

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	General Purposes Committee Council	Date:	7 November 2024 21 November 2024
Subject:	Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places		
Report Of:	Returning Officer		
Wards Affected:	All Wards		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
Contact Officer:	Tanya Davies, Policy and Governance Manager		
	Email: tanya.davies@gloucester.gov.uk	Tel: 396125	
Appendices:	1. Notice of Review 2. List of consultees 3. Revised ARO Recommendations 4. Maps of Polling Districts where changes are recommended		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To outline the recommendations for the Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, the purpose of which was to implement the changes resulting for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE) review of the Gloucestershire County Council divisions and consider any subsequent proposed amendments to voting arrangements aimed at ensuring that electors have such reasonable and accessible facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The General Purposes Committee is asked to consider the proposals for the Interim Review of Polling District and Polling Places and, subject to any amendments, **RECOMMEND** the proposals to Council for approval.
- 2.2 Council is asked to **RESOLVE** that the proposals for the Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places Review be approved.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 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. The following definitions may be helpful:
- 'Polling districts' are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
 - 'Polling places' are the buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.

- 'Polling stations' are the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.

3.2 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. The Council undertook its last compulsory review in 2023 with approved changes implemented in time for both the Gloucester City Council and Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2024 and the Parliamentary General Election in July 2024.

3.3 The compulsory review was unable to take into account the recommendations from the LGBCE's review of the Gloucestershire County Council division boundaries, as the recommendations had not yet been finalised. As a result, a further interim review had to be undertaken in order to make the changes required by the new County Council boundaries.

Review timetable

3.4 The Order giving effect to the division boundary changes has not yet passed into law, however, the Electoral Commission confirmed that the interim review could proceed based on the pending boundaries to enable any changes to be implemented for the publication of the revised electoral register.

27 September 2024	Notice of formal review and commencement of public consultation
By 4 October 2024	Publication of AROs' comments
18 October 2024	End of public consultation period
TBC	General Purposes Committee consider proposals and make recommendations to Council
21 November 2024	Council to consider and approve final proposals
To be confirmed	Publish revised register of electors

Review process

3.5 The process for a polling district and places review is set out in Schedule A1, Representation of the People Act 1983, though it should be noted that, as this is not a compulsory review, these requirements are good practice and not required by law.

3.6 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 representations 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 on the authority's website.
- seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons 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(s).

- On completion of the review, publish details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review, giving reasons, and publish all correspondence and representations received.

3.7 In preparing the ARO for Gloucester's submission, the maps showing the changes to the boundaries were reviewed in detail.

3.8 The proposals of the ARO for Gloucester were published on 27 September.

Consultation

3.9 The public consultation ran from 27 September to 18 October 2024. This was publicised via the Council's social media channels and via a dedicated page on the Council's website and direct communications with the consultees listed at Appendix 2. Aside from a small number of responses from direct consultees stating that they had no comments on the proposals, no other consultations responses were received. This is not surprising given the limited nature of the interim review and the fact that the proposals do not result in any changes to voting arrangements for electors.

3.10 The ARO for Tewkesbury confirmed that they support the proposals put forward by the ARO for Gloucester in respect of the area that falls within the Tewkesbury Constituency.

Proposals

3.11 The ARO's original proposals highlighted the changes that are required to give effect to the new County divisions boundaries and a small number of optional changes to polling districts designed to make optimum use resources following the changes. In all cases, there will be no impact on voters as a result of the proposed change. Key points of the review are highlighted below and these proposals are unchanged after the consultation period.

Areas with improved coterminous boundaries

3.12 As a result of the new division boundaries, polling districts AD3, B4, M3, MRW4 and P2 will now be in the same County division as the rest of the polling districts in that City Council ward. This means it is possible to reconsider the polling district boundaries; however, the intention was only to do this where there would be no impact on voting arrangements i.e. voters already cast their vote in the same location.

3.13 No changes are proposed to the polling district and polling station arrangements for AD3, M3 and MRW4 because, if they were to be merged with the other polling district whose voters cast their vote at the same location, the combined electorate would be close to or exceed the maximum number of voters that can be allocated to a polling station.

3.14 It is proposed that polling district B4 is merged with B2. Voters in both polling districts already cast their vote in the same location and the combined electorate would not be close to or exceed the maximum number of voters that can be allocated to a polling station. This will help to offset the costs associated with the requirement for an additional polling station detailed in 3.16 below.

- 3.15 It is also proposed that polling district P2 is merged with P1. Again, voters in both polling districts already cast their vote in the same location and the combined electorate would not be close to or exceed the maximum number of voters that can be allocated to a polling station. This will also help to offset the costs associated with the requirement for an additional polling station detailed in 3.16 below.
- 3.16 There are two small areas in Barnwood ward and Grange ward, both historically with no residential properties, that were in the different County divisions from the rest of the ward. The LGBCE boundary changes correct both anomalies.

Areas where the new boundaries divide an existing polling district

- 3.17 There is one polling district that must be split into two as a result of the new boundaries. The boundary between the Longlevens and Kingsholm and Wotton County divisions now follows Horsbere Brook between the B4063 (Cheltenham Road East) and the train line requiring polling district E1 to be divided along that boundary. The southern part of the area, which is in Kingsholm and Wotton division, will be polling district E1 and the northern area, which is in Longlevens division, will be E4. To prevent any impact on voters, it is proposed that an additional polling station be added at the current E1 polling place at Old Richians RFC. The ARO for the Tewkesbury Constituency has confirmed that he is content with this proposal.

Other matters

- 3.18 Polling district M2 has been moved into a different County division, but not the same division as the other polling district that it currently shares a polling place with, therefore no changes are proposed to the voting arrangements.
- 3.19 Tuffley division has been renamed Tuffley and Moreland.
- 3.20 In the course of reviewing the changes to the division boundaries, a historic anomaly was identified. There is a small area of polling district W4, comprising the train station and land registry building that is in Kingsholm and Wotton County division, while the remainder of the polling district is in Hempsted and Westgate division. There are no residential properties in this small area, however, it is still necessary to split this area from W4 and designate it as a separate polling district, W5. Because there are no voters living in the area, it is not necessary to allocate it a polling place or station at this time, but this will be kept under review. The Council will seek to have the anomaly rectified at the next boundary review as the area is 'unviable' as a polling district due to the number of voters, or in this case, the lack of any voters.

General Purposes Committee

- 3.21 General Purposes Committee considered the report at its meetings on 7 November 2024 and agreed to recommend the proposals to Council for approval.

4.0 Social Value Considerations

- 4.1 The review of polling districts and polling places seeks to obtain the views of the community on the best arrangements for voting and relies on the availability of community buildings for use as polling stations.

5.0 Environmental Implications

- 5.1 It is always preferable for electors to be able to walk to their polling station and access arrangements are a key consideration during the review; however, it is not always possible to provide a polling station within walking distance.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 There are no alternative options to some of the proposals as they are necessitated by the LGBCE review. In the case of the polling districts that it is proposed are merged, one or both could stay as they are, however, this would not allow the staffing costs associated with needing a new polling station for polling district E4 to be offset.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 The interim review of polling districts and polling places is required to give effect to the electoral review of Gloucestershire County Council's boundaries. The recommendations made seek to ensure that electors in the city have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and that the arrangements meet legislative requirements.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 8.1 If the Council agrees the proposals, the changes will take effect when the revised Electoral Register is published and details will be made available to the public on the council's website, along with all documents that the Council is required to publish.
- 8.2 It had been anticipated that the Order giving effect to the division boundary changes would have passed into law by the date of the Council meeting; however, the Council was informed that the Order would need to be re-laid for a further period of 40 days due to an error in the text. As a result, the Council will delay publication of the revised Electoral Register, which it is able to do because the General Election took place during the canvass period, and publish it on the new boundaries when the Order becomes law. It is anticipated that the revised Electoral Register will be published on either 1 January or 1 February 2025. It is understood that this aligns with most, if not all of the other district councils in Gloucestershire.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 If the proposals are approved the financial implications will be minimal; however, there may be a small reduction in polling station staff costs (approximately £1,000 for a single election) if the proposals to merge polling district are agreed.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 While this interim review is not compulsory, the Council should follow the same process as required for a statutory review, including providing individuals with the opportunity to comment on the proposals. Any consultation responses must be

considered and conscientiously taken into account before a final decision is made by Council.

- 10.2 Any changes to polling districts, polling places and polling stations must be made in accordance with the provisions of the Representation of People Act 1983 (as amended), Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and Equalities Act 2010.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 11.1 There are no risks of voter confusion as the changes proposed have been designed to have no impact of voters.

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 12.1 A PIA has not been completed on this occasion, as one was completed for the statutory review last year and the proposals do not propose any changes to polling stations and do not result in any impact on voters.

13.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 13.1 There are no community safety implications resulting from this report.

Staffing & Trade Union

- 13.2 There are no issues relating to trade unions arising from this report.

Background Documents: None