

# Full Council

Tuesday 12 December 2023



**Report of:** Director of Legal and Democratic Services

**Title:** Review of Polling Districts and Places

**Ward:** Citywide

## Recommendation

1. To approve the polling districts and places for all wards in Bristol as listed in the schedule of polling districts and polling places (Appendix A) and shown in the ward maps (Appendix B).
2. To note the proposed polling stations for all Wards in Bristol with effective from 1 February 2024.

## Summary

A four week public consultation was held from 2 October to 29 October 2023 in order to identify the most appropriate boundaries and venues for voting across the city. Following this review, members are asked to approve these polling districts and polling places, which would then come into force from 1 February 2024 and be used for all subsequent elections in Bristol.

## The significant issues in the report are:

Neither the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies nor the local ward boundaries are part of the review.

It is considered expedient to designate polling places as “whole of polling district” to ensure that the Returning Officer is able to properly exercise his statutory discretion in the identification of polling stations within those areas.

Polling stations are not a part of the review, however consideration has been given to consultation responses, and some changes made as a result. These new polling stations will be used from 1 February 2024. Prior to major elections the Returning Officer will advise political parties of the situation of the actual polling stations to be used, and will consider any comments made. The details of the 240 polling stations in 172 venues are included in Appendix C for reference and to help inform the decision on polling districts and places.



## Policy

1. Not applicable.

## Consultation

Following preliminary work to identify population changes per polling district, such as population trend analysis and known building developments, a four week public consultation was held. This ran from 2 October to 29 October 2023.

In addition to this open public consultation, the following internal and external persons were directly consulted.

### 2. Internal

- 2.1 All Bristol City Council Councillors.
- 2.2 Bristol City Council Party Group offices and Member Support.
- 2.3 The Mayor of the City and County of Bristol.
- 2.4 The Acting Returning Officer for all four constituencies.
- 2.5 Bristol City Council – Equalities and Social Inclusion Team.

Members have been consulted through a programme of engagement with launch events and emails. Members have given input either directly or through the consultation process.

### 3. External

- 3.2 All MPs for the authority area.
- 3.3 The Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 3.4 The West of England Combined Authority Mayor.
- 3.5 Political parties active within the authority area.
- 3.6 Disability and age-related equality organisations within the local authority area.
- 3.7 Voscur (support and development agency for Bristol's voluntary, community and social enterprise sector).
- 3.8 The Care Forum (Voice & Influence Partnership).
- 3.9 Bristol Women's Commission.
- 3.10 Bristol Hate Crime and Discrimination Services.

The public consultation elicited 40 responses, each of which has been considered and changes made to the proposals where practicable.

## Context

4. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, Bristol City Council has a duty to divide its parliamentary constituencies into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each polling district. This compulsory review must be completed by 31 January 2025 and, in order to successfully deliver the 2024 Bristol City Council elections, the changes will be implemented on 01 February 2024 and a new register of electors published.

5. The primary aims in making changes to polling district boundaries are:
  - a) to achieve a desired maximum of 1,500 electors attending each polling station (on projected figures) where geographical and physical features such as rivers and railways allow;
  - b) to identify good accessible venues for use as polling stations; and,
  - c) to ensure that every polling station sits within its ward.
6. Other key aims in drawing up the polling districts are:
  - a) to avoid electors having difficult, dangerous or long journeys to their polling stations;
  - b) to avoid electors having to walk past another polling station to reach their own polling station; and,
  - c) to avoid the use of portacabins wherever possible due to the expense.
7. We aim for a maximum of 1,500 electors attending each station to reduce queues at polling station. To ensure efficient use of staff and throughput of voters, each polling station will be staffed by one Presiding Officer and two Poll Clerks
8. Electoral Services has undertaken a comprehensive review of existing and potential venues which could serve as polling stations. Account has been taken of the new space requirements for Voter ID checks and increased accessibility requirements. Each venue has been graded according to its accessibility and must be a venue reachable for all voters regardless as to the means of travelling there (by foot, car or public transport). Additionally, the polling district boundary criteria were also applied to polling station selection and review.
9. Proposed changes to current polling district boundaries are summarised, by ward, in Appendix D for the convenience of Members.
10. Other key considerations in reviewing venues were Equality Act compliance; and a preference for selecting a polling station within the polling district wherever possible.
11. Parliamentary constituency and also local ward boundaries cannot be addressed within this review.
12. It should be noted that Ashley (polling districts ASHK and ASHL), Hengrove and Whitchurch Park (HWPL and HWPM) and Lawrence Hill (LAWG and LAWJ) have known large developments being accommodated within this proposal to ensure that queues cannot happen within the 5 year period for this review. As the exact position of the polling district boundaries are not precisely known until building work is underway, adjustments to a limited number of these polling district boundaries may be required within the next 5 years.

## Proposal

- 13.1 To approve the polling districts and places for all wards in Bristol as listed in the schedule of polling districts and polling place (Appendix A) and shown in the ward maps (Appendix B).
- 13.2 To note the proposed polling stations for all Wards in Bristol with effect from 01 February 2024 (Appendix C).

## Other Options Considered

14. All options proposed through internal and external consultation have been considered against the criteria set out in this report. All consultees will be notified when a Full Council decision has been made. Wherever a proposal is not implemented Electoral Services will respond to the individual or group to explain why it has not been taken forward in the context of these criteria.

## Risk Assessment

15. The result of not instituting new polling districts would be to prevent the efficient running of the May 2024 election. Polling districts need to be in place to administer and run the election, and any delay will impact all work-streams and incur a very high risk to the delivery of the election. As such any future changes to polling districts would be made after the May 2024 elections and a snap UK Parliamentary election.

## Summary of Equalities Impact of the Proposed Decision

- 16a). Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
  - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
    - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
    - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
    - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in

any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

- iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
  - tackle prejudice; and
  - promote understanding.

**16b).** The purpose of this review is to ensure that polling is accessible for all electors and thus that polling places and polling districts are set up to enable the Returning Officer to identify polling stations that meet this aim. Further details are in the Equality Impact Assessment. (Appendix E).

## **Legal and Resource Implications**

### **Legal**

Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the Council to review the way it divides its area into polling districts and to identify a polling place for each district. This must be completed by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025.

When reviewing polling districts, the authority must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in its area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

When designating polling places, the following requirements apply;

- (a) the authority must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in its area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
- (b) the authority must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled;
- (c) the authority must have regard to the accessibility, to disabled persons, of potential polling stations in any place which it is considering designating as a polling place or the designation of which as a polling place it is reviewing;
- (d) the polling place for a polling district must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district;
- (e) the polling place for a polling district must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station.

The proposals in this report meet the legislative requirements and facilitate the changes arising from an increasing electorate within the authority area.

**(Legal advice provided by Nancy Rollason. Head of Legal Service).**

### **Financial**

#### **(a) Revenue**

The direct cost of providing 2 incremental polling stations (so that the revised number is 240) will be c£2,300 per election (based on requiring 6 additional staff, training costs, venue and equipment hire costs). For Local elections, this cost will be covered within Electoral Services' approved revenue budget. The cost of any National or any other non-BCC election is reclaimable from Central Government.

**(b) Capital**

No capital implications.

**(Financial advice provided by Alison Bennett – Interim Finance Business Partner)**

**Land**

Not applicable.

**Personnel**

Not applicable.

**Appendices:**

- Appendix A Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places
- Appendix B Ward maps for each ward
- Appendix C Polling station list (whole city)
- Appendix D Summary of polling district boundary changes by ward.
- Appendix E Equality Impact Assessment

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**Background Papers:**

None