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| Council Meeting | |
| Meeting Date | 29 January 2025 |
| Report Title | Review of Polling District and Place |
| EMT Lead | Larissa Reed, Chief Executive and Returning Officer |
| Head of Service | |
| Lead Officer | Jo Millard, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager |
| Classification | Open |
| Recommendations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Council notes the consultation responses to the Polling District and Place review as set out in Appendix 1. 2. That, subject to the outcome of the Boundary Review, recommendations of proposed changes to polling districts and places be considered by Council at a future date. |

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council is required to carry out a review of its arrangements for polling districts and places for parliamentary elections and in accordance with legislation, this must be complete by 31 January 2025.
- 1.2 Due to the uncertainty around the outcome of the Local Government Boundary Review, and more recently, the Government's white paper on Devolution, whilst the review has taken place and feedback received, any implementation of suggestions of changes have been paused. A further review will be required when the outcome of the Boundary Review and Devolution is known as this may introduce new boundaries for local elections from 2027.

2 Background

- 2.1 A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an area, such as a Council ward and a polling place is a geographical area within a polling district that the polling station must be located within. The Council sets the polling district and polling place, whilst the Returning Officer is responsible for designating the polling station which must be located within the polling place.
- 2.2 When designating polling districts and places, the Council must seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and that, so far as reasonable and practicable, every polling place is accessible for electors who are disabled. The Returning

Officer must also have regard to the Electoral Commission guidance which suggests that no more than 2,250 electors should be elected to a polling station.

- 2.3 Notice of the review was given on 14 October 2024 and this started a consultation period. This was published on our website, displayed at Swale Borough Council offices and all Councillors, Parish Councils, MP's, returning officer for Faversham and Mid-Kent constituency, local schools and charitable organisations such as Age Concern directly consulted. Feedback was invited on all polling districts and places, but in particular regarding arrangements for voters who are impacted by school closures on polling day and from disabled residents.
- 2.4 The feedback received was disappointingly low and was mainly focused on two areas – Ethelbert Road School, Faversham and Minster, Isle of Sheppey, and can be seen at Appendix 1.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed that, subject to the outcome of the Boundary Review and given the uncertainty around changes that might arise out of the Devolution proposals, all consultation responses be noted, and suggested venue changes be researched and suitable alternative venues be agreed by Council as required. Polling districts and places are kept under constant review and a further full review will be undertaken at a future date.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 In accordance with legislation, the review must be completed by 31 January 2025, however due to uncertainties around the outcome of the Local Government Boundary Review and the Government's white paper on Devolution, it is practical to pause consideration of changes. Council may continue to make suggestions for alternative venues; however consideration does need to be given to practical aspects in terms of the venues available within the wards.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 All Members, Parish Councils, MP's, returning Officer for Faversham and Mid-Kent constituency, local schools and charitable organisations have been consulted and the notice of the review was published on the Council's website and displayed at Council buildings.

6 Implications

| Issue | Implications |
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| Corporate Plan | Ensuring voters are able to vote at the most convenient and commodious venue within the polling place contributes to the objective to strengthen democracy within the emerging corporate plan. |
| Financial, Resource and Property | None identified at this time. |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement | The Council is required to take a full review in accordance with the Electoral Administration Act 2006, but in practice keeps polling stations under regular review. |
| Crime and Disorder | None identified at this time. |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency | None identified at this time. |
| Health and Wellbeing | None identified at this time. |
| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | None identified at this time. |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety | The purpose of the review is to ensure that all voters have reasonable facilities for voting. It is important that venues meet health and safety requirements so as not to put voters at risk and election staff have assessed the venue. Polling Station staff are encouraged to give feedback on venues and each station is visited by a Polling Station Inspector on election day. |
| Equality and Diversity | One purpose of the review is to ensure that all electors in the Borough have reasonable facilities for voting, and that as far as is reasonable and practicable, facilities for voting are accessible for disabled people. |
| Privacy and Data Protection | None identified at this time |

7 Appendices

- 7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Feedback from consultation

8 Background Papers

Notice of Review of Polling District and Places