

Classification: Open	Decision Type: Non-Key
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Report to:	Council	Date: 13 September 2023
Subject:	Polling District and Places Review 2023	
Report of	Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs and HR	

Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek a recommendation from Council for approval of plans for a statutory review of polling districts and places within the borough of Bury.

Recommendation(s)

1. That the compulsory polling district and places review commences on Monday 2 October 2023.
2. That the outline table for the review is approved
3. That approval is granted to follow the review process described in this report.
4. That the ERO (Electoral Registration Officer) is authorised to take the necessary measures as soon as possible to give effect to parliamentary constituency changes, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new constituencies until the boundaries are fully in force.
5. That the Electoral Registration Officer is authorised to take the necessary measures to give effect to any new or amended polling districts on completion of the polling district review, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new boundaries until the boundaries are fully in force.
6. That power to designate polling places in accordance with section 18 and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 is delegated to the Chief Executive, in their role as Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer.

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1. Background

1.1. The following definitions may be helpful when reading this report:

Polling District	Geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
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Polling Place Buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.

Polling Station The number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.

- 1.2. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district.
- 1.3. The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.
- 1.4. Under Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 1.5. The intention of the legislation was to reviews would be completed by the January before a UK parliamentary general election. However, since the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011, there is no longer any certainty as to when the next general election will be.
- 1.6. The Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act means:
 - The UK Parliament can be dissolved by the King on request of the Prime Minister at any time with the 5 years of the life of the Parliament.
 - The next general election must take place before Tuesday 28 January 2025, but it could happen at any point before then.
 - There is no longer a link between the timing of the compulsory polling district and places review falling in a 16-month period ending 3 months before a scheduled general election.
- 1.7. In addition, the Boundary Commission for England is currently undertaking a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The Commission has now published its final recommendations, and Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries will be made by 1 November 2023.
- 1.8. Once the Orders for new parliamentary constituencies have been made the new boundaries will be used for the next general election.
- 1.9. If a parliamentary election is called in the meantime, it would be run on existing boundaries.
- 1.10. These issues mean it is important that the polling district and places review is carried out as early as possible, so that Bury Council has agreed polling districts and places to be used at the next parliamentary election as well as the scheduled Local and greater Manchester Mayoral elections in May 2024 and has a polling scheme in place which reflects the new constituencies.

2. Timing of the polling district and places review

- 2.1. As highlighted above, it is important to complete the review as soon as possible so the polling districts and places for future elections can be agreed in time for the next general election and scheduled elections.
- 2.2. Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 does not allow the review to commence before 1 October 2023.
- 2.3. It is recommended that the compulsory polling district and places review commences on Monday 2 October 2023.

3. Review timetable

- 3.1. Although the review itself cannot commence earlier, there is a degree of preparatory work which can be undertaken prior to the review as well as informal preliminary consultation.
- 3.2. It would be desirable for any changes in polling districts to be reflected in the electoral register published on 1 December 2023. However, due to desirability for a six week consultation period, it is unlikely that the review will be completed until January 2024.
- 3.3. This would mean the electoral register would need to be republished to take account of any changes to polling districts:

Preparatory work	Started July 2023
Resolution from council providing for commencement of review	13 September 2023
Preliminary review – including informal consultation	July to 1 October 2023
Notice of review published	Monday 2 October 2023
Councils proposals published	Monday 2 October 2023
Commencement of formal consultation	Monday 2 October 2023
End of formal consultation	Friday 10 November 2023
Consider responses	By 24 November 2023
Publish electoral register	1 December 2023
Final proposals published via meeting agenda papers and website	10 January 2024
Committee/Cabinet/Council meeting	17 January 2024
Conclude review	By end January 2024
Republish electoral register (if any new or amended polling districts)	1 February 2024
Scheduled elections on new polling districts, places and stations scheme	2 May 2024

4. Review process

4.1. Legal requirements

4.1.1. The process for a polling district and places review is set out in Schedule A1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

4.1.2. The Council must:

- Publish a notice of the holding of a review.
- Consult the (Acting) Returning Officer ((A)RO) for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area.
- Publish all recommendations made by an (A)RO within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area, and, if the authority maintains a website, by placing a copy of the authority's website.
- Seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for person who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the (A)RO.

4.1.3. On completion of the review, the council must give reasons for its decision and publish:

- All correspondence sent to the (A)RO in connection with the review
- All correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.
- All representations made by any person in connection with the review.
- The minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review.
- Details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review.
- Details of the places where the results of the review have been published.

4.2. Preliminary review

4.2.1. Electoral Services are also carrying out a preliminary review of the current polling districts and places in the borough to assess their suitability.

4.2.2. This involves:

- Compiling details of current polling places with a summary of their suitability
- Checking the continued availability of polling places
- Reviewing feedback from stakeholders at previous elections
- Identifying potential alternative buildings where appropriate
- Ensuring that polling places can support the requirements of the Elections Act, for example with sufficient space to undertake Voter ID checks, and to accommodate equipment to assist disabled voters
- Seeking advice and guidance from local disability groups and local authority experts around accessibility

- Preparing council proposals and drafting (A)RO comments, including explanations for “no changes”

4.3. Informal consultation

4.3.1. Electoral Services are also carrying out informal consultation with interested groups in preparation for the review.

4.3.2. This involves:

- Seeking the views of organisations with a special interest/expertise in disabled access
- Informal consultation with group leaders/local political parties
- Getting advice from relevant council officers (for example Property Services, Equalities Officers)
- Inviting comments from Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors

4.3.3. It will be important to do as much preparatory work as possible before the official commencement of the review, to ensure its early completion.

Legal Implications:

The Polling District and Polling Place review is a statutory requirement as set out in the body of the report.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications.

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
A(RO)	(Acting) Returning Officer
ERO	Electoral Registration Officer
Polling District	Geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided
Polling Place	Buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
Polling Station	The number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.