

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



Report of Chief Executive

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To: Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee

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AGENDA ITEM 3

Polling District and Polling Places Review

Recommendation

That the Committee:

- (a) approves the schedule of polling districts and polling places set out in Appendix A to this report
- (b) gives delegated authority to the chief executive, acting in his capacity as the council's returning officer, to make changes to polling districts and polling places where circumstances dictate that this is desirable, having first consulted with members of the committee and the local councillor(s)

Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out proposals for polling districts and polling places following a periodic review required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency. A polling place is the building(s) within each polling district that will house polling stations. The number of polling stations within each polling place is a matter for the Returning Officer and is not covered in this report.

Strategic Objectives

2. The report does not specifically relate to any of the council's strategic objectives, but agreement of the recommendations (amended if the committee sees fit) will ensure compliance with the law.

Background

3. In accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the Council has a duty to undertake a review of parliamentary polling districts and polling places, which it must complete by the 31 January 2015. Subsequent reviews must be undertaken at least once every five years. Some of the considerations that the council has to take into account are set out in the Representation of the People Act 1983.
4. Although the 2013 Act only relates to parliamentary constituencies, it is appropriate to designate polling districts and polling places that also work in respect of the new district wards created as a result of the Local Government Boundary Commission's electoral review of the district. The proposals in this report achieve this.
5. In undertaking the review I have given due regard to the following considerations, some of which are enshrined in legislation:
 - that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
 - that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled
 - where possible, the polling place is in its own polling district
 - each parish is a separate polling district unless special circumstances apply
 - no polling place is shared by two district wards unless special circumstances apply
 - polling places should be "logical"; that is, electors should not have to pass another polling place to get to their own
 - not to use school buildings unless the head teacher confirms that s/he is happy for the school to remain open on election day
6. My proposals are set out in appendix A and accord with the above criteria. By and large, each parish is a polling district in its own right and has its own polling place or places. Exceptions are as follows:
 - because Abingdon-on-Thames parish is sub-divided into five electoral wards for the district council I propose to divide it into five polling districts that align with the ward boundaries
 - similarly, the parishes of Wantage and Grove are split between three district wards – one wholly within Wantage, one wholly within Grove and one split between the two. I propose designating each ward as a separate polling district
 - Milton, Harwell and St Helen Without parishes are each split between two district wards and I propose creating two polling districts in each parish

aligning with the district ward boundary. In the case of St. Helen Without parish this is particularly important because the northern part of the parish lies in the Oxford West and Abingdon parliamentary constituency and the southern part in Wantage constituency.

- in anticipation of future changes I propose that the area of Harwell ward east of the A34 is a separate polling district but that the polling place for now is Harwell village hall (see paragraph nine below for more detail)
 - in the case of the Abingdon-on-Thames wards, Wantage Charlton ward, Wantage and Grove Brook ward and Cumnor and Radley polling districts, I propose designating more than one polling place. This will aid voter convenience and, in some cases, avoid people voting in a polling place outside of their district ward.
 - a number of smaller parishes do not have suitable premises to designate as a polling place, so the polling place is in the most easily accessible adjacent parish taking account of district ward boundaries
7. The committee should note that where a polling district is served by more than one polling place, the allocation of specific properties to a specific polling place falls outside the remit of this review. For information, however, I am carrying out this work in parallel with this review (wearing my hat as Returning Officer).

Consultation

8. We have been through a two stage consultation process. Stage one was to invite general views from interested parties, notably parish councils and ward councillors on any issues that the review should cover. Stage two involved consulting these same groups and disability groups on specific draft proposals, as well as making them available for general comment. This was done by placing them on the council's website. Given the general lack of public interest in a technical review like this, I did not consider it necessary to carry out a more extensive consultation.
9. Key issues raised in the first consultation and my response to these are set out in the table below:

Parish/Ward	Issue	Response
Longworth	Could all voters use Longworth village hall rather than some having to vote at Kingston Bagpuize and Southmoor village hall	Agreed. I am proposing that Longworth parish is a single polling district with a single polling place – Longworth village hall
Harwell	Consideration needs to be given to where residents of North and South Drive (on the Harwell Oxford campus) vote and the	Electors from North and South Drive used to have their own polling station on Harwell Oxford campus but this is no longer justified with the dwindling number of residents. For district purposes this area sits in Hendreds

	arrangements for the residents of Great Western Park who live in Harwell parish	<p>ward but asking residents to vote in East Hendred is unreasonable given the distance to travel. Harwell village hall is more convenient and I propose that these residents vote in the same location as others from the parish.</p> <p>Ultimately those electors from Great Western Park who live in Harwell parish will have their own polling place at the district centre, which should be available within the next three years. The council has also agreed to establish a new parish of Harwell East in due course when the population in the area makes this a viable proposition. For now, however, there is little option but to ask residents to vote at Harwell village hall.</p>
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10. The second consultation commenced on the 19 December. At the time of writing this report the comments received and my responses are as follows:

Parish/Ward	Issue	Consultation responses	Response
Appleford	Disabled access needs improving	Use trailer in car park	Although disabled access needs improving, the village hall is fit for purpose in other respects so propose to continue to use rather than go to the expense of bringing in a mobile unit.
Woolstone	Polling place is outside parish	Suggest using barn at private property	Election staff to view premises and assess suitability

I will report any responses received following publication of this report at the meeting.

11. Although I anticipate implementing in full that the decisions made by the committee in respect of polling districts and polling places, it is possible that issues could arise that require changes. The council's constitution currently gives me delegated authority to choose an alternative polling place if the designated one becomes unavailable. I propose that this is widened to refer more generally to changes in circumstances and extended to cover changes to polling districts as well. This will avoid a situation where the Committee may have to meet at short notice to agree what could be a relatively trivial change. I am happy that the

delegation includes reference to first seeking the views of members of the committee and the local councillor(s) covering the area affected.

Access Issues

12. The committee will note that the schedule in appendix A lists a number of premises where access for disabled people is not particularly good. In all cases there is no ready alternative. The committee may wish to discuss whether it wants to pass a resolution for cabinet to consider regarding financial support to improve disabled access to these premises.

Financial Implications

13. There is a modest cost associated with running a polling place. Often this cost is shared amongst a number of parties because the polling place hosts multiple elections at the same time. Cost, however, should not be a consideration in determining how many polling places to designate

Legal Implications

14. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the council to complete its review of polling districts and polling places by the 31 January 2015. Decisions made in respect of the proposals in this report will fulfil this requirement.

Risks

15. There are no discernable risks associated with the proposals set out in this report

Conclusion

16. The council has a legal requirement to complete a review of polling districts and polling places by the end of January 2015. Decisions taken in respect of this report will fulfil that requirement. For the most part existing polling districts and polling places remain. Where there are changes these are generally because of changes to district ward boundaries, changes to the availability of premises or the identification of new or better premises to host polling stations.

Background Papers

Responses to the consultation