



## Governance Committee

### Review of Polling Districts and Places – Electoral Services

**Date:** 18 December 2024

**Key decision:** N/A

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** ALL WARDS

**Contributors:** Jamie Baker, Head of Electoral Services

### Outline and recommendations

Governance Committee is asked to: -

1. consider the Returning Officer's proposals for changes to Lewisham's polling scheme;
2. make recommendations for further changes and/or consultation with councillors;
3. recommend the revised polling scheme (with their proposed changes) for approval by Council in January.

### Timeline of engagement and decision-making

- 11 September – briefing provided to Governance Committee and discussion on general principles for the review
- 13 September – formal notice of review published. Start of formal consultation period (internal and external)
- 25 October – deadline for representations
- 18 December – report to Governance Committee for feedback and directions
- 10 January 2025 – Returning Officer to publish final proposals
- 22 January 2025 – Approval of final polling scheme at Full Council meeting

## 1. Summary

1.1. The council is required to undertake a statutory review of polling districts and

polling places every 5 years. The current review began on 13 September and must be completed by 31 January 2025. The Returning Officer has created draft proposals for all wards that have been shared with all councillors.

- 1.2. Officers have used feedback from previous elections since the last review in 2021, alongside representations received from residents and local parties. Where the proposals are recommending a change to polling district boundaries, or polling places, the relevant ward councillors have been contacted directly for feedback and approval.
- 1.3. The proposals are being shared with the Governance Committee for feedback and further direction before they are finalised. The proposals will then be revised to include all changes recommended by the Committee. Final proposals are due to go to Council for formal approval in January 2025.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. Governance Committee is asked to: -
  1. consider the Returning Officer's proposals for changes to Lewisham's polling scheme;
  2. make recommendations for further changes and/or consultation with councillors;
  3. recommend the revised polling scheme (with their proposed changes) for approval by Council in January.

## **3. Policy Context**

- 3.1. This report aligns with Lewisham's Corporate Priorities, as set out in the Council's [Corporate Strategy \(2022-2026\)](#): -
  - Cleaner and Greener
  - A Strong Local Economy
  - Quality Housing
  - Children and Young People
  - Safer Communities
  - Open Lewisham
  - Health and Wellbeing
- 3.2. In particular, this report is closely aligned to priority "Open Lewisham" because our polling scheme is designed to enable all residents to participate in elections, removing barriers for those with protected characteristics, and promoting equality.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1. Lewisham's last polling district review took place in 2021, in advance of the changes to ward boundaries which came into effect in May 2022. The boundaries for our wards and parliamentary constituencies are not in scope for this review – only the polling districts and polling places.
- 4.2. Lewisham has 19 wards and 3 Parliamentary constituencies. Lewisham's current polling scheme has 98 polling districts, 96 polling places and 120 polling stations.

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The draft proposals would create a polling scheme with 89 polling districts, 88 polling places, and 116 polling places.

- 4.3. The small reduction in polling districts and polling places is bought about through the use of some new and better venues, moving district boundaries to better distribute voters, and maximising the use of our best venues.
- 4.4. The full suite of draft proposals for the polling scheme, along with an equalities impact assessment, can be found in a separate report, provided as an appendix.

## 5. Financial implications

- 5.1. A small number of polling place changes have been proposed to reduce the cost. However, the cost of a polling place is not the primary concern, of more importance is the accessibility of voting for our residents.
- 5.2. Overall, the proposed changes to our polling scheme will not have any significant financial impact.

## 6. Legal implications

- 6.1. By order of section 18c of the Representation of the People Act, the Returning Officer for Lewisham Council is required to undertake a review of all polling districts and places every 5 years. The current review period ends on 31 January 2025.
- 6.2. The legislative provisions are supported by further guidance published by the Electoral Commission. The Returning Officer has applied all guidance and legislative requirements in publishing the notice of review, the consultation period, receipt of representations, and decision making process.
- 6.3. Lewisham's constitution has no delegation of the decision for approving the polling scheme, and therefore the decision must be made by Full Council at a formal meeting.

## 7. Risk Implications

Risk	Mitigation
Failure to complete statutory review by the deadline.	Early publication of notice. Confirmed item on agenda for January Full Council meeting.
Councillors are not able to approve Returning Officer's proposals.	Direct engagement with ward councillors with proposals for their ward. RO to make all changes recommended by councillors, and where that is not possible, to reach understanding and agreement on the reasons and the best possible scheme. Make no change if no agreement can be made.
New polling scheme not communicated to voters.	Comms and engagement officers to help publish the review and consultation

	documents. Once final scheme is approved, electoral services to write to all voters several times in advance of 2026 elections (and any unscheduled polls). Reminders sent before every poll.
New scheme not fit for purpose	Rigorous consultation from councillors and interested residents. Engagement from facilities, highways and other relevant council teams. Application of electoral commission guidance and performance standards.

## 8. Equalities implications

- 8.1. The Committee is directed to the separate Equalities Impact Assessment which is appended to the formal Polling District Review proposals documents (Appendix A). In summary, all changes have been considered in line with equality legislation. In particular, we have considered the impact on residents with protected characteristics.
- 8.2. All polling places are subject to a site assessment where electoral officers visit the premises and conduct a thorough assessment of the facilities, access and location. Note that no polling place will be recommended that doesn't pass the site assessment. The assessment includes access, size of venue, width of entrance and internal doors, space for tellers, lighting, ventilation, kitchen and restroom facilities, etc. In particular, the officer must conduct checks for the accessibility of the site in order to determine suitability as a polling place with regards to people with a disability. This includes: -
- Access for the mobility disabled, e.g. wheelchair users, mobility scooters, etc;
  - Transport – bus stops, parking (regular and disabled);
  - Light;
  - Access for visually impaired.

## 9. Climate change and environmental implications

- 9.1. Local polling places allow voters to walk or cycle to their polling place. This reduces the requirement for voters to use a car. Where possible, polling places are situated close to public transport stops and hubs, again enabling residents to avoid using a car.
- 9.2. Postal voting is available for all voters, and targeted communications encourage people to consider postal voting if they would otherwise find it difficult to attend a polling station for any reason.

## 10. Crime and disorder implications

- 10.1. There are no crime and disorder implications.

## 11. Health and wellbeing implications

- 11.1. The accessibility of polling places, and ability to vote, are important. Participation

in the democratic process can benefit mental health and wellbeing. Residents need to feel like their opinion matters.

## 12. Background papers

- 12.1. Appendix A – PD Review 24-25. RO Proposals. Initial. V1. (Word document includes maps, additional maps supplied separately for ease of access)

## 13. Glossary

- 13.1. [Link to Oxford English Dictionary here.](#)

Term	Definition
Polling District	An area of residential properties containing electors who are allocated to a polling place
Polling Place	The building or area where polling stations are situated
Polling Station	A room or building which is used for the issuing of ballot papers to voters

## 14. Report author(s) and contact

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## 15. Appendices

- 15.1. Please attach appendices as separate documents and list them below.
- Appendix A – PD Review 24-25. RO Proposals. Initial. V1