



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**17<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2024**

**REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES (AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION/RETURNING OFFICER)**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The Representation of the People Act 1983 requires local authorities to conduct a review of parliamentary polling districts, places and stations at least every five years. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the outcome of the review and associated consultation exercise undertaken during Autumn/Winter 2023 and to consider the suggested proposals for amendments to certain existing Polling Districts, Places and/or Stations.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Council:

- 2.1 Notes the responses received in relation to the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations Review which are summarised at Appendix 2 to the report;
- 2.2 Approves the proposals to amend existing Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report and notes that the Electoral Registration Officer would implement any consequential changes to the register of electors; and
- 2.3 Notes that the Returning Officer will continue to monitor Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations as outlined in Appendix 1 and/or where no suitable alternative venue is available at any relevant time note any changes would be made in consultation with the relevant Local Member(s).

### **3. DEFINITION OF TERMS**

- 3.1 A **Polling District** is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a UK Parliamentary Constituency or a local Electoral Division, commonly referred to as a Ward.
- 3.2 A **Polling Place** is a geographical area in which a Polling Station is located. It can be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire Polling District. The Polling Place shall be an area in the Polling District, except where special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the Polling District.
- 3.3 A **Polling Station** is the actual area or specific room where the process of voting takes place i.e. where voters cast their votes. It must be located within the Polling Place designated for the particular Polling Station.

### **4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

- 4.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and the Review of Polling District & Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC has a duty to divide the district into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each polling district. It also has to keep these arrangements under review.
- 4.2 In order to comply with the above legislation the Council is required to complete a full review of all polling districts and polling places every five years. However this does not prevent changes being made at any time prior to the next review.
- 4.3 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. This compulsory review had to be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive).
- 4.4 Subsequent compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.

### **5. AIM OF THE POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATION REVIEW**

- 5.1 Local Authorities must seek to ensure that:
- a) All of the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
  - b) So far as is reasonable and practicable, all Polling Places are accessible to all their electors, including those with disabilities;
  - c) Each Community shall, in the absence of special circumstances, be a separate Polling District.

- 5.2 The Polling Districts, Places and Stations Review does not cover the following areas:
- a) The boundaries of UK Parliamentary Constituencies;
  - b) The borders, names and electoral areas of Local Authorities.
- 5.3 For UK parliamentary elections, the powers and duties of the Returning Officer are discharged by the designated 'Acting Returning Officer'. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Acting Returning Officer is the Electoral Registration Officer appointed by the Council (Mr. Andy Wilkins).
- 5.4 The choice of fully accessible buildings for use as polling stations is limited, and they are not always located in an area which is convenient for electors. As the Council has rationalised its accommodation this has created some additional issues if arrangements cannot be made to ensure continued use of a premises as a Polling Station. Electoral Services staff, on behalf of the (Acting) Returning Officer, undertake a continuous assessment of the premises used as polling stations, in order to seek alternative more suitable solutions where necessary. Furthermore, the review has sought to minimise disruption to schools and to find a permanent polling place to cease the use of hiring portacabins where ever practicable.

5.5 Timetable for the review

Start of the review (Publication of Notice of Review of Polling Districts and Places)	9th October 2023
Deadline for receiving representations and submissions	17th November 2023
Electoral Services and Returning Officer's comments published	4th December 2023
Deadline for receipt of representations on the Returning Officer's Comments	15th December 2023
Council to consider proposals and agree recommendations	17th January 2024
Revised arrangements come into force	1st February 2024

**6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1. A public notice was published and included on the Council's website. All ward members, MSs, MPs, Community Council clerks, Local Disability Forums, RCT Older Persons Advisory Group as well as the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner and the (Acting) Returning Officers for Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil due to the parliamentary cross boundary arrangements, have been consulted. The Deputy Returning Officer also attended a meeting of the Local Disability Forum to discuss the review and obtain feedback.

6.2. Comments received as part of the review are set out in Appendix 2.

## **7. EQUALITY AND ENGAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening process took place prior to the consultation period. The outcome indicated that it was low priority and a full report was not required. The aims of the review are to ensure so far as is reasonable and practicable, all Polling Places are accessible to all their electors, including those with disabilities and this is therefore at the forefront of the Returning Officers' considerations.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no specific financial implications associated with this report. However Members should note the use of hiring portacabins is in the region of circa £2K+ and therefore in respect of Local Elections this is a cost that is borne by the Council and/or relevant Community Council. The Returning Officer is able to utilise Council owned buildings and Schools (subject to payment of associated utility costs) free of charge.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

9.1 The results of the review and suggested changes, where relevant are highlighted in Appendix 1 to the report. There are a number of polling stations which are generally suitable but alternatives have been identified. There is a Polling district where we have not been able to confirm/finalise a suitable polling station as yet and we continue to search for a location ahead of the next election. Members should note any future changes are made in consultation with the Local Ward Member(s).