



## ORDINARY COUNCIL

13 DECEMBER 2023

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Jonathan Stephenson – Chief Executive & Electoral Registration Officer Carole Tatton-Bennett – Corporate Manager – Electoral Services

### REPORT SUMMARY

This report details the responses received to the recent public consultation on the review of polling districts and polling places, evaluates the issues raised and proposes an amended schedule with polling district boundary maps for Members' approval.

### RECOMMENDATION

- R1. Approve the Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places, as appended to the report, to take effect from 4 January 2024.**

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

#### 1. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Council is required to keep polling districts and polling places under review and make amendments where necessary. The recent review of the ward structure in the Brentwood Borough by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has made changes that will affect where some people go to vote.

This review sets out revised polling districts and polling places within the new ward structure drawn up by the LGBCE. It cannot amend any of the ward boundaries that have been put in place and given Government approval.

1. A revised schedule of polling districts and polling places needs to be put in place at the earliest available opportunity to ensure proper planning of the all-out Borough elections in May 2024. This includes providing information to the Returning Officer so that he can initiate plans and book and staff polling stations. It will also assist political parties and prospective candidates with the planning of their campaign activities.
2. Approval of the schedule at this meeting will allow for the publication of a revised Register of Electors in January 2024, as well as scheduled early notification to all electors of any changes to their polling station and voting arrangements.
3. The Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places before Members takes into consideration issues identified during the public consultation and subsequent cross-party discussions. The aim has been to ensure that all electors in the Borough have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. Particular attention has been given to accessibility issues, including the duties placed on the Returning Officer under the Elections Act 2022.
4. When determining the Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places, the Council is required to have regard to the recommendations of the Returning Officer. His response is attached at Appendix B.

#### **Issues identified and analysis of options available**

5. A public consultation was held between 9 September and 23 October 2023. Representations were received from two local residents and on behalf of Brentwood Access Group, Ingatestone & Fryerning Parish Council, Brentwood Conservative Group, Brentwood Labour Group and Brentwood Liberal Democrats. Appendix C.
6. The responses were analysed and clarified to determine any common themes and to identify particular proposals that had attracted adverse comment.
7. As well as the positive feed-back from members of Brentwood Access, there was wide cross-party support for the majority of proposals within the draft schedule.
8. Particular issues were raised within the following wards:

**Brentwood North** – Doddinghurst Road Church (the existing polling station) is not central to the Sawyers Hall Polling District. Alternative venues were put forward and it was further suggested that electors in the immediate vicinity of Doddinghurst Road Church could be transferred to the neighbouring polling district and vote at St George’s Church Hall.

**Brentwood South** – the lack of a suitable polling station venue within the Warley Mount Polling District. There was opposition to the proposal that electors should vote at The Nightingale Centre.

**Herongate, Ingrave & West Horndon** – the reallocation of part of Great Warley to this ward. This is a consequence of the LGBCE ward boundary review and not within the scope of this polling district and polling place review.

**Hutton North** – the proposal to merge the Long Ridings Polling District into a new Poplar Polling District and cease use of Long Ridings School as a polling station. There were comments both for and against the proposal.

**Hutton South** – the proposal to cease use of Three Arch Bridge Community Hall (Maple Hall) as a polling station and move to the Knights Way Centre. Additionally, a suggestion that electors in Brocksparkwood estate should vote at St Stephen’s Church Hall.

**Ingatstone, Fryerning & Mountnessing** – the proposal that electors in the Heybridge estate should vote at Inगतstone and Fryerning Community Hall on a permanent basis. It was suggested that an alternative venue should be used, such as Inगतstone Library or the United Reformed Church.

**Shenfield** – a suggestion that the ward should be divided into two polling districts with electors voting at an alternative venue in the north of the ward.

**Warley** – a suggestion that The Galleries should be included in the Clements Park PD and that electors voting at the Christ Church Centre should be transferred to an alternative venue closer to Keys Hall and the new housing development.

9. Officers made enquiries regarding the availability of alternate venues that had been suggested and the Council’s Health and Safety Adviser was asked to assess their suitability.
10. Once all the responses had been considered and evaluated, cross-party discussions were held to seek consensus.

### **Conclusions from cross-party discussions**

11. It was agreed that the Long Ridings Polling District should be retained due to the needs of the community it served and the convenience of the current polling station for these electors. Following discussions with Long Ridings Primary School, it was confirmed that the main hall at the school would be

made available for all elections. This would overcome the issues raised by the Returning Officer. Poplar Polling District would therefore operate as a single polling station. **Long Ridings Polling District to be retained, Long Ridings Primary School to continue as polling station but larger hall to be used.**

12. Similarly, a resolution was sought to assist the electors in the Heybridge area. Unfortunately, the alternative venues put forward by the Ingatestone & Fryerning Parish Council proved to be either unavailable or to have other issues regarding their suitability as a polling station. An alternative which evolved from discussions was for electors from Heybridge to vote at Mountnessing Village Hall. This venue has excellent facilities, sufficient capacity to operate as a double station, good parking provision and is on the bus route from Heybridge. Although the location is outside of the polling district, the Returning Officer has no objection to the proposal. As a consequence of this amendment, it was agreed that the current polling district structure should be retained in Ingatestone, Fryerning & Mountnessing Ward. **Existing Polling Districts to be retained, Mountnessing Village Hall to be used as polling station for Heybridge Polling District.**
13. There has been confirmation that the proposed redevelopment at Three Arch Bridge Community Hall (Hutton South Ward) is on hold and, following health and safety recommendations, its continued use as a polling station is viable. Therefore, electors can continue to vote at this location. **Three Arch Bridge Community Hall (Maple Hall) to remain as polling station for Three Arches Polling District.**
14. The suggestion to relocate electors in Brocksparkwood to the Thrift Park Polling District (Hutton South Ward) was accepted. Similarly, electors from The Galleries and Water Tower Road have been moved to the Clements Park Polling District (Warley Ward). **Electors to be relocated.**
15. It was accepted that identifying suitable, available polling venues within the Sawyers Hall Polling District (Brentwood North Ward) and Eagle Way Polling District (Warley Ward) would take further investigation and negotiation. These could be taken forward at the planned review in 2024. There were also no concrete proposals with regard to Shenfield Ward at this time. **Current polling district and polling station arrangements to remain with future review in 2024.**
16. The identification of a suitable polling station for the Warley Mount Polling District (Brentwood South Ward) also proved difficult. Having carried out an inspection in September 2023, the Council's Health and Safety Adviser's view was that Brentwood Mosque Community Hall could no longer be used safely as a polling station, as well as having accessibility issues. Officers had sought

an alternative venue within the polling district that met the needs of all electors and had adequate facilities for operation as a polling station.

17. As none had been identified, the proposal was to use The Nightingale Centre, just outside the polling district boundary. As well as having good facilities, it also benefited from a car park. This venue had been used on a previous occasion for electors in the Warley Mount Polling District when no other venue was available. In the absence of any appropriate venue within the polling district, it was the opinion of the Returning Officer that The Nightingale Centre should be used as the polling station for Warley Mount Polling District.
18. However, a further site visit to Brentwood Mosque in November 2023 resulted in an offer to make the Main Hall available for use as a polling station. This is at the front of the building and has a dedicated access ramp and a lobby suitable for use by tellers. Limited waiting parking is available outside the building. The Health and Safety Adviser was able to assess the facilities and confirmed that he had no issues with the alternative arrangements agreed.  
**Main Hall at Brentwood Mosque to be used as a polling station for the Warley Mount Polling District.**
19. Arising from the above, and taking into account the recommendations of the Returning Officer, the proposed schedule of polling districts and polling places was revised and is now before Members for consideration and approval.  
Appendix A.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

20. When designating polling districts, the council has a duty to seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. In addition, and unless there are special circumstances that lead the council to determine otherwise, each parish must be in a separate polling district.
21. The polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district. The polling place must also be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the polling district how they will be able to reach their designated polling station.
22. The council has a duty to consult the Returning Officer and must have regard to his recommendations when determining the schedule of polling districts and polling places.

23. It is the statutory responsibility of the Returning Officer for the particular election to provide a sufficient number of polling stations and allot the electors to those polling stations in such manner as he or she thinks the most convenient.
24. Additional duties regarding accessibility and facilities for disabled voters have been placed on the Returning Officer under the Elections Act 2022.
25. The council is required to give 14 days' notice of publication of the revised register.

### **3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

26. Officers will continue to review the arrangements in both the Sawyers Hall Polling District (Brentwood North Ward) and Eagle Way Polling District (Warley Ward). Potential alternative polling station locations have been identified and will be investigated further.
27. Updated information will be provided to Members as part of the statutory Parliamentary Constituency polling district and polling place review in summer/autumn 2024.

### **4.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

28. Failure to approve a schedule of polling districts and polling places aligned with the revised borough ward boundaries would result in the council being unable to meet its statutory duties and would jeopardise the planning, due to commence in January 2024, for the forthcoming local elections in May 2024.

### **5.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

29. Details of the existing arrangements were circulated to Ward Councillors and the relevant public notices were displayed on 23 August 2023. A draft schedule of polling districts, polling places and polling stations was published and circulated on 8 September 2023.
30. The Returning Officer was consulted and his views are contained in the Appendix to this report.
31. Responses to the public consultation, which closed on 23 October 2023, are appended to the report.
32. Brentwood Access, a local group representing those with particular expertise in regard to access and disability, were advised of the consultation and asked

for their views. Feedback on accessibility issues was also obtained through the Polling Station Inspectors' reports and visits carried out by the Council's Health and Safety Adviser.

33. Details of the proposals were also sent to Parish Councils within the Borough to seek their views on any proposals affecting their area.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Tim Willis, Director – Resources & Section 151 Officer**  
**Tel & Email: 01277 312500 / tim.willis@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

52. The proposals would mean an increase in the total number of polling stations from 49 to 50. These are sited over 38 locations. There would therefore be a small increase in costs for venue hire, equipment and staffing.

## **7.0 LEGAL/GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Claire Mayhew, Acting Joint Director – People & Governance & Monitoring Officer**  
**Tel & Email 01277 312500 / Claire.mayhew@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

51. The recommendations set out within this report are lawful and within the Council's powers and duties. The Council has statutory duties within an existing legal framework to designate polling districts and polling places.

In conducting a review of such polling places the local authority must seek to ensure that (i) all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and (ii) the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.

The Council must consult on its review of polling places, including seeking representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for people with different forms of disability, and ensure that the outcome of this consultation is conscientiously taken into account as part of any lawful decision-making process.

## **8.0 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Phil Drane, Director - Place**  
**Tel & Email 01277 312500 / phil.drane@brentwood.rochford.gov.uk**

52. No economic implications.

## **9.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

**Name & Title: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager - Communities, Leisure and Health**

**Tel & Email 01277 312500 kim.anderson@brentwood.gov.uk**

The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful.
- b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

The Returning Officer has a duty to ensure polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.

There is also opportunity for voters to apply for a postal vote or proxy vote if required.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

**Name & Title: Henry Muss, Sustainability & Climate Officer**

**Tel & Email 01277 312500 henry.muss@brentwood.gov.uk**

52. No direct implications.

### **REPORT AUTHOR:**

**Name: Carol Davis**

**Title: Electoral Services Officer**

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**Email: carol.davis@brentwood.gov.uk**

## **APPENDICES**



Appendix A - Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places: December 2023 (with accompanying maps showing polling district boundaries)

Appendix B - Returning Officer's Response

Appendix C - Responses received to the public consultation

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Proposed Schedule of Polling Districts, Polling Places & Polling Stations (Sept 2023)  
– website

Introduction to Proposal District Proposal Document – website

Notice of Review – website

Background information for Members – Electoral Services Office

Polling Station Inspection reports – Electoral Services Office

Polling Station Suitability Reviews 2023 – Electoral Services Office

### **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Ordinary Council</b>	<b>16/03/2022</b>