



COUNCIL: 16 OCTOBER 2024

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive

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SUBJECT: STATUTORY POLLING REVIEW 2024 – FINAL PROPOSALS

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To enable the Council to comply with its statutory duty to review all Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places and to review all Local Government Polling Districts and Polling Places at the same time.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Final Schedule of Proposals as set out in Appendix 1, be approved.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) (the 1983 Act) makes provision about the timing of reviews of polling districts and places by local authorities in the UK. The 1983 Act, now provides that a local authority must carry out and complete a review of all the polling districts and places in its area within the period of 16 months beginning with 1 October 2013, and the period of 16 months beginning with 1 October of every fifth year after that.

3.2 The Electoral Commission (the Commission) advises that a review of polling districts and places for local government elections should be undertaken at the same time. The last review was completed in 2019.

3.3 The legislation does not prevent a local authority carrying out a review of some or all of the polling districts or polling places in its area at other times and a system for conducting interim reviews is in place and operating.

3.4 To aid understanding of the report and Appendices the following definitions will assist:-

- **Parliamentary constituency:** an area having separate representation in the House of Commons - these cannot be changed by the review. The division of these constituencies into polling districts and places is the subject of the review;
- **Polling district:** a geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency, ward, or division into smaller parts. Each parish is to be a separate polling district (unless there are special circumstances) – this means that a parish must not be in a polling district together with a part of another parish or an un-parished area;
- **Polling place:** the building or area in which the Returning Officer will select polling stations;
- **Polling station:** Chosen by the Returning Officer for the election, a polling station is the room or building within the polling place where the poll takes place.

3.5 Local authorities are required to divide every constituency into polling districts for UK parliamentary elections and to designate a polling place for each polling district. Polling places should be within the polling district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside the district. These must be reviewed every five years.

3.6 Authorities must:

- Seek to ensure that all the electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
- Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable polling places are accessible to those who are disabled;
- When considering or reviewing the designation of a polling place, have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

3.7 In West Lancashire the Review formally began on 1 March 2023 with the publication of the Notice of Review and the start of the Public Consultation on existing polling districts and places. This included the views (if any) of the (Acting) Returning Officers for West Lancashire and South Ribble.

3.8 Notice of the Review was issued to all West Lancashire Borough Councillors, West Lancashire County Councillors, the MPs for West Lancashire and South Ribble, political parties, and all Parish Clerks. Press Releases were also issued at various times during the consultation period.

3.9 During the course of the Review, following the conclusion of the initial consultation, a General Election took place. This necessitated a delay in the start of the consultation on final proposals to avoid the purdah period around that election. The timetable was amended, and the consultation ran from 26 July until 6 September 2024. The General Election also introduced new Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries which brought in a change of consultee from South Ribble to Sefton, due to the constituency change in northern area of the Borough from South Ribble to Southport.

3.10 Following determination of the Review, the Revised Register of Electors will be published on 1 December 2024.

4.0 CONSULTATIONS ON EXISTING PROVISION AND FINAL PROPOSALS

- 4.1 Submissions to the consultations could have been made in writing, by email, or online via the Council's customer engagement platform.
- 4.2 The consultation on the existing polling districts and polling places ran from 1 March 2024 until 9 May 2024.
- 4.3 In total, 84 submissions were made to the initial consultation, 82 of which were valid. Responses were received for every Ward, with the exception of Tarleton Village.
- 4.4 The consultation on the final proposals for future polling districts and polling places ran from 26 July 2024 until 6 September 2024.
- 4.5 In total, 40 submissions were made to the consultation on final proposals, all of which were valid. Responses were received for every Ward with the exceptions of North Meols & Hesketh Bank, and Rural North-East.
- 4.6 Details of each submission, to both consultations, can be seen at Appendix 2 under the appropriate ward.
- 4.7 Maps of each Ward and each Polling District are available at <https://www.westlancs.gov.uk/about-the-council/elections-and-voting/ward-and-polling-district-maps.aspx>

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 Following the initial consultation, submissions received were considered, and where appropriate, alternative options were investigated. Due to the unavailability of suitable venues in areas where alternatives were raised, no changes were put into the final proposals. Such areas, and the reasons why no change is proposed, are noted in Appendix 1.
- 5.2 The Final Proposals, as outlined in Appendix 1, are put forward to Members for their determination.
- 5.3 The Council must now decide upon appropriate Polling Districts and Polling Places for the Borough after considering the submissions received (Appendix 2).
- 5.4 It must be remembered that the responsibility of the Council is to determine Polling Districts and Polling Places. Whilst it is understandable that Members will consider actual Polling Stations when reaching their determination, responsibility for finalising the location of a Polling Station within a Polling Place rests with the Returning Officer at each election.
- 5.5 Once the Council has agreed its final proposals, whether there are changes or the status quo applies, the proposals will be made available to the public together with the reasons for them in accordance with the legislation. Appendix 1 has been produced to enable Members to consider both the decision and reasons for that decision in each case.

6.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 There will be a breach of statutory duty if the authority does not conduct a review of Parliamentary polling districts and polling places with the prescribed timeframe.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 As noted earlier in the report the Council must seek to ensure that all the electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances, and that so far as is reasonable and practicable polling places are accessible to those who have a disability. There is no significant impact on crime and disorder.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The costs of the Review have been met from existing resources by the prioritisation of workloads. Should the Final Proposals be adopted in full, as there are no changes proposed, the financial implications are cost neutral.

8.2 In the medium term, for future reviews, Members should consider the ongoing cost of the polling estate, particularly mobile unit polling stations, in relation to the benefit to local residents. Mobile unit polling stations make up 14% of all polling stations in West Lancashire, but account for 54% of the total cost (May 2024). Since 2016, the number of polling stations has reduced from 96 to 81, but the cost of the polling estate (venue hire only) has almost doubled during that time (£24k in 2016 to £42k in 2024).

Background Documents

The following background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this Report.

- Consultation responses and related correspondence

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account in the Recommendations contained within this report

Appendices

1. Statutory Polling Review 2024 Final Proposals
2. Submissions to the Initial and Final Proposals Consultations
3. Equality Impact Assessment