

Committee: **Council**

Date of Meeting: **23rd January, 2025**

Report Subject: **Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places/Stations 2024**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor S. Thomas – Leader of the Council/Cabinet Member – Corporate & Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Andrea Jones, Head of Legal & Corporate Compliance**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
20/12/2024							23/01/2025	

## 1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to seek Council approval to amend the current polling districts and polling places in response to the polling districts and places review that has been carried out.

## 2. Scope and Background

2.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and the Review of Polling District and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has a duty to divide the district into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each polling district. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The compulsory review must be completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025. This does not prevent changes being made to polling districts, places or stations between full reviews, where necessary or appropriate, and polling stations are inspected every time an election is held to ensure the polling station is accessible and is properly laid out to promote ease and secrecy of voting.

2.2 A review notice was published on the 28 October 2024 which provided notice of the Council's intention to carry out this review, and the timescales involved, along with a background document and a schedule of polling districts, places and stations on the Council's website. The notice asked residents, members, community councils, Senedd members, the Police & Crime Commissioner for Gwent and members of Parliament for their comments on the existing arrangements and any proposals for change by, 27 November 2024.

2.3 The review focused on asking people for their views about polling districts, places and stations in Blaenau Gwent (which are defined below), and any proposals for change.

- A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a constituency, district ward or division into smaller parts.
- A polling place is a building or area in which polling stations will be located.
- A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place.

2.4 The review did not address or ask about the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies or the boundaries and names of local authorities and electoral areas within Blaenau Gwent, as these issues were outside the remit of this review.

2.5 This review only intended to focus on polling districts, places or stations where it was evidently necessary or appropriate and the review was about the buildings in which voting takes place – not the specific rooms within buildings, or specific areas. It was not a root-and-branch review without constraints, but had at its base the belief that the aim was to increase the number of people who vote at elections, not decrease the number by disrupting existing arrangements which in some cases have been in place for many years.

2.6 The list of polling stations and proposals published as part of the review can be found at appendix 1.

2.7 Comments arising from the review were received from County Borough Councillors for Llanhilleth and Brynmawr:-

#### 2.7.1 Llanhilleth

Following representations from electors in the Llanhilleth Ward, a proposal was made to use Zion Congregational Vestry, High Street, Llanhilleth instead of Llanhilleth Institute, Meadow Street, Llanhilleth for electors in the BP polling district.

Electors living in the BP polling district that did not have transport, electors with mobility issues and the elderly found that the polling station at Llanhilleth Institute was too far to reach. Zion Congregational Vestry has been used as a polling station for elections prior to Covid and following an inspection of the property it was deemed to be suitable to use as a polling station.

#### 2.7.2 Nantyglo

A Brynmawr Ward Member informed the Council that Holy Trinity & St Anne's Church, Nantyglo has permanently closed and would no longer be available

to use as a Polling Station. There is no other suitable polling station in the BE1 Garnfach electoral ward, therefore OAP Hall, Chapel Road, Nantyglo, which is currently used as a polling station for the BR - Nantyglo electoral ward, will be used as a double station.

2.7.3 No other comments were received.

2.8 The review is an opportunity to update and combine some polling districts. A number of polling stations have closed since the last compulsory review and electors were moved to existing polling stations within the Ward. The electoral registers have not been amended to reflect these changes. It is also an opportunity to update the register structure.

2.9 The final list of proposed polling stations following the review can be found at appendix 2.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

#### 3.1 **Option1**

To approve the list of polling stations and register amendments which can be found at appendix 2 and implement these changes with effect from 1 February 2025 when the new register of electors is published.

#### **Options 2**

To consider the information in the report and suggest additional or alternative changes.

### 4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

There is a legislative requirement to carry out a compulsory review of polling districts and polling places/stations.

### 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

#### 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The proposal in the report to use Zion Congregational Vestry as a polling station instead of Llanhilleth Institute will incur additional hire costs as Llanhilleth Institute is currently used as a double polling station.

#### 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Polling stations are reviewed before each election to ensure they are still suitable premises to be used, and if not, alternative premises are sought.

### 5.3 **Legal**

The review is being carried out in accordance with the relevant legislation.

### 5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no human resource implications associated with this report.

### 5.5 **Health and Safety**

A risk assessment is carried out on each polling station to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

N/A

### 6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

Polling Stations are accessible and situated within the easy reach of electors to enable them to vote.

### 6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

As part of the review process, the following have been consulted;

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Councillors
- The Town Clerks of the Town and Community Councils
- Member of Parliament for Blaenau Gwent
- Welsh Assembly Members
- The Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent
- Any other stakeholders, including electors, by way of public notice and the Council's website

### 6.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

Polling stations are reviewed before each election.

### 6.5 **Preventative focus**

N/A

### 6.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

N/A

### 6.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

N/A

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

N/A

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)***

An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 A compulsory review is carried out every 10 years and the findings are reported to Council. A review is also undertaken before each election to ensure that the premises are still available and suitable for use as a polling station.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

- Appendix 1 – The list of polling stations and proposals published as part of the review
- Appendix 2 - The final list of polling stations following the review