

Thurrock: An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

General Services Committee

The meeting will be held at **6.00 pm** on **10 October 2023**

Committee Room 2, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex RM17 6SL

Membership:

Councillors Andrew Jefferies (Chair), John Kent (Vice-Chair), Deborah Arnold, Kairen Raper, Graham Snell, Luke Spillman and Lynn Worrall

Substitutes:

Councillors Paul Arnold, George Coxshall, Barry Johnson, Ben Maney, Valerie Morris-Cook, Sara Muldowney and Lee Watson

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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1 Apologies for Absence	
2 Public Minutes	5 - 8
To approve as a correct record the Public Minutes of General Services Committee meeting held on 24 August 2023.	
3 Items of Urgent Business	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
4 Declarations of Interests	

Exclusion of the Public and Press

Members are asked to consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an agenda item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 or it being confidential for the purposes of Section 100A(2) of that Act.

In each case, Members are asked to decide whether, in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

5 Shortlisting - Assistant Chief Executive, Executive Director of Place, Chief Financial Officer and Executive Director of Corporate Services (Monitoring Officer)

Paperwork for this item will follow under separate cover.

6 Exempt Minutes 9 - 14

To approve as a correct record the Exempt Minutes of General Services Committee meeting held on 24 August 2023.

7 Post Election Report - 4 May 2023 15 - 24

8 Polling District and Places Review 2023 25 - 34

9 Employment Matter - Finance Department Restructure - to follow.

Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **2 October 2023**

Information for members of the public and councillors

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;
- Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and
- leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
 - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
 - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
 - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
 - Fewer public buildings with better services

3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
 - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
 - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
 - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

PUBLIC Minutes of the Meeting of the General Services Committee held on 24 August 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Andrew Jefferies (Chair), John Kent (Vice-Chair), Kairen Raper, Graham Snell, Luke Spillman, Lynn Worrall and Ben Maney (Substitute) (substitute for Deborah Arnold)

Apologies: Councillor D Arnold

In attendance: Dr Dave Smith, Chief Executive and Managing Director
Commissioner
Gavin Jones, Chief Executive, Essex County Council
Jackie Hinchliffe, Director of HR, OD & Transformation
Steven Mair, Interim Chief Financial Officer
Patrick McDermott, Chief of Staff to the Thurrock
Commissioners
Jayne Middleton-Albooye, Assistant Director, Legal
Elizabeth Roy, Senior HR Business Partner
Nicole Wood, ECC Best Value Commissioner
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

12. Minutes

Public Minutes of the General Services Committee held on the 27 June 2023 and 5 July 2023 were approved as a correct record.

13. Items of Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business.

14. Declarations of Interests

There were no declaration of interests made.

15. Employment Matter - Senior Management Arrangements

Following the report presented on the 5 July 2023 to the General Services Committee with a proposed revised Senior Management structure that met the requirements of the Directions. General Services Committee supported the proposed structure enabling formal consultation to commence. This consultation took place between the 6 July 2023 and 5 August 2023. The report sets out the outcome of consultation, presenting the final Senior Management structure and the process and timescale for implementation.

The following points were raised:

ACTIONS:

RESOLVED

General Services Committee:

1. **Approved the final Senior Management Structure.**
2. **Approved the voluntary redundancy request from the Director of Public Realm as set out at Appendix 3.**
3. **Noted and approved the dismissals of the Director of HR, OD & Transformation and the Director of Strategy, Engagement & Growth through compulsory redundancy as set out in Appendix 3.**
4. **Noted the recruitment and selection timetable for the new senior positions set out in section 6.**
5. **Recommended to Commissioners the appointment of Steve Mair as S151 Officer pending the permanent appointment of the new Chief Finance Officer (Section 151).**

16. Pay Policy 2023/24 - Senior Manager Pay

General Services Committee received a report on 27 June 2023 setting out options and risks relating to the 2023/24 pay award for Senior Managers. The outcome of the report was a recommendation of no increase for Senior Managers. Counsel has confirmed the Council had a contractual commitment to pay any increase recommended by the Annual Review. The recommendation of no increase would be in breach of current employment contracts. This report sets out the position and the way forward to correct the award for the current year and confirms the review of arrangements for senior pay.

The following points were raised:

ACTIONS:

RESOLVED

General Services Committee:

1. **Noted the recommended Senior Manager Pay award of 4% as determined and by the independent assessment with effect from 1 April 2023.**
2. **Recommended the revised Pay Policy Statement (Appendix 5), incorporating the 4% award, to Council. Councillor Spillman voted against this recommendation.**
3. **Instructed the Chief Executive, as part of the wider Pay Review, to bring back to General Services Committee a review of pay and arrangements for determining on-going annual pay awards for Senior Managers.**

At 8.11pm, the committee went into exempt session.

17. Exempt Minutes of General Services Committee Meetings held on the 27 June 2023 and 5 July 2023

Exempt Minutes of the General Services Committee held on the 27 June 2023 and 5 July 2023 were approved as a correct record.

18. Employment Matter - Finance Department Restructure

This was exempt.

The meeting finished at 8.18 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

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10 October 2023		ITEM: 7
General Services Committee		
Post Election Report - 4 May 2023		
Wards and communities affected: n/a	Key Decision: n/a	
Report of: Asmat Hussain, Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer), Ian Wake, Returning Officer and Elaine Sheridan, Elections Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: n/a		
Accountable Director: Asmat Hussain, Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

A report to share with General Services Committee on the outcome and review of Elections for the Council by thirds, which took place on the 4 May 2023.

Commissioner Commentary

N/a

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Note that a high-level report with data and general information to be taken to General Services Committee for noting and comments.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The scheduled Local Government Elections for Thurrock Council took place on the 4 May 2023. The core objectives of the elections are governed by electoral legislation and guidance from the Electoral Commission.
- 2.2 The responsibility for the conduct for local elections in Thurrock resides with the Returning Officer (RO). The Acting Chief Executive was appointed to this role on 1 March 2023 and continued in the Returning Officer post for this poll.
- 2.3 Dr Dave Smith was appointed as the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer for future elections at Council on 24 May 2023, with the Director of Legal and Governance appointed as Deputy Electoral Registration Officer.

2.4 The RO may appoint one or more persons to discharge all or any of his functions and the following officers were appointed as formal deputies with full powers for this election.

- Asmat Hussain - Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)
- Elaine Sheridan - Electoral Services Manager

The following officers are appointed with limited powers

- 1 x DRO with limited powers – Postal Vote Opening
- 8 x Polling Station Inspectors – DRO with limited powers to undertake the duties of a Presiding Officer
- 1 x DRO with limited powers – to assist as Count Manager and reject Ballot Papers

The core team consisted of 2 full time permanent staff members, 1 full time, fixed term staff member and 1 temporary staff member (four-month contract).

2.5 The RO plays a central role in the democratic process ensuring that elections are administered transparently and effectively and that, as a result, the experience of voters and those standing for election is a positive one. It is recommended therefore that a review of the election and processes is undertaken post-election.

2.6 Thurrock Council elects by thirds. 16 wards were contested on 4 May 2023.

- Polling cards were delivered by hand by a team covering the borough
- 47 valid Nominations were received for the 16 wards
- The poll was conducted with 53 polling stations staffed by 53 Presiding Officers and 128 Poll Clerks.
- 12,634 absent votes were issued
- 8 Inspectors (including one office-based Inspector) were employed to assist across the borough. The office-based inspector was a new initiative and proved beneficial, freeing up the office team, providing an element of contingency in case a gender specific officer was required to review a voter ID, and assisting the Inspectors who were out in the field allowing a quicker response when needed
- The count took place at the London Cruise Terminal with 49 Count Assistants 14 Senior count staff, plus the team of Postal Voting Staff, Security, IT and Environment
- Other personnel involved pre-election included Comms, the Web team and contact centre, ICT, Security, Health and Safety and the Environment Team.

2.7 An Elections Project Board and Elections Working Group were formed to assist in the preparations and risk assessments. Following the election, the Project Board met to review the election. Some of the learning points are included at paragraph 8.

3. Voter ID at polls

- 3.1 These were the first elections nationally, and in Thurrock, which were undertaken with Voter ID requirements. Voters were required to show an approved form of photo ID at polling stations. Electors applied for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) via an online portal (ERO portal) or in person at the Town Hall.
- 3.2 Polling station staff were required to collect specific data. Not all the data collected is public information. The public data for Thurrock is available at [Use of voter ID at elections](#) and is shown below. The Electoral Commission is collating a national report and the statistics were supplied to the Commission by the deadline of 12 May 2023.

Elector Information	Total
Electors eligible to vote in person at polling stations	88,864
Electors who attended a polling station	18,054
Electors who requested a ballot paper at a polling station but were initially refused because they did not have voter ID	139
Electors who were initially refused a ballot paper at a polling station because they did not have voter ID, but who later returned with voter ID and were issued with a ballot paper	88
Electors who requested a ballot paper at a polling station but were refused because they did not have voter ID, and who had not been issued with a ballot paper by the time the poll closed	51
Electors issued with a ballot paper at polling stations	18,003

- 3.3 The core team worked with the internal Communications team and partners to publicise the requirements for Voter ID.
- 3.4 The Contact Centre phone line message about Voter ID went live from 23 January and this remained on the phone lines until the election. Colleagues were supplied with Frequently Asked Questions to respond to Voter ID enquiries. The total number of enquiries actually received by Customer Services Advisors was 29 throughout this period; 19 face to face in the Town Hall and 10 via the contact centre.

The Elections Office also handled Voter ID enquiries on the telephone and in person. Approximately 20 standalone queries were recorded in one month period (March-April). This is outside of the ERO portal and is an estimated

figure. However, the applications made on the ERO portal required many follow up calls, emails and correspondence.

- 3.5 Electors were able to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate in person at the Town Hall, which received positive feedback from electors. The team utilised existing Ipads to complete applications and processing in person provided the additional benefits of ensuring the elector was registered to vote, and the photograph taken would meet the criteria required.
- 3.6 Some electors found the online application challenging, but these were in the minority. The Election Team could identify from the online portal if an elector specifically asked for help, repeatedly had issues providing a suitable photograph or could not provide the identification details. The Election Team worked with Local Area Co-ordinators (LAC) from Adult Health, who support anyone 18 years or over, to engage with the elector and support them to obtain Voter ID. The Co-ordinators assisted electors with applications in the community and their own homes allowing the elector to participate in the democratic process.
- 3.7 From January 16th (go-live), the total number of Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) applications received was 218, of which 18 were rejected and 16 on hold as of 25 April (the deadline for applications for a VAC for 4 May).
- 3.8 In the lead up to the VAC deadline, media reporting led DLUHC to implement contingency plans for assistance in processing applications if the rate of applications peaked. This was not required, and applications were processed by the elections team.
- 3.9 A process for issuing Temporary VAC's, where the criteria was met, was available. No Temporary VAC's were issued. One emergency proxy was issued but unrelated to the Voter ID process.

4. The Count

- 4.1 The Count took place at London Cruise Terminal, Tilbury on 4 May, commencing with the verification of votes at 10pm.
- 4.2 The venue was previously used in May 2021 and lessons learnt from that election contributed to changing the ballot box receipt layout and one way flow through the carpark, plus additional overflow parking.
- 4.3 The ballot boxes were all receipted within 75 minutes of the polls closing. Verification completed with the postal votes after midnight. The first result for Chadwell St Mary was declared at 1.02am with the final result for Corringham and Fobbing ward at 2.31am. There were two recounts necessary due to the close results.

5. Post Election

5.1 Following the poll additional work in May continued including:

- calculating and running the payroll.
- processing documents returned from the poll.
- sealing documents as appropriate.
- arranging to destroy home address forms from nomination papers.
- calculating costs and supplying marked registers to candidates and agents.
- analysing and supplying data to the Electoral Commission.
- informing Postal Voters whose identifiers were rejected have been notified as required by law and requested to supply new identifiers if appropriate.
- polling stations used on 4 May have been written to requesting invoices and provisionally booking for May 2024. This has highlighted the need to review at least one station due to cost.
- responding to FOI's and requests for data.

6. Feedback and complaints

6.1 Complaints and issues

- Two complaints were received from electors on polling day. One complaint was in regard to the polling station location and signage and one complaint in regard to Voter ID and how this was handled by staff.
- A complaint was received by the Monitoring Officer regarding intimidation at a polling station.
- Fly posting was an issue in two wards which took up officer time and resources.
- Social Media complaints and allegations regarding a candidate and members.
- Questions regarding the recount of one ward.

6.2 Reported threats of issues at polling stations due to Voter ID did not materialise. The team created a RAG system for polling stations and this was updated before polling day according to any local intelligence to enable the smooth running of polling stations and the correct resource levels deployed to each station. The RAG system was shared with the Police to inform them of their operation plans on the day of polls.

6.3 The polling station staff in general conversations, commented post-election, that it was 'not as bad as expected'. A survey was conducted of polling station staff with 92% of the 106 respondents surveyed willing to work again and 8% 'maybe'. 100% of respondents answered that they enjoyed their day and felt equipped to deal with Voter ID at the polling station. When staff were asked if they faced any challenges on the day, the comments related to electors and their responses to being asked to provide Voter ID. These included "not happy/ waste of time", not having the correct ID (work ID or an unacceptable Oyster card), or unhappy with being asked to remove a face mask/cap.

7. Compliments

- 7.1 Positive feedback and compliments on the way the poll was run were received by the team. This included compliments from electors who contacted the office for assistance, staff who worked on the election and candidates and agents.

8. Lessons Learnt from the Reviews and Actions to take

	Action
Late changes to the project plan and administrative tasks being undertaken by the Electoral Services Manager	A Project Initiation Document (PID) will be developed for early sign off by the Returning Officer. Agreement on this will reduce some of the pressures with planning and changes in 2024
Communications	Internal Communications Team to lead and prepare in advance of elections a communication plan
Fly Posting rules Guest attendance at count	Hold a second candidates' and agents' meeting after close of nominations
Administration within the core election team	Explore the use of MEA (mobile election app) for staff appointments
Staff recruitment levels to meet Electoral Commission guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the use of digital polling – a solution offered by Modern Democracy • Implement measures to recruit and highlight working on the election. The Elections Team have requested a slot on the Corporate Induction programme as one method of highlighting this.
Polling Day pressure on the core team	The helpline for Electoral Services will be diverted in future to the Contact centre – go live expected January 2024.
Polling station set up and staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review training methods and messages delivered • Review Polling Station Inspector rounds and checklists, increase visits made and introduce catch up session mid-day
Delays to finalising the verification and starting the count due to Postal Vote Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review procedure at Close of Poll for postal vote opening

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the need for additional collection of postal votes by Inspectors at 9pm • Review the location of Postal Vote Opening in relation to the count hall (venue permitting)
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9. Challenges, Changes and Issues identified for 2 May 2024

Resources – venues	Count venue for 2024
Resources – staffing	Core team and polling station staff
Combined poll	17 wards – local election 20 wards – PFCC (3 wards PFCC only)
BVI report	Implementing any outcomes from the BVI report
Boundary Commission Review of Parliamentary Constituencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final recommendations to Parliament by 1 July 2023. Work to review and implement the recommendations • Parliamentary boundary review of Polling Districts and Places and (separate paper to General Services Committee)
Planning for a Parliamentary Election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Parliamentary boundaries • Take on the part constituency instead of ‘give-away’ due to Boundary change • Count two constituencies instead of one
Elections Act 2022 – implementation of further measures (outstanding)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online applications for postal voting (estimated go-live October 2023) • Overseas Electors statutory instruments made and changes take effect (January 2024) • Limit to the number of postal votes an elector may hand into a polling station • First past the post system for PFCC polls • Absent Vote secrecy rules statutory instruments made and apply from May 2024 (December 2023) • Postal Vote handling statutory instruments made and apply for May 2024 (December 2023) • EU citizens Voting and Candidacy Rights – statutory instruments

	made and take effect <u>after</u> May 2024 polls (November 2023)
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10. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

10.1 The Project Board and Working group will monitor the work of the Elections team in relation to the scheduled election on 2 May 2024.

11. Reasons for Recommendation

11.1 For General Services Committee to note and be informed of the post-election review and way forward for the 2 May 2024 election.

12. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

12.1 n/a

13. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

13.1 n/a

14. Implications

14.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Interim Senior Management Accountant

There are no financial implications arising from this report about the review of the election on 4 May 2023, however future committee reports regarding action plans or changes will have their detailed financial implications considered at that time.

14.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Asmat Hussain**
Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

The requirements for the conduct of local elections are set out in the Representation of the People Act 1983 and in the Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006. 6.2 The matters set out in this report comply with the above legislation.

14.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager, Community, Development & Equality

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on Local Authorities to promote equal opportunities. These considerations should sit alongside the statutory obligations set out in the Electoral Administration Act. The Electoral Administration Act (2006) and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 seeks to improve engagement in the electoral process,

The work outlined in this report will continue to aid community participation in elections, by reviewing the introduction of Voter ID brought about by the Elections Act 2022, through engaging with partners who can assist and communicate the need for Voter ID in areas of the community who are less likely to have the required Voter ID. Voters without access to digital platforms are considered in the work of the team.

The Elections Act 2022 also introduced the need for increased accessibility at polling stations to ensure all voters have adequate facilities and opportunities to vote. From May 2023, there will be more support at polling stations for voters with disabilities and voters with a disability can be assisted in future by anyone over the age of 18 years old.

The review of the poll in May 2023 will enable the service to implement lessons learned and contribute to elector experience and participation in future democratic events.

14.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

n/a

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

Asmat Hussain

Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Legal Services

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10 October 2023		ITEM: 8
General Services Committee		
Polling District and Places Review 2023		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Dr Dave Smith – Chief Executive		
Accountable Assistant Director: n/a		
Accountable Director: Asmat Hussain, Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is for General Services Committee to note plans for a statutory review of polling districts and polling places within Thurrock.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 General Services Committee note the report and plans outlined within the report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district.

2.2 The following definitions may be helpful when reading the report and Appendices.

- “Polling districts” are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
- “Polling places” are the buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
- “Polling stations” are the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.

- 2.3 The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.
- 2.4 Under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 2.5 The intention of the legislation was reviews would be completed by the January before a UK parliamentary general election. However, since the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011, there is no longer any certainty as to when the next general election will be.

The Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act 2022 means:

- the UK Parliament can be dissolved by the King on request of the Prime Minister, at any time within the 5 years of the life of the Parliament
 - the next general election must take place before Tuesday 28 January 2025, but it could happen at any point before then
 - there is no longer a link between the timing of the compulsory polling district and places review falling in a 16-month period ending 3 months before a scheduled general election.
- 2.6 In addition, the Boundary Commission for England is currently undertaking a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. The Commission has now published its final recommendations, and Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries will be made by 1 November 2023.

Once the Orders for new parliamentary constituencies have been made, the new boundaries will be used for the next general election.

If a parliamentary by election is called in the meantime, it would be run on existing boundaries.

- 2.7 These issues mean it is important that the polling district and places review is carried out as early as possible, so that Thurrock Council has agreed polling districts and places to be used for the next parliamentary election as well as the scheduled local elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024 and has a polling scheme in place which reflects the new constituencies.
- 2.8 Timing of the polling district and places review

As highlighted above, it is important to complete the review as soon as possible, so the polling districts and places for future elections can be agreed in time for the next general election and scheduled elections.

Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 does not allow the review to commence before 1 October 2023.

Although the review itself cannot commence earlier, there is a degree of preparatory work which can be undertaken prior to the review, as well as informal consultation.

It would be desirable for any changes in polling districts to be reflected in the electoral register published on 1 December 2023. However, due to capacity issues, desirability for a 6-week consultation period and council meeting deadlines, it is unlikely that the review will be complete until January 2024.

This would mean that the electoral register would need to be republished if there are any polling districts changes.

This is the proposed timetable for the review:

Review of polling districts and places 2023	
Preparatory work	started July 2023
Preliminary review – including informal consultation	July to 1 October 2023
Notice of review published	Monday 2 October 2023
Council proposals published	Monday 2 October 2023
Commencement of formal consultation	Monday 2 October 2023
Report to General Services Committee for information	10 October 2023
End of formal consultation	Friday 10 November 2023
Consider responses	By 24 November 2023
Publish electoral register	1 December 2023
Final proposals published via meeting agenda papers and website	23 January 2024
Council meeting	31 January 2024
Conclude review	By end January 2024
Republish electoral register (if any new or amended polling districts)*	15 February 2024
Scheduled elections on new polling districts, places and stations scheme	2 May 2024

* If, after the publication of the revised register, the ERO needs to re-publish a register to incorporate changes, a notice needs to be published 14 calendar days before publication in a local newspaper, at the ERO's office and some other conspicuous place or places in the area.

2.9 Review Process

Legal requirements

The process for a polling district and places review is set out in Schedule A1, Representation of the People Act 1983.

The Council must:

- publish a notice of the holding of a review
- consult the (Acting) Returning Officer ((A)RO) for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area
- publish all representations made by an (A)RO within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area and, if the authority maintains a website, by placing a copy on the authority's website
- seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the (A)RO(s).

On completion of the review, the council must give reasons for its decisions and publish:

- all correspondence sent to an (A)RO in connection with the review
- all correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability
- all representations made by any person in connection with the review
- the minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review
- details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review
- details of the places where the results of the review have been published.

3. Preparatory work

3.1 Even though the formal review cannot start until 2 October 2023, there is a range of preparatory activity which Electoral Services are already carrying out.

This includes:

- Reading the final proposals published by the Boundary Commission and understanding the impact for this area

- Contacting Returning Officers and Elections Teams in neighbouring authorities which will be sharing our constituencies.
- Liaising with electoral software suppliers about structuring the electoral register to accommodate boundary changes
- Preparing data for the start of the review (electorate figures, turnout from previous elections, information about new housing developments in the next 5 years)
- Obtaining detailed up to date maps to enable accurate designation of polling district boundaries
- Identifying organisations with a special interest/expertise in disabled access to consult
- Preparing the consultation portal and questions for the formal consultation period
- Liaising with Communications team to schedule a plan

3.2 Preliminary review

Electoral Services are also carrying out a preliminary review of the current polling districts and places in the borough to assess their suitability.

This involves:

- Compiling details of current polling places with a summary of their suitability
- Checking the continued availability of polling places
- Reviewing feedback from stakeholders at previous elections
- Identifying potential alternative buildings where appropriate
- Ensuring that polling places can support the requirements of the Elections Act, for example with sufficient space to undertake Voter ID checks, and to accommodate equipment to assist disabled voters
- Seeking advice and guidance from local disability groups and local authority experts around accessibility
- Preparing council proposals and drafting (A)RO comments, including explanations for “no changes”
- Seeking costs for comparisons of existing, and alternative venues, if required

3.3 Informal consultation

Electoral Services are also carrying out informal consultation with interested groups in preparation for the review.

This involves:

- Seeking the views of organisations with a special interest/expertise in disabled access
- Informal consultation with group leaders/local political parties

- Getting advice from relevant council officers (for example Property Services, Equalities Leads)
- Inviting and reviewing comments from Polling Station Inspectors and Presiding Officers

It will be important to do as much preparatory work as possible before the official commencement of the review, to ensure its early completion.

4. Implementing parliamentary boundary changes

4.1 The Boundary Commission for England recently undertook a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. They have published their final recommendations, and Orders for the new parliamentary constituency boundaries will be made by 1 November 2023.

4.2 Once the Orders for new parliamentary constituencies have been made, the new boundaries will be used for the next general election.

If a parliamentary by election is called in the meantime, it would be run on existing boundaries.

This means the Register of Electors needs to be able to reflect both the existing and new constituencies.

4.3 Work can be done to prepare the register in the background before then, so that once the Order for the new parliamentary constituencies is made, the register can be re-arranged or adapted as necessary to give effect to the Order. This would allow any snap general election in November 2023 to be run on the new constituencies.

This can be achieved by creating future administrative areas within the Election Management system. The Electoral Services Manager, on behalf of the Electoral Registration Officer, will liaise with the software supplier to implement this. This work can be started once the final parliamentary constituency proposals are published.

4.4 It is recommended that the Electoral Registration Officer takes the necessary measures as soon as possible to give effect to parliamentary constituency changes, ensuring that the register reflects existing and new constituencies, until the boundaries are fully in force.

5. Implementing polling district changes

5.1 The polling district and places review may result in new polling districts being created or existing polling district boundaries being amended.

5.2 If the council makes any alterations to the polling districts in its area, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) must amend the register of electors accordingly (Section 18A (5) Representation of the People Act 1983).

- 5.3 Whilst desirable that alterations to polling districts be timed to coincide with the annual revision of the register of electors on 1 December 2023 the timetable of events will not be completed by this date. The changes to the register take effect on the date the ERO publishes a notice stating that the adaptations have been made.
- 5.4 Publishing the register to reflect existing and new boundaries will also help to enable current members and MPs to receive the parts of the register that they are entitled to, while allowing individuals to be supplied with the relevant parts of the register once they become a candidate for an election.
- 5.5 The designation of polling districts and places is a function of the Council, whereas decisions about polling stations are for the Returning Officer.
- 5.6 The Council's constitution identifies the determination of polling district reviews as a matter to be reserved for Full Council.

6. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 6.1 The review is statutory and is required to be carried out within the timeframe outlined.
- 6.2 Options considered relate to the process, scope and commencement of the review. The reasons for the timing in relation to the unknown date of the next Parliamentary Election are outlined in the body of the report.
- 6.3 The preferred option for the timetable is therefore to commence and finish as soon as is reasonably practicable, compliant with the legislation and with enough time for a meaningful consultation period.
- 6.4 There is considerable risk to the authority, the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer if the review timetable is not met, including an operational and planning delay for the scheduled elections in May 2024 and a risk to the Parliamentary Election if the review and boundary implementation is not complete by the time it is called.
- 6.5 Elector confusion and reputational damage to the authority is also a risk with delayed poll card printing, booking of polling places or the potential for late changes to printed poll cards.
- 6.6 Political parties would require up to date registers and registering numbering for campaigns ahead of scheduled polls. The timetable outlined above would provide for the earliest provision of information.

7. Reasons for Recommendation

- 7.1 This report is for General Services Committee to note the proposed arrangements and timetable. A further report for decision will be brought to full council in January 2024.

8. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 8.1 The review will be subject to consultations and the findings will be consulted on prior to full council.

9. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 9.1 This report is for General Services to note however it is important that the democratic process for residents and electors is in place to allow, enable and encourage electors to vote.

10. Implications

10.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rosie Hurst**
Interim Senior Management Accountant

This is a statutory review and the cost implications of any changes to polling districts or places will be reviewed as part of the report to Council in January 2024.

10.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Asmat Hussain**
Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Sections 18A to 18E of the Representation of People Act 1983 clarify the duties and powers of local authorities in relation to UK Parliamentary Elections. The provisions of the Act detail the time and manner in which reviews of polling districts and places are to take place and how representations can be made, in particular by those concerned to ensure accessibility of polling stations to persons with a disability. The Council's plans to undertake a statutory review of polling districts and places as set out in the body of the report is compliant with its legal duties.

The review process, from the publication of the notice of the review until the publication of the documents at the end, must take place within the specified period. The length of the review process is not prescribed, provided all the steps required by the legislation can be undertaken within it. However, the time allowed for consultation should be sufficient to enable interested persons and groups to read and understand the proposals, gather comments and

respond with any alternative arrangements that they may wish to submit. The Council may wish to have regard to any council guidelines on public consultation when carrying out the review. Conducting the review early in the compulsory period will ensure that the next UK Parliamentary general election is delivered with the correct boundaries.

Under the Terms of Reference of General Services Committee as set out in the Council's Constitution, the Council has delegated to the Committee to exercise the Council's functions in relation to elections (paragraph 10). However, in relation to any change to the electoral arrangements for the Council the Committee has been delegated authority to make recommendations to the Council in respect of any change (paragraph 11). The ambit of electoral arrangements is broad and is broad enough to encompass proposed changes to polling districts and polling places in a further report to this Committee recommending the changes to Full Council for final decision.

10.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities

This is a statutory review and consultation will take part with interested parties as part of the review and will inform a Community Equality Impact Assessment.

10.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

- none

11. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- none

12. **Appendices to the report**

- none

Report Author:

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Electoral Services Manager, Electoral Services

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