

**TO: EXECUTIVE  
21 OCTOBER 2014**

**POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2014  
Director of Corporate Services – Democratic & Registration Services**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report sets out the Electoral Steering Group’s proposals for changes to Bracknell Forest’s polling districts and locations as part of a review carried out as required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. Any changes will take effect from the publication of the revised register on 1 December 2014. If an election were to be called prior to publication the existing polling districts and places would be used.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That the Electoral Review Steering Group proposals are agreed for recommendation to Council:

- (i) That no changes are made to the following polling districts and polling places which meet the statutory criteria and provide reasonable and accessible facilities:

<b>BA</b>	<b>BD</b>	<b>BE</b>	<b>BF</b>	<b>BG</b>	<b>BH</b>	<b>BJ</b>	<b>BK</b>	<b>BM</b>	<b>BN</b>
<b>BP</b>	<b>BQ</b>	<b>BT</b>	<b>BW</b>	<b>CS</b>	<b>SJ</b>	<b>SO</b>	<b>SP</b>	<b>SQ</b>	<b>WG</b>
<b>WM</b>	<b>WN</b>	<b>WP</b>	<b>WQ</b>	<b>WS</b>	<b>WV</b>	<b>WW</b>	<b>WX</b>	<b>WY</b>	<b>WZ</b>

- (ii) That no changes are made to polling district CN (Crowthorne) noting that the TRL site is a long term development area and therefore will be kept under review as development progresses
- (iii) That a new polling district BC is created to cover those properties in the Wykery Copse development, Peacock Lane and Waterloo Road which are currently located in BB and that the Jennett’s Park Community Centre, Tawny Owl Square, is designated as the polling place for the new BC polling district (see Map1). Electors in the revised BB polling district will continue to vote at Farley Wood Community Centre.
- (iv) That a new polling district BLP is created for The Parks and surrounding roads and that the Parks Community Centre is designated as the polling place for the new BLP polling district (see Map 2). Electors in the revised BL polling district will continue to vote at St Paul’s Church.

**3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

3.1 The proposals seek to update the current scheme to enable Bracknell Forest to implement fully the guidance of the Electoral Commission. In particular the proposals seek to meet the recommended number of electors allocated to polling stations across the Borough.

- 3.2 All proposals are made to ensure that there is a balance of the electorate within each polling district; that polling places are convenient and easily accessible for voters; and that future demand arising from new building and development has been taken into account.

#### **4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 The Electoral Review Steering Group received and considered the views of the Returning Officer, set out in Annex A and the representations received in response to the consultation, set out in Annex B.

#### **5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

##### **Background**

- 5.1 The Boundary Commission, in conducting the Periodic Electoral Review [PER] in 2002/3, undertook a full review of electoral arrangements in the Borough and as a result a number of Borough and Parish wards were re-drawn and the number of Borough councillors increased to 42. A full review of polling districts and polling places followed in order to ensure that convenient and accessible voting facilities were provided for the electorate, particularly in these changed areas. A further review was undertaken in November 2011.
- 5.2 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced changes to the timing of the compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The requirement now provides that a local authority must carry out and complete a review of polling districts and polling places within 16 months of 1 October 2013 and every five years thereafter. The revised register must be published by 1 December 2014. Completing the polling district 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, which avoids the potential need to publish a further revised register. If the review is not completed in time for changes to be made to the December register, the change would have to be by publication of an additional revised register before the implementation date of 31 January 2015.
- 5.3 Although polling districts and polling places for local government elections are not automatically part of the review the Electoral Commission recommend that a review of local government polling arrangements is conducted simultaneously.

##### **Polling districts**

- 5.4 A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area i.e. a Borough ward, a Parish/Town Council or a Parish/Town Council ward. It is the smallest unit of electoral area. Polling districts cannot include more than one of either a Parish/Town ward, a Parish/Town Council or a Borough ward, whichever is the smaller. Each Parish ward, or if the Parish is un-warded the whole Parish, must be a polling district. **The designation of polling districts is a Council function.**

##### **Polling places**

- 5.5 A polling place is a geographical area or building in which a polling station is located. There cannot be more than one polling place for each polling district, however, as there is no legal definition of what a polling place is, it can be as large as the polling district or as small as a particular building. Currently all polling places are listed as

the polling district. This has the advantage of giving the flexibility of being able to change the location of a polling station without the time associated with re-designing a specific location. A building is also identified as the preferred polling place in order to satisfy the Electoral Commission's guidance that a building should be designated. **The designation of polling places is a Council function.**

### **Polling station**

- 5.6 A polling station is the actual room or building within which voting takes place. The polling station should be located within the polling district unless there are no suitable facilities available. **The selection of a polling station for a particular polling district from within a polling place is the responsibility of the Returning Officer.**

### **Current review**

- 5.7 The review is not one of electoral areas, only the polling districts and the polling places. The following cannot be considered as part of the review:
- The boundary of the Bracknell parliamentary or neighbouring parliamentary constituency or local authority boundaries
  - The names of local authorities or electoral areas within or bordering Bracknell Forest
- 5.8 Changes can be made to a polling district including the merging of polling districts and the creation of new ones (subject to 5.4 above). This would require the Returning Officer to provide a polling station in the changed or new polling district.
- 5.9 Whilst there is no requirement to change any existing arrangements, reasons must be given for any change or decision to make no change. All decisions must be consulted upon, be measured and practical. The whole process should be as transparent and open as possible to avoid potential conflict.
- 5.10 Wokingham Borough Council reviewed their polling districts and polling places from October 2013 to end of March 2014. In the case of those polling districts and polling places which fall within the Bracknell Constituency no changes were made to the existing arrangements.
- 5.11 In deciding whether to change the current arrangements or maintain the status quo, the Council will be required to demonstrate that:
- the reasonable requirements of electors have been met
  - accessibility to the proposed polling stations for electors with a disability has been considered
- 5.12 The review was conducted by the Electoral Review Steering Group, comprising Councillors Birch (Chairman), Mrs Temperton, Turrell (Vice-Chairman) and Ward. The Steering Group minutes are attached as Annex C. In conducting the review the Steering Group considered the current arrangements and any particular areas where further investigations were required. The following principles were observed:
- Changes should be kept to a minimum and alterations sought only where necessary

## Unrestricted

- No polling station should have more than 2500 electors (excluding postal voters) assigned to it
- Polling stations should not have fewer than 1,000 electors registered to vote at them as this delivers poor value for money
- Polling districts need to contain suitable premises to be used as a polling place at an election time

### 5.13 Other factors taken into account included:

- accessibility for electors who are disabled
- physical barriers that divide a ward such as railway lines, large open spaces and main roads which can act as a barrier to voters
- the disposal or changes to buildings used as polling places which may mean that they cease to be available as polling stations and alternatives must be identified
- the disruption to other users of proposed venues
- ensuring where possible, continuity for voters in where they go to vote
- transportation links to polling places
- turnout at previous elections

### **Timescale for the review**

### 5.20 The polling district review should be completed in time for publication of the new register on 1 December 2014. The key milestones are set out below:

1 April	- Notice of the review published
14 April	- All councillors, local MPs, local political parties, agents at recent elections and disabled groups advised of the proposals and invited to comment.
16 May	- Deadline for receipt of comments on the proposals
June/July	Adjustments made to the proposal to reflect responses to the consultation or to explain why it is not recommended that they are accepted
29 July	- Electoral Review Steering Group considered the Returning Officer's proposals
21 October	- Executive considers Steering Group recommendations
26 November	- Council approves the recommendations
27 November	- Publication of final agreed scheme (including full explanation of all decisions made including the reasons adopting or not; amendments received during the consultation process).

## Unrestricted

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|---------------------------------|--|
| 27 November<br>to<br>1 December | Incorporation of changes into the register.                                    |
| 1 December                      | Publication of new register incorporating the new polling district boundaries. |

### **6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

#### Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Nothing to add to the report.

#### Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The creation of two polling districts/polling places will attract costs in the region of £3000 which will be met from the elections budget.

#### Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 The purpose of the review is to ensure that current arrangements as far as practicable, offer convenient and accessible voting facilities to all the electorate, including those who are disabled.

#### Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The risks to the conduct and integrity of elections could occur where cross boundary voting is undertaken. However, there are measures that can be taken to ameliorate the situation and where appropriate, these have been detailed in the report.

#### Other Officers

- 6.5 None

### **7 CONSULTATION**

#### Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 All councillors, local MPs, local political parties, agents at recent elections and disabled groups were asked to comment. All electors were consulted via the website.

#### Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Letters and emails to stakeholders, notice at the Council offices and via the website

#### Representations Received

- 7.3 These are set out in Annex B

#### Appendices

- Annex A – Returning Officer’s Proposals by Borough Ward  
Annex B – Responses to Public Consultation

Unrestricted

Annex C – Electoral Review Steering Group Minutes  
Map 1 – Proposed BC Polling District  
Map 2 – Proposed BLP Polling District

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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