

Item No. 6.2	Classification: Open	Date: 22 November 2023	Meeting: Council Assembly
Report title:		Polling district, polling place and polling station review 2023	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All wards	
From:		Frances Biggs, Head of Electoral Services	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That council assembly note the polling district, polling place and polling station review 2023 agreed by the chief executive as acting returning officer and the assistant chief executive, governance and assurance, as monitoring officer.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. In accordance with the requirements of the Representation of the People Act 1983, and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, Southwark Council has a statutory duty to carry out a review of polling districts and polling places for parliamentary elections, in the period from 1 October 2023 to 31 January 2025. This also needs to include consideration of the location of polling stations (existing or proposed) within polling places (existing or proposed).
3. The purpose of the review is to assess the current arrangements and make any necessary changes to improve the convenience and accessibility of polling stations for electors. The Electoral Commission recommends that no polling station should have more than 2,250 electors allocated to it, and no fewer than 1,000, however, due to the additional pressures placed on polling station staff as a result of the new provisions in the Elections Act 2022, this review will apply a maximum of 1,800 polling station electors (the full electorate minus postal voters) to each polling station.
4. The scope of the 2023 polling district and polling station review covered the following:
 - That suitable polling station provision is made for all electors
 - Identified polling stations which were found to be not fit for purpose and identify suitable alternatives where possible

- Removed sub-polling districts in wards which were previously split by parliamentary constituency boundaries, but are no longer required.
 - Made adjustments to existing polling districts, for administrative purposes in order to improve the delivery of elections
5. A Polling District is a geographical area created by the sub-division of an electoral area i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a European Parliamentary electoral region, a Ward or an electoral division.
 6. A Polling Place is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. There is no legal definition of what a Polling Place is; it could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.
 7. If no polling place is designated for a polling district the polling district is to be taken to be the polling place. This is the default position in Southwark.
 8. 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, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

9. All proposals are made to ensure that where possible there is a balance of the electorate within each polling district, that polling places are convenient and easily accessible for voters.
10. These changes will take effect with the publication of the new revised register on 1 December 2023.

Policy framework implications

11. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 required a review of polling districts and polling places to be completed by 31 January 2020 and then every five years thereafter.
12. This requirement does not prevent a local authority from conducting a review at any time. It is sometimes the case that interim reviews may need to be conducted outside of the compulsory review period.
13. Initial proposals were drawn up by Electoral Services on behalf of the (Acting) Returning Officer.

Community impact statement

14. The considerations used in developing the review, taken from the Electoral Commission's guidance, fully comply with the council's equality commitments. No formal community impact statement is therefore needed

for this report to be adopted.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

15. Equality impact and needs analysis is published in appendix B of the main report (appendix 1). In accordance with the statutory requirements disability groups were consulted on the initial proposals. The Southwark Disablement Association had a meeting with the elections team as a result of this and were satisfied with the proposals.

Consultation

16. The review has taken in to consideration any representations from local residents and stakeholders in the ward, including any issues regarding access to premises or facilities for persons with disabilities. Any elector can make their views known and the process for doing so has been publicised.
17. An initial consultation with ward councillors took place in summer 2023. All councillors were consulted on the proposals for their ward, and their views taken forward for consideration.
18. The public consultation began on 2 October 2023 and closed on 3 November 2023.
19. The initial public consultation document was shared with approximately 140,000 Southwark residents via email, publicised on the Council's social media accounts and the Southwark website. Representations were also sought from other stakeholders, including elected members, political party groups, the Community Southwark Network and local disability groups.
20. Following this process and consideration of all comments and representations, the proposed scheme has been updated to accommodate these where possible.

REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

21. All representations received are included in appendix A of the main report.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance [AJW 7.11.2023]

22. In accordance with the requirements of section 18C the Representation of the People Act 1983, and the Electoral Administration Act 2013, Southwark Council has a statutory duty to carry out a review of polling districts and polling places at parliamentary elections. This report is produced in the context of the most recent compulsory review which must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

This review also has to include consideration of the polling stations (current and proposed) in the polling places.

23. The council's functions relating to a review of polling districts and places are designated by law as non-executive functions, so they cannot be discharged by the Leader or Cabinet. Part 3O (5) in the Constitution specifically delegates the council's functions of deciding polling districts and places to the Assistant Chief Executive (Governance and Assurance). The designation and provision of polling stations is a specific duty of the Acting Returning Officer.
24. The appendix sets out the conclusions of the review and this report recommends adoption of the conclusions of the review.
25. The 1983 Act makes provision for publication of the intended review, for consultation and for the making of representations to the council in relation to the review. The appendix includes details of representations received, together with the council's responses which should be conscientiously considered in making this decision.
26. In carrying out its functions, the council must have regard to the public sector equality duty contained in section 149 Equality Act 2010. This requires the council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct. and advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The decision makers will need to pay due regard to these matters, and will note the steps taken to consult and seek views, in particular from disability groups, and the Equality Impact and Needs Analysis included in the appendix.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations 2023 Draft Proposals Report	Electoral Services Southwark Council 160 Tooley Street SE1 2QH	electoral.services@southwark.gov.uk

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations 2023 - Final Proposals

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Frances Biggs, Head of Electoral Services	
Report Author	Richard St Pierre, Rachael Yarrow	
Version	Final	
Dated	7 November 2023	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments sought	Comments included
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		7 November 2023