

Council Report

Thursday 22 January 2025

Review of Polling Districts / Polling Places (PDR), and Community Governance (CGR)

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Exempt / confidential / not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	Delivery Plan - A7 (Ensure appropriate support on preparing for new ward boundaries and all out elections in 2026)
Wards affected	All wards

Executive summary

The Council's ward boundaries are currently being reviewed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission), with [draft proposals](#) out to consultation, and final recommendations expected on 3 June 2025, ahead of all out elections in 2026. As the review draws to a conclusion, new electoral geography for the City Council is a natural opportunity for MKCC as the principal council to review both our Polling Districts and Places, and Community Governance.

- A Community Governance Review (CGR) is an opportunity to change parish names, warding patterns, the number of parish councillors and in certain circumstances, amend external parish boundaries, and create / merge / abolish parishes.
- A Polling District Review (PDR) designates which electors are grouped together administratively because of common electoral geography (all belong to the same parliamentary constituency, MKCC ward, parish/parish ward etc), and where those electors vote (a convenient and accessible location).

We plan to commence both reviews in late January and conclude them in time to be reflected in new electoral registers to be published on 1 December 2025. Whilst there is a risk that there could be significant changes to the Commission's draft proposals, we plan to initially undertake informal consultation and seek views on both reviews and then develop our proposals for polling places / community governance so that they align with new warding patterns ahead of a formal consultation phase in summer 2025. We will seek the views of parishes, ward Councillors and other stakeholders throughout and ensure there is either strong community support, or strong evidence to support any changes we propose.

1. Proposed Decision/s

- 1.1 That the following reviews be commenced, initially with a period of informal consultation:
 - a) Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (PDR); and
 - b) Community Governance Review (CGR).
- 1.2 That the indicative timetable for both reviews (as set out in section 6), be noted.
- 1.3 That initial implications for Parish Governance (Annex A), from the Commission's draft warding patterns, be noted.

2. Why is the decision needed?

- 2.1 Local authorities are required to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years (originally timetabled to coincide with fixed term parliaments). The current statutory review period runs from 1 October 2023 to 31 January 2025. Whilst the timing of this review is not technically compliant with the prescribed window, it will:
 - commence inside the statutory window and coincide with the draft and final recommendations of new ward boundaries; and
 - ensure polling districts and polling places fully reflect proposed warding and parish warding patterns, avoiding the need to repeat work.
- 2.1 The recommendations published by the Commission are for 20 new MKCC wards, with only one existing ward (Tattenhoe) unchanged. These recommendations either mean that some existing polling districts may no longer be appropriate, or could be consolidated, due to the changes. Officers have also been keen to review the number, suitability and cost of polling stations used, for some time, and this is a natural opportunity to do so.
- 2.2 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides for a principal council to conduct a Community Governance Review at any time. Statutory guidance encourages that principal councils keep their community governance arrangements under review, in order to ensure that the arrangements for those areas continue to be effective and convenient and reflect the identities and interests of the communities involved. This could be in light of circumstances such as a major change in the population of a community, or new local issues.
- 2.3 Over recent years a number of informal enquiries have been made by Parish or Town Councils to review the number of Councillors, and / or Parish Ward boundaries, which can be incorporated as part of the review.

3. The Process

- 3.1 We will undertake an initial informal consultation, asking for feedback about existing issues, or opportunities. This will be done via an online form with structured questions. For example, we are keen to understand:

- a) where there are accessibility issues with polling stations, or new more suitable venues becoming available; or
 - b) where parishes wish to express an interest in amending their warding patterns, or numbers of Councillors.
- 3.2 Provisional desk-based work has also been undertaken to identify immediate implications and opportunities for existing polling district geography that arise as a result of the Commission’s draft recommendations. We will use this work to inform targeted engagement with specific parishes and groups during the initial consultation phase.
- 3.3 Certain parishes are [affected by consequential changes](#) in the Commission’s draft warding patterns for MKCC. This is because the Commission cannot propose a principal area ward boundary that would split a parish or parish ward. Where this has happened, they have either recommended parishes are warded or existing parish wards are amended, and they have considered / changed the number of parish councillors representing wards to achieve better electoral equality across affected parish wards. The Commission will, as part of their final recommendations also lay an order to make any consequential changes to Parishes. However, this does not mean a Community Governance Review undertaken by MKCC could not subsequently make further changes.
- 3.4 During and after the initial informal consultation stage Electoral Services will continue to undertake desktop research and preparation to further inform any draft proposals. For example, we will consider whether existing parish wards have significant electoral inequality based on electoral forecasts. We may also visit some polling stations to consider suitability based on feedback from voters and staff at elections in 2024.
- 3.5 After the Commission finalise their recommendations for MKCC wards, we will prepare our terms of reference / draft recommendations for both reviews and then seek formal Council approval to formally consult on these recommendations.
- 3.6 We aim to present our final recommendations to full Council in October 2025 we will present, with a view to new electoral registers being published on 1 December 2025. However, in the event of any additional complexity arising from the Commissions final recommendations or MKCC wards, full Council could consider final PDR and CRG recommendations in November 2025.

4. Implications of the decision

Financial	Y	Human rights, equalities, diversity	Y
Legal	Y	Policies or Council Plan	N
Communication	Y	Procurement	N
Energy Efficiency	N	Workforce	N

a) Financial implications

There are modest direct costs incurred by the Council in undertaking the review, predominately associated with consultation. These costs are likely to be less than £1,000 and can be accommodated from existing budgets.

The time taken by officer colleagues to support this review and consultation, whilst significant, will not require any additional staffing resources.

b) Legal implications

Poling Districts

The requirements for the timing and completion of compulsory reviews are set out in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

Any PDR would be undertaken in accordance with the required steps set out in schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, and the process will be guided by the Electoral Commission's guidance for [Reviews of poling districts, polling places and polling stations](#).

The Council is required to undertake compulsory reviews of all polling districts and polling places according to the statutory timetable (the next one should have been completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025).

Community Governance Review

Any CGR would be undertaken in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the Guidance on Community Governance Reviews (March 2010) provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 gives full responsibility for Community Governance Reviews (CGR) to principal councils in England. A CGR is a way for MKCC to make sure that at parish level, governance arrangements are working as efficiently and effectively as they should be. It considers electoral arrangements i.e. number of councillors, warding arrangements, and its boundaries. There are a variety of ways that a Community Governance Review (CGR) can be triggered, but in this case the recommendation is that Council voluntarily commence a full review because:

- a city wide CGR of all parishes has not been conducted in at least 5 years;
- a review allows for further consequential changes due to the final LGBCE recommendations to be made;
- some Parishes have made representations to the Council that they support a review to address specific issues; and
- in other Parishes, residential development and population growth means that it may be sensible to do so now.

A CGR must by statute be completed within a 12-month period from the day on which it commences. The CGR formally begins when the Council publishes its Terms of Reference and concludes when it publishes the recommendations made in the review.

c) Communications

It is important that all stakeholders are made aware of the review and how they can make representations. Information will be published on public notice boards and on the Council's website. We will utilise Parish Councils to publicise information locally as well as initiate a formal public consultation.

d) Human rights, equalities, diversity

For the review of polling districts and places we will make specific provision to engage with groups to ensure that accessibility issues with specific polling stations can be considered.

5. Alternatives

- 5.1 To not undertake a review of polling districts and polling places. This is not recommended as there is a legal requirement for a review to be undertaken.
- 5.2 To undertake a limited scope review of polling districts and polling places, only reviewing polling stations directly impacted by the ward boundary changes. This is not recommended as it will not take in the full City, which does need reviewing due to consequential changes from the ward review and informal requests received.
- 5.3 To not undertake a community governance review. This is not recommended as the opportunity to coincide a review along with a PDR and final ward recommendations will ensure the city's electoral and governance arrangements at every level has been considered ahead of elections in 2026.

6. Timetable for implementation

- 6.1 A formal timetable for the reviews will be finalised and approved by Council when draft recommendations and terms of reference in June 2025.
- 6.2 An indicative timetable of events is set out below (MKCC ward review activity shaded):

Who	Item	Date(s)
LGBCE	Decide on the number of Councillors	12 March 2024
LGBCE	Initial Public Consultation on Communities	Tuesday 7 May 2024 to Monday 9 September 2024
LGBCE	Proposals published	Wednesday 3 December 2024
LGBCE	Public Consultation on new MKCC ward Proposals	Wednesday 3 December 2024 to Monday 24 February 2025
MKCC	Preparatory work for CGR & PDR	December 2024 -
MKCC	Resolution from council providing for commencement of CGR & PDR	Wednesday 22 January 2025
MKCC	Informal consultation – to include engagement with specific parishes and groups as appropriate	Thursday 23 January 2025 to Friday 28 March 2025
LGBCE	Recommendations published for revised MKCC boundaries	Tuesday 3 June 2025

Who	Item	Date(s)
MKCC	Notice of review and draft Council proposals published in Council papers for June Full Council	Papers published Friday 6 June 2025 for Wednesday 18 June meeting
MKCC	Formal PDR & CGR consultation period (12 weeks)	Thursday 19 June 2025 to 11 September 2025
MKCC	Final proposals published via meeting agenda and on website	Friday 10 October 2025
MKCC	Full council meeting to consider and agree final proposals	22 October 2025
MKCC	Conclude review – and make reorganisation order	1 November 2025
MKCC	Publish electoral register (including any new or amended polling districts)	Monday 1 December 2025
MKCC	Scheduled all out elections on new polling districts and places	Thursday 7 May 2026

Annexes and Background Papers

Annex A Summary of Impact on Parishes of Draft Commission recommendations