

## AGENDA ITEM NO 10

### **POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS REVIEW 2023**

Committee: Council

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Author: Chief Executive/Electoral Services Team Leader

Report No: Y147

Contact Officer: Adrian Scaites-Stokes

Electoral Services Team Leader

Tel: (01353) 616460

E-mail: [adrian.scaites-stokes@eastcambs.gov.uk](mailto:adrian.scaites-stokes@eastcambs.gov.uk)

Room 211, The Grange, Ely

#### **1.0 ISSUE**

- 1.1 To conduct a Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations Review.

#### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Members are requested to:

- (i) Approve the current arrangements for use of polling district/places/stations for future elections/referendums/polls, except the previous HI3 polling district and the Ely North Ward.
- (ii) Agree to amalgamate the previous HI3 polling district with the HI1 polling district.
- (iii) Designate the whole of the Ely North Ward as a polling place, to provide flexibility for the Returning Officer to use any suitable building or area as deemed appropriate for relevant elections/referendums/polls.
- (iv) Approve the Returning Officer's use of suitable alternative polling stations should the need arise.

#### **3.0 BACKGROUND/OPTIONS**

- 3.1 The Council must conduct a Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations Review every five years, in accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 Act.
- 3.2 The 2023 Review commenced on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2023, and concluded on 31<sup>st</sup> October, with a consultation document which set out the Returning Officer's proposals for polling districts, places and stations that would be used for future Parliament, local and other elections or referendums. The consultation

document was subsequently revised, due to a minor error relating to the misidentification of a polling station in the Soham South ward. All consultees were consequently notified of this correction. The revised consultation document is shown as Appendix 1.

- 3.3 The Review consisted of a consultation period to obtain views of the proposals from relevant organisations and people. The list of those consulted is shown in Appendix 2 and any representations received are shown in Appendix 3.
- 3.4 The Review considered the suitability and availability of all the polling places and stations currently used, with particular regard to access for disabled voters in line with the requirements of the Elections Act 2022.
- 3.5 In assessing the future suitability of those polling places/stations, analysis of electorate figures, both current and estimated, was used. The Five Year Land Supply Report, published 12 August 2012 (covering from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2027), was used to identify potential housing growth in the district and how that could affect electorate figures. In addition, some consideration was taken into account of the numbers of European electors that would be removed from the electoral registers, in line with the Elections Act 2022 requirements, and an estimation of the numbers of potential postal voters in the future. The latter numbers were based on the current percentage of postal voters (c.15%) and this percentage was applied to the estimated electorate figures. This process helped identify the estimated maximum number of electors who could use polling stations to vote.
- 3.6 In reviewing the polling places, there was a particular issue with the Ely North Ward. Previously a polling station in the Princess of Wales Hospital had been used, but in 2023 this became permanently unavailable. No other suitable building was identified for use during the May 2023 elections, resulting in portacabins being used.
- 3.7 Further research into the Ely North Ward revealed that no suitable place was currently available, though there was potential for a, yet to be built, community building to be used in the future.
- 3.8 In response to the City of Ely Council's comments, a review of the polling district boundaries in the Ely North Ward would be considered at a later date. Currently there is construction of dwellings taking place in that ward and until that is completed and the number of electors known, it is too early to get a clear picture to be able to make a decision at this stage. An assessment of final elector numbers would enable a view of what additional electors the small polling station in Chettisham could be able to cope with and whether any polling district boundary changes would need to be made.
- 3.9 Reviewing the polling districts, it was noticed that polling district HI3 only contained 6 dwellings. That area had originally been within the North East Cambridgeshire constituency but had been moved during a review in 2019. The

electors voted in the same polling station as electors living in the HI1 polling district during the May 2023 elections.

- 3.10 The assessment and analysis of the remaining polling places/stations shows that the current arrangements would be sufficient to provide access to all voters, meet the requirements associated with the voter identity procedures, i.e. private rooms or privacy screens, and could accommodate the estimated increase in voter numbers. See Appendix 1 for the current and potential electorate figures, shown per district ward.
- 3.11 The assessment also considered their suitability to accommodate disabled voters in particular. All the polling stations had sufficient facilities to do. The only exception was in the Ely North Ward, where portacabins were used during the May elections. They did provide adequate access for voting, and no disabled voter was unable to vote, but better provision needs to be sought.
- 3.12 The Review also considered the continued use, suitability and availability of all its current polling stations. All stated that they would be available into the future. However, should any polling station become unavailable for any reason then the Returning Officer should have the flexibility to seek and use alternatives should the need arise. These alternative polling stations would usually be within the relevant polling district. However, under exceptional circumstances, it is permitted for them to be outside that polling district.
- 3.13 There are a number of polling districts where electorate figures need to be monitored: Ely North HF2, Littleport IE1, Littleport IF1, Soham LF1. It is estimated that the number of voters voting in the associated polling stations could exceed the maximum number, as advised by the Electoral Commission (2000 per polling station), at some time in the future. However, the figures for voters actually voting in a polling station suggest that this would not be an immediate issue, as many voters are turning to voting by post instead, thereby reducing the numbers visiting polling stations. The Council has the option to conduct a separate polling district review on any of these polling places at any time, should the electorate figures approach the maximum suggested.
- 3.14 The Electoral Commission, while not having a direct responsibility for the Review, can intervene where it considers that the reasonable requirements of electors or the needs of disabled electors have not been taken into account.
- 3.15 After the Review has concluded, the following can appeal to the Commission if they are dissatisfied with the Review's outcome:
  - Any parish council which falls within the constituency;
  - Not less than thirty registered electors in the constituency;
  - Any person who has made representations during the review;
  - Any person who is not an elector in the constituency but who has sufficient interest or expertise in access to premises or facilities for disabled persons.

- 3.16 The Commission could direct the Council to alter any polling arrangements that arise from the Review, and the Commission could make these alterations itself if the Council failed to respond within two months.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 4.1 The vast majority of existing polling districts do not need altering. However, it is recommended that polling district HI3 be amalgamated with HI1, due to its small number of electors who already use the same polling place as those from HI1.
- 4.2 All the polling places are deemed suitable, except for the Ely North Ward due to its lack of any suitably identified/available building. Therefore it is recommended to designate the whole of Ely North Ward as the polling place, to provide the Returning Officer with the flexibility to use any suitable building or area within that Ward that becomes available in the future.
- 4.3 Should anything happen to any polling station to make it unavailable for a poll, the Returning Officer should be granted permission to designate an alternative polling station within, or if necessary outside, the relevant polling district. Therefore, it is recommended that the current arrangement for using polling places/stations continue to be used, with the proviso that the Returning Officer use suitable alternatives should the need arise.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT/ CARBON IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 There are no additional cost implications.
- 5.2 Equality Impact Assessment (INRA) not required, as this report does not refer to a change in Council policy. The minor changes to the polling districts will have no negative impact on any or all electors.
- 5.3 Carbon Impact Assessment (INRA) completed, see Appendix 3. Neutral impacts of these proposals expected.

#### **6.0 APPENDICES**

- 6.1 Appendix 1 - Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations document  
6.2 Appendix 2 – Consultation responses  
6.3 Appendix 3 – Carbon Impact Assessment

#### Background Documents

Relevant Electoral Services files,  
Electoral Commission guidance on Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and  
Polling Stations  
Five Year Land Supply Report