
REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

To: **Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party – 9 January 2014**

By: **Glenn Back, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager
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Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **All wards**

Summary: To brief Members on the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places which has to be undertaken and completed by 31 January 2015.

For information

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places.
- 1.2 A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election. A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer.
- 1.3 The next compulsory review must now be started and must be completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 (inclusive).
- 1.4 Subsequent compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.
- 1.5 A 'review' is all the steps set out in Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983). The review process, from the publication of the notice of the review until the publication of the documents at the end, must take place within the specified period.
- 1.6 The length of the review process is not prescribed, provided all the steps required by the legislation can be undertaken within it. However, the time allowed for consultation should be sufficient to enable interested persons and groups to read and understand the proposals, gather comments and respond with any alternative arrangements that they may wish to submit. The local authority may wish to have regard to any council guidelines on public consultation when carrying out the review.

2.0 Timing of review

- 2.1 The most important thing to note is that by 31 January 2015, every Council must have undertaken and completed a new review of all of the polling districts and polling places in its area.
- 2.2 Local authorities need to decide when to carry out the review within the specified 16-month-period. In practice, Returning Officers will often be asked to decide when the review should take place. In reaching their decision on timing, Returning Officers will

need to consider what other statutory duties and processes they and their staff will be carrying out in that time and how the review will fit with these.

2.3 Thanet District Council's Returning Officer has decided to commence the review from beginning of July to end of November 2014.

2.4 There are a number of reasons as to why the review will start in July and these are summarised below:

2.4.1 Publication of the register

Completing the review in time for publication of the revised register means that any changes can be reflected in it, and that no subsequent alterations to the structure of an already published register will need to be made, thus avoiding the potential need to publish a further revised register. Therefore, the RO has agreed to an earlier start so it finishes before publication of the revised register in December 2014.

2.4.2 Scheduled polls

During the review period, there will be European Parliamentary elections across the UK and local government elections in parts of England (as well as an independence referendum in Scotland). Therefore, the RO has agreed to start the review after the elections so that it does not interfere with the referendum process and its preparations,

2.4.3 The start of the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

Starting the review process immediately after the May 2014 polls would mean that there would be some overlap between the work that EROs will need to undertake on the transition to IER (including "go-live on 10 June 2014 and the confirmation live run process expected on 1 July 2014 and the subsequent write-out). Again, the impact is likely to be different in England and Wales, where the ERO is also the Returning Officer.

Across the whole of Great Britain, an Electoral Commission publicity campaign on IER will be undertaken in the early stages of the compulsory review period. In England and Wales, messages will be communicated to the public from summer 2014. In England and Wales, where the Returning Officer is also the ERO, there would be two types of public engagement activities they would need to manage if the review was carried out in this period – one relating to IER, the other to the review.

2.4.4 Scheduling approval of the proposals

It is important to factor into the timetable the most likely scheduled date of the council/committee meeting where the detailed review proposals would be formally considered and approved.

3.0 **The Review**

3.1 To assist Members in understanding the review process, background information has been prepared and appended at **Annex 1**.

3.2 This Working Party is to consider all appropriate representations. At the end of the review process, the Working Party will make its recommendations to a meeting of the full Council for ratification.

4.0 **Notice of review and consultation arrangements**

4.1 The Council must give public notice of the review and consult the Returning Officer and any such persons it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or

facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must be given the opportunity to make representations and to comment on representations made to the Council by the Returning Officer. The Council must consider the Returning Officer's representations within 30 days.

4.2 The Council will give public notice of the review in a local newspaper and on the Council's website on 1 July 2014. In addition, the following parties will be invited to submit representations including suggestions for the identification of polling districts and alternative polling places and polling stations:

- All district councillors;
- Town and Parish Councils;
- Kent County Council
- Local political party groups; and
- Local organisations with expertise in matters concerning access to premises.

4.3 Following this initial consultation period, the Returning Officer will make representations to the Council which must include information as to the location of both existing and proposed polling places and polling stations. Interested parties will be able to make comments on the Returning Officer's representations.

4.4 All representations will be considered by the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party who will make recommendations to the Council which shall then adopt the new scheme.

5.0 Timetable for Review

5.1 The review has to be completed prior to the publication of the revised register of electors (i.e. 1 December 2014). The last scheduled Council meeting prior to 1 December would be 2 October 2014. This does not allow enough time for a thorough review to take place.

5.2 Therefore, it is proposed that an extraordinary meeting of full Council be held during November 2014 to enable the review to be ratified by Council before publication of the revised register of electors.

5.3 The proposed timetable for the review is as follows:

Publish Notice of Review	1 July 2014
Initial consultation period	1 July to 1 August 2014
Returning Officer publishes his representations	2 August 2014
Consultation on Returning Officer's representations	2 August to 1 September 2014
Electoral Matters Working Party considers all representations and makes recommendations	Dates to be confirmed – meeting(s) to be held between 2 September and 30 September
Council adopts scheme	Date to be confirmed – extraordinary meeting needs to be arranged in mid November
Revised Register of Electors published	1 December 2014

6.0 Corporate Implications

6.1 Financial and VAT

6.1.1 There are no immediate financial implications. However, if additional polling districts were designated it would result in the provision of additional polling stations at elections with associated costs.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 It is a legal requirement to undertake the review in the timetable indicated. Failure to carry out the review could result in representations being made to the Electoral Commission because the Council failed to carry out the review, which could result in the Electoral Commission directing the Council to amend its current polling districts and polling places.

6.3 Corporate

6.3.1 Through the polling district and polling places review Thanet people will have been consulted.

6.4 Equity and Equalities

6.4.1 There are no specific equity and equality considerations that need to be addressed in this report. However, the subject of equalities will be considered when carrying out the review as individual polling stations need to meet accessibility needs.

7.0 Recommendation

7.1 That the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party

- (a) agrees the proposed timetable for the review of polling districts and places
- (b) considers all representations received during the polling districts and polling places review
- (c) makes recommendations thereon to an extraordinary meeting of Council held in November 2014.

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Annex List

Annex 1	Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations – Electoral Commission
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Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations – Electoral Commission	Attached to this report

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	<i>Sarah Beeching, Finance Officer</i>
Legal	<i>Steve Boyle, Interim Legal Services Manager</i>