

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

## Gravesham Borough Council

**Report to:** Full Council

**Date:** 11 October 2022

**Reporting officer:** Chief Executive and Returning Officer

**Subject:** Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

### **Purpose and summary of report:**

To report on the outcome of the review of polling district, polling places and polling stations in Gravesham.

### **Recommendations:**

It is recommended that, having taken into account all representations received, Council approves the revised schedule of polling districts and polling places be adopted with effect from 1 March 2023, with the current scheme remaining valid until that date.

<b>Key Implications:</b>	
<b>Item</b>	<b>Implications</b>
<b>Legal</b>	The review was conducted in accordance with legislation set out in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	There are no financial implications in designating the Polling Districts however the cost of elections will be affected by the number of Polling Stations used.
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	#1 People: A proud community; where residents can call a safe, clean and attractive borough their home
<b>Climate Change</b>	There are no direct climate change implications.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In April 2022, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) published its final recommendations setting out new electoral arrangements for Gravesham. The recommended changes are due to be laid before Parliament in November and once they have received Parliamentary approval, they will become law and come into effect for local elections in 2023.

- 1.2 The recommendations from the LGBCE set out new electoral arrangements for the borough, resulting in a reduction of councillors to 39 councillors, representing 17 wards. As a result of the recommendation, it was necessary for the council to conduct a review of all polling districts and therefore polling places, to ensure that the changes are in place for the next elections in May 2023.
- 1.3 The review has been completed, following the required consultation period and Full Council is asked to approve the polling districts and polling places scheme as detailed in appendix two to this report. Maps outlining the proposals are provided at appendix three.

## **2. Designating Polling Districts**

- 2.1 A polling district is the geographical sub-division of an electoral area, eg UK Parliamentary constituency, a ward or an electoral division. The council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts for elections and for keeping the polling districts under review.
- 2.2 When designating polling districts, the council must seek to ensure that all the electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 2.3 The council must designate a polling place for every polling district in the Borough, unless the size or other circumstances of the polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electorate.
- 2.4 The council must:
  - a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
  - b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
- 2.5 In addition, the polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district.

## **3. Polling Places**

- 3.1 A polling place is 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.
- 3.2 The current scheme designates the polling place as the Polling District. Where no suitable Polling Station is available the (Acting) Returning Officer is authorised to designate an adjoining Polling District for that Polling Place.

#### **4. Polling Stations**

- 4.1 A Polling Station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district. This function is the responsibility of the (Acting) Returning Officer.
- 4.2 Guidance from the Electoral Commission states that no Polling Station should have more than 2,500 electors allocated to it; this figure does not include those electors who have opted for a postal vote.

#### **5. Consultation Process and Results**

- 5.1 The council gave notice of undertaking a review of polling districts and polling places on 11 July 2022 through the council's website and at council offices. Proposals were developed and placed on the council's website with maps provided to provide ease of reference.
- 5.2 Details of the consultation were sent directly to key stakeholders including all borough councillors, parish councils, Kent County Council, local disability groups and political parties that have fielded candidates in recent elections in the borough.
- 5.3 The consultation ended on 19 August 2022.
- 5.4 A number of representations were made and these have been analysed and considered in presenting the final recommendations for the polling districts in Gravesham. A summary of the representations made and the council's response to these, is shown at appendix one.

#### **6. Proposals**

- 6.1 Appendix two sets out the proposals for the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations for the borough of Gravesham.
- 6.2 Designated polling stations are regularly assessed and, where necessary, steps are taken to improve accessibility to all members of the community. This review has resulted in several new polling stations being designated as detailed in appendix two.

#### **7. Returning Officer's Further Comments**

- 7.1 The Returning Officer has a duty to encourage every eligible elector to use their vote and make it as simple as possible to do so.
- 7.2 Although postal voting is available on demand and this is often a convenient voting arrangement for some people, there are many who prefer to exercise their democratic right to vote in person at a polling station and this right is respected.

- 7.3 The Returning Officer is mindful of the fact that changing polling stations can cause confusion for electors who have been used to going to the same station for some years. He wishes to reassure the Council that all changes made have been done so with consideration to electors, although some have been required due to the changes in boundaries.
- 7.4 The proposed new scheme set out in appendix two to this report is considered to represent the best arrangements presently available and is recommended to Council for adoption.

## **8. Appendices**

- 8.1 The following documents are to be published with the report:
- Appendix One – summary of representations made in response to the draft proposals and the council’s response to these comments.
  - Appendix Two – Polling District, Polling Place and Polling Station proposals for the borough of Gravesham.
  - Appendix Three – Maps of the Polling District, Polling Place and Polling Station proposals

## **9. Background Documents**

- 9.1 The following background documents were used:
- *New electoral arrangements for Gravesham Borough Council - Final Recommendations* – published by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) in April 2022

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<b>Secondary Implications</b>	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Any changes to the proposed Polling Places/Polling Districts would require the Register of Electors to be republished.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner’s Office website via the above links. N/A</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/A</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>. N/A</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. Yes – accessibility is a key consideration in determining the polling stations to be used. All polling stations selected have been reviewed in terms of location and accessibility to ensure those wishing to vote in person are able to do so.</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. Yes – as above.</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	Public Participation in local democratic processes contributes to community wellbeing and cohesion.
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	The consultation, including maps, was published on the council’s website. Once the final polling districts are approved, there will be a need to ensure these are available on the website in due course.
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	There are no safeguarding children and vulnerable adults implications.