

To: **Executive**
7 February 2023

Polling Districts Polling Place Review 2023
Boundary Review Working Group

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to proceed with the implementation and adoption of the revised polling district and polling place scheme proposed by the Boundary Review Working Group following public consultation.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Executive recommends to Council the approval of the revised polling district and polling place scheme, as set out in Annex A.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 Following the conclusion of recent boundary reviews it is necessary to alter the Council's polling scheme to take account of the new borough, parish and town council ward boundaries.
- 3.2 Included in the recommendations are the appointment of designated alternative polling places at which the Returning Officer could locate polling stations at short notice should the primary venue not be available due to any unforeseen circumstances. This is to ensure the efficient administration any electoral event.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 Several alternative locations were evaluated by officers and the Boundary Review Working Group throughout the review process and a number of these have been included in the scheme as suitable alternative polling places. Those designated as the primary polling place are considered to offer the most suitable arrangements for voters and polling station staff.

5 Supporting Information

Polling district

- 5.1 A polling district is appointed by the Council and is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election. In England, each parish must be a separate polling district. This means that a parish must not be in a polling district which has a part of a different parish within it, or any un-parished part of the local authority area within it. A borough ward, however, may be comprised of multiple polling districts across more than one parish.

Polling place

- 5.2 A polling place is designated by the Council and refers to the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling

place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district

Polling stations

- 5.3 A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for the election.
- 5.4 No changes to the overall number of polling places have been proposed by this review.
- 5.5 There is a statutory requirement to undertake a polling district and polling place review following the conclusion of any boundary review(s) and since the last polling review, changes have been made to both the borough and parish/town warding arrangements.
- 5.6 Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission explains that one of the primary purposes of undertaking these reviews is to ensure that the needs of electors with accessibility issues are suitably considered when designating polling places and polling stations.
- 5.7 Each polling place was visited by officers as part of this review to ensure their continued suitability with specific consideration given to the forthcoming requirements specified by the Elections Act 2022 and the introduction of Voter ID.
- 5.8 Private organisations are under no obligation to host polling places.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 Legal considerations are included within the body of the report.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 There are no financial implications associated with this report. The proposal maintains the current number of polling stations and as such there is no change in the financial cost position.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 Two stages of public consultation were held during the review period. The first consultation prior to the publication of any recommendations ran from 15 August to 12 September with a second period of consultation on the published final recommendations held from 28 November to 19 December. 13 representations were received across both periods of consultation.
- 6.4 The majority of comments received supported the continued use of the respective polling place mentioned with the exception of any polling places located in schools. A specific comment around accessibility at the Bracknell Central Library is currently being investigated by officers.

- 6.5 The full range of responses received as part of the two stages of public consultation have been published on the Bracknell Forest Council website. Due consideration was given to these by the working group during the drafting of recommendations.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.6 An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed at the commencement of the review and highlighted the need to ensure that, in the commissioning and running of the consultation, those with a disability or other accessibility consideration were afforded a range of options to engage with and respond to the review. As such both digital and hard copy versions of review documents were made available online, in borough libraries and at other community locations across Bracknell Forest.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.7 Failure to follow proper process for the implementation of any polling changes could result in significant financial and reputational damage to Bracknell Forest Council.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.8 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO2 due to the nature of the exercise which is predominantly administrative using existing resources.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 6.9 None identified.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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