

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 8 October 2019

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 15 October 2019

Report of: Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support

Title: The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places within the Exeter City Council Area

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report sets out for consideration by the Executive, proposals for new Parliamentary polling district and polling places arrangements recommended as a result of a statutory responsibility to carry out a review as set out in sections 18A to 18E of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013).

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 To adopt the proposals as set out at paragraphs (8.4 – 8.13) for implementation from a revised register of electors to be published on 1 December 2019.
- 2.2 For the Council to formally publish its final report on the Review of Parliamentary Polling Districts and Places within the Exeter Constituency by 1 November 2019, as required by the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983).
- 2.3 For the Council to complete a further review by 31 January 2025, as required by the RPA1983; or as necessary, in relation to the 2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

- 3.1 Polling District Reviews have been carried out in the City in 2014 (the last statutory review), in 2016 (as a result of a new boundaries recommended by the Local Boundary Commission for England for the City Council and in 2107 (as a result of new boundaries recommended by the LGBCE for new Divisions within Devon County Council). This review is a statutory cyclical review of the Parliamentary polling district boundaries, which are then used for Local Government elections. The RPA 1983 sets out a framework for Councils to follow in conducting a review.
- 3.2 Any new polling district and polling place arrangements will be introduced from the electoral register due to be published on 1 December 2019 and for any election held after that date. (However, if any elections are held prior to this it may be necessary to postpone the publication of the register until 1 February 2020 with the introduction of the new polling districts similarly postponed until then).

4. What are the equality and diversity impacts of this decision?

A completed EqIA is attached at Appendix B.

5. What are the resource implications including non-financial resources:

- 5.1 There would be some officer time involved in redrawing the appropriate polling district boundaries to match the proposals contained within this report. This can be contained within existing resources.
- 5.2 There would be a small decrease in the costs of running polling stations if the proposals were adopted.

6. Section 151 Officer Comments:

There are no significant financial implications contained within this report.

7. What are the legal aspects?

The Council is obliged to meet the requirements of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (Section 18A- 18D).

8. Monitoring Officer Comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer.

9. Report details:

- 9.1 A public consultation exercise in relation to the review, was carried out between 10 June and 19 July 2019. Additionally, all Exeter City and Devon County Councillors (representing the Exeter electoral divisions), political parties and other stakeholders such as disability charities were contacted. (See list at Appendix A). Reference was also made on the Council's website, raising the public's awareness of the consultation process, and seeking any views thereon. Further opportunity to comment on the proposals put forward by the Acting Returning Officers for the Exeter Parliamentary Constituency and the part of the East Devon Parliamentary Constituency which falls within Exeter City Council, was available until 9 August 2019.
- 9.2 Due to its urban nature, to afford the maximum flexibility in selecting polling stations (particularly if required at short notice), Exeter City Council has always defined its polling places as being coterminous with its polling district boundaries. The only exception to this rule being where the polling station may be located just outside of the ward boundary. It is recommended that this practice be continued. The new polling districts and places will be coterminous with arrangements for the existing Exeter Parliamentary Constituency and the part of the East Devon Parliamentary Constituency contained within the Exeter City Council Boundary.

The (Acting) Returning Officer has, for a number of years, employed the principle of avoiding the use of schools as polling stations, although this is not always possible where there is a lack of suitable alternative accommodation. It is recommended that this practice be continued, although it should be noted that at the moment, due to the lack of suitable alternative accommodation the number of schools to be used as polling stations will remain at 13 from a total of 56 polling station venues.

Whilst this is regrettable, every effort will be made to reduce this number if practically possible. It should be further noted that whilst the Returning Officer has a statutory right to use a school as a polling station, it is a decision for the school itself as to whether this use can be facilitated whilst the school is in operation. (Eighty percent of schools are able to remain open).

9.3 Alphington Ward (See Map 1)

Currently consists of 4 polling districts AA, AB, AC and AD.

The current polling districts of AA and AD to be merged and to be referred to as AA. This is due to the demise of St. Andrew's Church as a polling station. The new arrangement will consist of 3 polling districts AA, AB and AC.

9.4 Duryard & St. James Ward (See Map 2)

Currently consists of 4 polling districts BA, BB, BC and BD.

The current polling districts of BB and BC to be merged into BB. The current polling district of BD to be renamed BC. The new arrangement will consist of 3 polling districts BA, BB and BC

9.5 Exwick Ward

No changes proposed.

9.6 Heavitree Ward

No changes proposed.

9.7 Mincinglake and Whipton

No changes proposed.

9.8 Newtown & St. Leonard's Ward

No changes proposed.

9.9 Pennsylvania Ward

No changes proposed.

9.10 Pinhoe Ward

No changes proposed.

9.11 Priory Ward

No changes proposed.

9.12 St. David's Ward

No changes proposed.

9.13 St. Loye's Ward

No changes proposed.

8.14 St. Thomas Ward

No changes proposed.

9.15 Topsham Ward

No changes proposed.

9.16 Bearing in mind the continuing availability of suitable accommodation, and taking on board comments received following recent elections as to the suitability of some of the polling stations, the opportunity has also been taken to review polling stations within the City. This has led to the following changes:

- a) Electors currently allocated to polling district AA will be merged with the electors of AD and a double polling station set up at West Exe Technology College.
- b) Electors currently allocated to the polling district at BB, Lopes Hall, will be merged with the electors at BC and Exeter Cricket Club used as a polling station.

Members should be aware that the decision as to where a polling station is located, is the responsibility of the Returning Officer, who would take all the necessary details into account.

10. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

10.1 By making polling districts and places coterminous, allows the (Acting) Returning Officer discretion to locate a Polling Station within that area which best meets the needs of the area and the electors within.

11. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

11.1 There are no risks associated with the proposals

12. What is the impact of the decision on health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and adults with care and support needs, economy, safety and the environment?

12.1 Ensuring that polling stations are as accessible as possible (within the constraints of the buildings available and the topography of the City), positively impacts on equality issues especially for the disabled elector. The use of schools as polling stations has been raised as a potential safeguarding issue. The Returning Officer works with the schools themselves to minimise any such risk, mainly through the use of facilities on site which, in the majority of cases, allows the school to remain open to pupils on polling day. As stated elsewhere in this report, the closure of a school on polling day, ultimately lies with the schools themselves.

13. What other options are there, and why have they been dismissed?

13.1 There are no other options currently available.

13.2 The number of polling stations in the City allows for efficient running of all types of elections, and also for ease of access to them for the City's electors.

John Street
Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support and Returning Officer

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:

