.
8. All representations received will be considered and a final set of proposals for a revised polling scheme will be presented to the 28 November meeting of this committee.
9. Public notice of these responses will be placed on the Council's website, shortly after the consultation deadline of 13 November 2023.

### **Recommendations**

10. That approval be given to the (Acting) Returning Officer to conduct a review in accordance with the timetable for a revised Scheme of Polling district and Polling places for the North West Essex Parliamentary Constituency within Uttlesford district with effect from December 2024.

### **Financial Implications**

11. The review will be carried out by the Electoral Services team within existing budgets.

### **Background Papers**

12. All papers referred to by the author in the preparation of this report are already published and are widely available.

### **Impact**

- 13.

Communication/Consultation	Full public consultation will be 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
Health and Safety	The consideration of 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	Selected wards but potentially all of them
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

## Situation

14. 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 2018/19. 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 – county, district, parish and all referendums.
15. 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. In accordance with the Electoral Commission guidelines, no one polling station should have more than 2,250 electors allocated to it.
16. 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. If necessary, electors can be sent to an adjoining polling district to vote from a different polling place.
17. Designation of the polling station, i.e., the room within the polling place that polling takes place is the responsibility of the (Acting) Returning Officer.
18. The duty to designate polling places means considering the convenience of electors living in the area and to ensure compliance, as far as is practicable, with the accessibility needs of disabled electors.
19. The current scheme is attached to this report for comment - Appendix 1.

## Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
2 – there is a risk that existing polling arrangements will not meet the needs and expectations of the public if they are not reviewed before the next statutory review is due to take place	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 the existing scheme is not reviewed and any necessary changes put in place there is a danger of confusion leading to reduced turnout at future elections	Carry out an interim 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.