

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

10 NOVEMBER 2023

Returning Officer Delegated Report

Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

Purpose of the Report

1. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Review of Polling District and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council is required to divide every constituency situated within its area into polling districts for the purposes of UK Parliamentary elections, to designate a polling place for each polling district, and to keep these under review
2. In order to comply with the above legislation Neath Port Talbot County Borough 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 if required. The arrangements made for United Kingdom Parliamentary elections are also used at all other elections and referenda.
3. Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amended the 1983 Act required an initial review to be conducted and completed within the period of 16 months beginning with 1 October 2013 and subsequently every five years (intending to bring reviews in line with the new cycle of UK Parliamentary terms and boundary reviews).

4. The current review commenced on 2 October, 2023 and is due to conclude on 1 December, 2023.
5. The Returning Officer has personal responsibility for deciding on the number and location of Polling Stations within the County Borough.
6. The Returning Officer has decided to conduct both Reviews (Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Review of Polling Stations) simultaneously so as to make it more convenient for people to respond to the process.

Definition of Terms

7. A polling district is the smallest geographical sub-division of a local electoral ward.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.

Aim of the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review

11. Local Authorities must seek to ensure that:
 - a) All 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;

12. The Polling Districts and Polling Places Review does not cover the following areas:

- a) The boundaries of UK Parliamentary Constituencies;
- b) The borders, names and electoral areas of Local Authorities.

Polling District and Polling Places Review Procedure

13. The review procedure followed by the Local Authority is summarised below:

14. **Stage 1** - The Authority gives public notice of its intention to undertake a review and invites comments and submissions from any interested parties;

15. **Stage 2** - The Authority considers all submissions received before a final determination regarding the new Polling Districts and Polling Places structure is made by the Returning Officer. However, there is no requirement to change any existing arrangements. The outcome of the review is then published.

16. Feedback submissions are considered by the Returning Officer and decisions taken accordingly.

Joint Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

17. Stage 1 commenced on 2 October 2023 with the publication of the Notice of Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations on the Council Website. The notice invited comments and submissions on the existing arrangements and the Returning Officer's Observations (Appendix 1) by 2 November 2023. An online consultation form for the review was also published on the Council's website.

18. Concurrently, correspondence inviting feedback on the current arrangements and the Returning Officer's Observations were sent to:
 - a) All Councillors, MPs, MSs and Community / Town Councils representing the area of Neath Port Talbot; and
 - b) Groups who represent protected characteristics, such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Communities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), and Disabilities via the Communities of Practice forum.
19. The submissions received during the consultation are summarised in Appendix 2 'summary of consultation responses received'. These assisted in the formulation of the final decisions relating to polling districts and polling places which are set out in Appendix 3 of the report. Appendix 3 summarises changes made by the Returning Officer to polling station arrangements.
20. A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
21. Following the First Stage Impact Assessment it was determined that it was not necessary for a Full Impact Assessment to be conducted due to the predominately low impact and risk associated with changing the location of polling stations within some areas of the County Borough.

22. Furthermore, while it is accepted that in some instances electors may have a slightly longer journey to their polling station, all electors will be notified of the changes at the earliest possible opportunity and be reminded of the facility to apply for a postal or proxy vote should they deem the location of the new polling station to be inconvenient for them.

Determination

23. As Returning Officer, I have considered the responses as set out in Appendix 2. These assisted in the formulation of my final decision relating to polling districts and polling places which are set out in Appendix 3 of the report. Appendix 3 summarises the changes made to polling station arrangements.
24. The decisions provide for the effective management of the electoral process within the County Borough and to discharge the various legal duties referenced in the report which are placed on the Council and the Chief Executive in their role as Returning Officer.
25. In exercise of the delegated authority granted to me in the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Constitution and as Returning Officer I confirm:
- (a) that there be no changes to any of the polling districts and polling places (other than a re-sequencing of polling district codes as appropriate to accommodate the new UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries in due course).
 - (b) the changes that I intend to make to the location of certain polling stations as set out in Appendix 3.
26. The revised polling arrangements will come into force on 1, December, 2023.

Returning Officer's Decisions

27. To confirm the Returning Officer's decision that there be no changes to any of the Polling Districts and Polling Places within the County Borough.

Signed:



Name: **Karen Jones (Returning Officer)**

Date: **10 November 2023**

Appendices

28. Appendix 1 - Returning Officer's Observations
29. Appendix 2 - Summary of Consultation Responses Received
30. Appendix 3 - Final Recommendations of the Returning Officer in relation to Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

Background Papers

31. First Stage Integrated Impact Assessment

Officer Contacts

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