

North Yorkshire Council

Standards and Governance Committee

13 December 2023

North Yorkshire Polling District and Polling Place Review Final Proposals

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Committee are asked to approve the final recommendations for polling districts and polling places within the North Yorkshire Council area.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Local authorities are required to review their polling districts and polling places for UK parliamentary constituencies at least once every five years. Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the compulsory review periods are now:
- a) The period of 16 months beginning with 1 October 2013, and
 - b) The period of 16 months beginning with 1 October of every fifth year after that.
- 2.2 The current compulsory review period commenced on 1 October 2023, and this is the first time that a polling district review has been conducted as North Yorkshire Council (NYC).
- 2.3 A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election. Currently NYC has 888 polling districts, with around 560 stations.
- 2.4 A polling place is the building or area in which the (Acting) Returning Officer (A)RO will allocate a polling station. The polling place should be designated so that the polling station is within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.
- 2.5 As required under 18C(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 the Council gave notice of the review of polling districts and polling places, and the timetable set out as follows:

ACTION	DATE
Commence Review	Monday 16 October 2023
Consultation deadline	November 13 November 2023
Decision at Standards and Governance Committee	Wednesday 13 December 2023
Publish Notice of Changes	Monday 18 December 2023
PUBLISH REVISED ELECTORAL REGISTER	Thursday 1 February 2024

- 2.6 In addition to the 5 yearly statutory review, local authorities can undertake interim reviews at any time to make changes to the polling district/place schedule if required due to buildings becoming unavailable or other reasons. The Returning Officer may also make changes to polling stations at short notice if required for the delivery of a poll.

3.0 APPROACH TAKEN AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 There are a number of legislative requirements for polling district and polling place reviews. These are:

- each parish must be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply;
- the council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors;
- the polling place must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district;
- the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station;
- Local authorities must also comply with accessibility requirements which are that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place should be accessible to electors who are disabled.

3.2 Within the next two years, a Local Government Boundary Review will be undertaken, and as a result, a further polling district and polling places review will be required to account for any new electoral boundaries established following the completion of the boundary review. With this in mind, changes have only been recommended where:

- the existing polling place was no longer available
- where the existing polling place is no longer suitable for continued use as a polling station, or,
- in the case of polling districts, merges have been recommended where both polling districts are in the same electoral area and are already using the same polling station, and where the ratio of electors to stations as recommendation by the Electoral Commission can be met (2,500 electors max to a station, though polling places can be split into multiple polling stations if space allows).

3.3 Initial recommendations were published at the start of the review, shared and representations sought as part of the required consultation process.

3.4 The full list of polling districts and the final recommendation for each one is shown in Appendix C, and the list of recommended changes to current arrangements is shown in Appendix D.

4.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND RESPONSES

4.1 In carrying out consultation the Council has followed the Electoral Commission guidance on how the review should be conducted. Appendix A sets out the list of consultees from whom representations were sought during the consultation period.

4.2 The Council consulted the (A)RO of the six current parliamentary constituencies within North Yorkshire, who made representations on existing and proposed arrangements. The Council published the (A)RO's proposals and invited comments. It is important to note that the proposed recommendations have been made to factor in the changes to Parliamentary constituency boundaries that come into force at the next General Election.

4.3 In addition to the usual groups interested in electoral arrangements the Council particularly wanted to include and obtain comments and views of disability groups within the NYC area, which was achieved through engaging with NYCs Consultation Team.

4.4 The notice of review was published on 16th October along with a copy of the initial recommendations on the Council's website [Previous consultations | North Yorkshire Council](#) to allow anyone to make representation, following a media release to publicise it.

Initial recommendations formed a consultation document, generated by Constituency, and then further divided by NYC Division, listing each polling district and its designated polling place.

- 4.5 Paper copies of the documents were placed in council offices around North Yorkshire. NYC social media feeds were also used to promote the consultation at the start of, during, and towards the end of the consultation.
- 4.6 During the consultation period, 135 responses were received. Of those, approximately 50% were in favour / supportive of changes, and 50% against.
- 4.7 A summary of all responses received can be seen in Appendix B. The (A)RO has also made comments against all representations.
- 4.8 Of those that were against the proposals, 23 were specifically opposing the recommendation to move the polling place in Low Row in the Richmond (Yorks) constituency to nearby Gunnerside. Many of the representations received referred to recent and ongoing improvements to the accessibility of the building. As a result, the final recommendation for this polling district is to retain the polling place at Low Row Institute.
- 4.9 A further 20 representations were specifically opposed to the recommendation to move the polling place in Dallowgill in the Skipton and Ripon constituency to Kirkby Malzeard. As a result of these representations, the Electoral Services team made a visit to the Methodist School Room in Dallowgill and assessed its suitability for continued use as a polling place. The conclusion was that it is not suitable to be used as a polling station due to the poor access for voters with disabilities and due to the condition of the building and the facilities. The final recommendation is unchanged from the initial recommendation to move the polling place for Dallowgill to Kirkby Malzeard Mechanics Institute.
- 4.10 As a consequence of representations received during the consultation period, site visits were carried out by members of the Electoral Services team where necessary, and changes were made to the initial recommendations as a result of the consultation process in five instances shown in the table below.

Constituency	Division	Polling District at 1 Dec 2022	Polling Place	(Acting) Returning Officer Initial Recommendation	(Acting) Returning Officer Final Recommendation
Harrogate and Knaresborough	High Harrogate & Kingsley	HRJAH1H	Starbeck Methodist Church	Merge with HRJAH2H. No change to polling station	Do not merge polling districts. Create new polling district boundary. Polling station to change to Christ Church Parish Centre

Harrogate and Knaresborough	High Harrogate & Kingsley	HRJAH2H	Starbeck Methodist Church	Merge with HRJAH1H. No change to polling station	Do not merge polling districts. Create new polling district boundary.
Richmond (Yorks)	Morton-on-Swale & Appleton Wiske	HBMO02R	Danby Wiske Village Hall	No change to polling station.	Change polling station to Kirkby Fleetham Village Hall
Richmond (Yorks)	Upper Dales	RIHA01R	Gunnerside Village Hall	Merge with RIHA04R. No change to polling station.	Do not merge polling districts. No change to polling station
Richmond (Yorks)	Upper Dales	RIHA04R	Low Row Institute	Merge with RIHA01R. Change polling station to Gunnerside Village Hall	Do not merge polling districts. No change to polling station
Richmond (Yorks)	Aiskew & Leeming Bar	HBBE02R	Leeming Village Hall	No change to polling station.	Change polling station to The Reubans, Leeming Bar
Thirsk and Malton	Sowerby & Topcliffe	HBSO05T	Sowerby Scout Hut	No change to polling station.	Create new polling district to account for new homes build at Sowerby Gateway. No change to polling station until suitable venue for new polling district is identified.
Thirsk and Malton	Sowerby & Topcliffe	HBSO05T	Sowerby Scout Hut	No change to polling station.	Create new polling district to account for new homes build at Sowerby Gateway. No change to polling station until suitable venue for new polling district is identified.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 *Amend the final recommendations:* Any amendments to the final recommendations may require a further consultation on the amended recommendations. An additional period of consultation would lead to a delay in the implementation date for polling districts and effect the publication of the revised register of electors planned for 01 February, 2024 and potentially impact the preparations for the elections expected in 2024.
- 5.2 *Not to approve the final recommendations:* To not approve the recommendations would leave NYC in breach of its duty to review polling district and polling places.
- 5.3 Where alternative proposals were received as a result of the consultation process, each proposal was considered. Where necessary, visits to alternative venues have been made and a response to each representation proposal received is detailed in Appendix B along with any revisions that have been made to the initial proposals as a result.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The recommendations in the polling district review are broadly cost neutral as the overall number of polling places used is almost the same as the pre-existing arrangements.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the Council to undertake this review between the period of 1 October 2023 and January 2025.

8.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment Screening Form has been completed and can be found at appendix E

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None. An initial climate change impact assessment form is attached at Appendix F.

10.0 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Breach of Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 by not conducting and completing this review within the given timescales.

10.2 Pressures of scheduled and unscheduled elections expected in 2024 would not easily allow this review to be undertaken any later, particularly given the uncertain nature the timing of the next UK Parliamentary General Election which must be held before by January 2025.

11.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 To ensure compliance with Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

11.2 To ensure polling districts and polling places are fit for purpose, having been reviewed by North Yorkshire Council after its formation, on 01 April 2024, and in consultation with the (A)RO.

13.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

i) to approve the final recommendations for polling districts and designated polling places as shown in Appendix C.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Consultee List

Appendix B – Summary List of all Responses to Consultation

Appendix C – Full Schedule of Final Recommendations

Appendix D – List of Recommendations which would change existing arrangements

Appendix E – Equality Impact Assessment Screening Form

Appendix F – Climate Change Impact Assessment Screening Form

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

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13 December 2023

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.