



Purpose: For Decision

Committee report

Committee	FULL COUNCIL
Date	18 NOVEMBER 2020
Title	POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES REVIEW 2020
Report of	Director of Corporate Services and Returning Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report details the consultation carried out, and responses received, during the recent Polling Districts and Places Review, and makes recommendations to Full Council regarding the scheme of polling districts and places.

BACKGROUND

2. The current scheme of polling districts and polling places was last considered by the Isle of Wight Council in September 2019, following the introduction of The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, which required authorities to have completed a review by 31 January 2015 (regardless of when the last review was conducted), ahead of the general parliamentary election which was held in May 2015, and then to conduct such reviews as a minimum of once every five years.
3. This review is necessitated by the need to amend a number of polling districts due to the introduction, in 2021, of revised electoral divisions for the Isle of Wight Council, resulting from the implementation of The Isle of Wight (Electoral Changes) Order 2020. As a result of these changes all polling districts will be allocated new designatory letters.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

4. By ensuring that electors are able to access polling stations as effectively as is reasonably practicable, the Isle of Wight Council can ensure that electors are able to participate in the democratic process of electing their representatives.

5. Facilitating electors to participate in this way may encourage them to engage with wider aspects of democracy and decision making, and will also contribute to delivering the core values of “Our Island - Our Vision”, the Corporate Plan 2019 – 2022, by “putting customers and our community at the heart of everything we do” and “treating people fairly”.

CONSULTATION

6. Details of all those who were consulted in the compilation of this report are included in Appendix 1, along with responses received. Suggestions for change were received in relation to a small number of electoral divisions.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

7. The financial implications arising from this report are minimal, and any consequent changes to the arrangement of the Register of Electors can be easily implemented using the existing software used in the electoral registration office at no additional cost to the Isle of Wight Council.
8. This report recommends that the single polling district covering Nettlestone and Seaview be split into two polling districts, which will restore the situation which existed prior to December 2019. As a result, there will be a small increase in hire charges as two buildings will be used instead of one, and there will also be a small increase for polling station staff costs of £415 per poll as one additional presiding officer and one poll clerk will be required. However, in the case of all but Isle of Wight Council elections these costs will be borne by other bodies.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9. As outlined above, the Isle of Wight Council has a statutory duty to review the polling districts and polling places scheme as directed by section 18C of The Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended). As indicated, under the 1983 act, local authorities are required to undertake a review every five years. This particular review is necessitated by the need to align polling districts to the 39 revised electoral divisions of the Isle of Wight Council which come in to force in May 2021.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

10. The council, as a public body, is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
11. The recommendations in this report do not seek to introduce new, or to revise existing Isle of Wight Council policies or procedures, and there are no adverse implications for any aspect of equality and diversity. The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 have been considered, and the recommendations in this

report do not have any adverse effect on any aspects of the protected characteristics as defined by that act.

12. As a result of the proposed change to the polling districts and locations of the polling stations in the Nettlestone and Seaview area, some electors will have their journey to the polling station reduced. The provision of a more locally based polling station for the proposed Nettlestone polling district will hopefully improve access for local residents.
13. In a wider sense, any improvements to the provision of polling places and districts can only serve to increase an individual's ability to access all aspects of the democratic process. All polling stations are assessed to ensure that they offer good access for the disabled, and each review of polling stations seeks to improve on the quality and provision of polling stations. Electors may make a personal choice to exercise their right to vote by post or by proxy rather than visit their polling station in person.
14. An equality impact assessment of the effect of the implementation of the recommendation has been carried out, which concluded that there may be a small positive effect for electors in the Nettlestone area as journey distances to their polling station will be reduced.

OPTIONS

15. The Isle of Wight Council may conclude the following:

(a) To implement the recommendations as follows:

THAT the Isle of Wight Council adopts the scheme of polling districts and polling places as set out in Appendix 2 (attached). This resolution is to be effective for the purposes of proceedings preliminary or relating to any election to be held on or after 6 May 2021. This scheme includes the separation of the Nettlestone and Seaview area into two polling districts, each served by its own polling station.

(b) To modify the recommendations as they are set out in this report prior to resolution.

(c) To decide not to approve any or all of the recommendations within this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT

16. There are no risk implications for any financial, transactional or property related matters. Once the recommendations have been resolved by the council there are no perceived external factors which could prevent implementation taking place, and the recommendations are not considered to be counter-productive to any of the council's existing policies or objectives.
17. It is a statutory requirement to conduct a regular review of polling districts and places, and having undertaken open public consultation and following consideration of the limited responses received, the recommendation meets

the legal obligations of the Isle of Wight Council in an open and transparent manner.

18. It is not considered that the recommendations or actions arising will in any way unlawfully infringe the rights of any individual or involve the council in acting outside of any rights or powers conferred upon it by Parliament.

EVALUATION

19. The recommendation to council is to implement the recommendations without further change or modification. The recommendations detailed below, and in Appendix 2 have been arrived at after a period of consultation, and best express the wishes of those concerned who responded to the consultation.
20. Should the council decide not to implement any or all of the recommendations then existing arrangements in those areas will continue as they are, without modification. This will mean that the polling districts do not align to the new electoral divisions, effectively rendering the local elections impossible to run.
21. Members should be aware that further polling places and district reviews must be carried out in the future, and it is currently proposed that a further review be carried during 2024, as required by the legislation outlined above.

RECOMMENDATION

22. It is recommended:

Option A: THAT the Isle of Wight Council adopts the scheme of polling districts and polling places as set out in Appendix 2 (attached). This resolution is to be effective for the purposes of proceedings preliminary or relating to any election to be held on or after 6 May 2021. This scheme includes the separation of the Nettlestone and Seaview area into two polling districts, each served by its own polling station.

APPENDICES ATTACHED

23. Appendix 1 - Details and analysis of responses to the consultation, including final recommendations.
24. Appendix 2 – Proposed scheme of polling districts and places with effect from 6 May 2021.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

25. The following document has been referred to in the compilation of this report:
 - Agenda and minutes of the meeting of the Isle of Wight Council held on Wednesday 18 September 2019

- The Isle of Wight Council (Electoral Changes) Order 2020
- Equality impact assessment on the impact of the recommendation in this report

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