

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



Report of head of legal and democratic

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To: Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee

DATE: 26 November 2018

Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Recommendation

1. That the Committee approves the schedule of polling districts and polling places set out in Appendix A which incorporates the proposed changes set out in paragraph 16 of this report.
2. To authorise the returning officer, in consultation with committee members and the ward councillors, to allocate an appropriate polling place for polling district SAC2.

Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out proposals for polling districts and polling places following an interim review prior to the scheduled district and parish elections in May 2019 to reflect the outcome of recent community governance reviews agreed by this committee, reflected in the Vale of White Horse District Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Order 2018, and to ensure electors continue to have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

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. 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 last such review in Vale of White Horse was undertaken in October 2014. The results of the polling districts and polling places review were agreed by this committee at its meeting on 27 January 2015. The next statutory review of polling districts and polling places will take place in 2019 and be concluded by January 2020 at the latest.
4. The changes to polling districts and polling places agreed by this committee in 2015 were first used at the parliamentary and local elections in May 2015. The current polling arrangements within the Vale are predominantly satisfactory and have been shown at elections conducted in recent years (the 2015 elections, the European Referendum, Police and Crime Commissioner elections in 2016 and the Oxfordshire County Council and Parliamentary elections in 2017) to be practicable.

Terminology

5. **Polling District:** a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency or ward into smaller parts within which a polling place can be located which is convenient to electors. By and large each parish is a polling district in its own right and has its own polling place or places. Exceptions are where parishes are sub-divided into electoral wards or split between district wards which necessitates the creation of additional polling districts.
6. **Polling place:** the building(s) within each polling district that will house polling stations.
7. **Polling stations:** the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. The number of polling stations within each polling place is a matter for the returning officer and is not covered in this report.

The review

8. Council gave notice of the review in October 2018. Notice of the review was published on the council's website and given to the Acting Returning Officer (ARO), parish councils and district councillors. The closing date for consultation responses was 2 November 2018. Consultation responses, including the ARO's comments, are set out in the appendix to this report.

Key issues

9. The Vale of White Horse District Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Order 2018 (The Order) made a number of changes to parish boundaries notably those of Grove and Wantage, Great Coxwell and Great Faringdon and Abingdon and neighbouring parishes. Those areas transferred will become part of the polling district designated for the area it is transferring to – details of which are set out in paragraph 16 of this report.

10. The Order abolished the warding arrangements for Longworth Parish Council. Currently the parish is sub-divided into two polling districts (SRE1 and SRE2) to reflect these warding arrangements. With the abolition of the warding arrangements I propose the creation of one polling district (SRE).
11. The Order creates warding arrangements for South Hinksey parish – Hinksey Hill and Village. I propose designating each ward as a separate polling district – SBB1 and SBB2.
12. In transferring an area of land from Grove parish to Wantage parish The Order abolished the existing ward of Crab Hill in the parish of Grove. Because this ward was created by the division of Grove parish by district wards it had its own polling district designation – SSC4. With the abolition of this ward there is no requirement for this polling district.
13. As part of the polling district and polling places review in 2014/15 this committee agreed to sub-divide the parish of Harwell into two polling districts in anticipation of the creation of a Harwell East parish (this committee subsequently agreed to defer a review of this matter until after the 2019 elections). In 2015 this committee agreed that electors in this area should vote at Harwell Village Hall until an alternative polling place became available in the polling district. Consultation responses for this review also highlight the need/support for a polling place in this area. Officers had previously identified the district centre as a polling place but this venue is not yet available. Alternative venues are being investigated. Any developments will be reported to the committee at its meeting and subject to the matter not being resolved the committee is invited to authorise the returning officer in consultation with committee members and the ward councillors to allocate an appropriate polling place.
14. Due to renovation works, St Mary Convent will not be available as a polling place for the elections in May 2019. For the county council by election on 15 November 2018 the returning officer, under delegated powers, designated The Beacon as an alternative venue for polling districts SSB1 and SSB2 (covering the Segsbury ward of Wantage parish). This arrangement is not suitable going forward and officers are seeking an alternative venue. The appendix includes consultation responses on this issue. Officers propose designating Stockham School as a polling place. Whilst this council has sought not to use school buildings unless the head teacher confirms that s/he is happy for the school to remain open on election day the committee is reminded that legislation provides for the returning officer to use schools for election purposes. In this case there is no suitable alternative venue within the polling districts.
15. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is currently considering related alteration requests from this council to amend certain district ward and county division boundaries to ensure coterminosity with those changes made at parish level by this committee and implemented by The Order. If the LGBCE does not agree to make a related alteration order for some of the requests it may be necessary to create further polling districts. The returning officer has delegated authority 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 local councillor(s). It may be the case that the returning officer must rely on this delegation to avoid calling a further meeting of the committee.

16. The issues and officer proposals are set out below.

Parish	Issue	Proposal
Various	<p>The Vale of White Horse District Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Order 2018 makes a number of changes to parish boundaries set out below which will require amendments to existing polling districts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer of land from Grove to Wantage Segsbury • Transfer of land from Grove to Wantage Charlton • Transfer of land from Lockinge to Wantage Charlton • Transfer of land from St Helen Without to Abingdon-on-Thames Dunmore • Transfer of land from Sunningwell to Abingdon-on-Thames Dunmore • Transfer of land from Radley to Abingdon-on-Thames Dunmore • Transfer of land from Radley to Abingdon-on-Thames Peachcroft • Transfer of land from Great Coxwell to Great Faringdon 	<p>To amend the polling districts to reflect the change in parish boundaries as set out below:</p> <p>To be included in polling district SSB1.</p> <p>To be included in polling district SSC3.</p> <p>To be included in polling district SSC3.</p> <p>To be included in polling district XAE2.</p> <p>To be included in polling district XAE2.</p> <p>To be included in polling district XAE2.</p> <p>To be included in polling district XAD2.</p> <p>To be included in polling district SGA.</p>
Longworth	Wards abolished in The Vale of White Horse District Council (Reorganisation of Community	Longworth to become a single polling district - SRE.

	Governance) Order 2018.	
South Hinksey	Creation of wards in The Vale of White Horse District Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Order 2018.	Subdivide the existing polling district SBB to provide for two polling districts to reflect the wards of Hinksey Hill (SBB1) and Village (SBB2).
Crab Hill ward of Grove	Abolished by The Vale of White Horse District Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Order 2018.	Remove polling district (SSC4) designation. Area to become part of Wantage Charlton (SSC3).
Harwell	Allocate a polling place for "Harwell East".	Authorise the returning officer to designate a suitable polling place for polling district SAC2 in consultation with members of this committee and local ward councillors.
Wantage (Segsbury)	Designation of alternative polling place for the polling districts in the Segsbury parish ward of Wantage parish (currently St Mary Convent)	Designate Stockham Primary School as the polling place for the Segsbury ward of Wantage parish (polling districts SSB1 and SSB2).

Financial Implications

17. 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 prime consideration in determining how many polling places to designate.

Legal Implications

18. The Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) (Section 18C (5) and Section 31) allows a local authority to conduct an interim review of any polling district, polling place or polling station within its area, outside of the timescales for a compulsory review.

Risks

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

Conclusion

20. The council met its legal requirement to complete a review of polling districts and polling places by the end of January 2015. To address changes to community governance arrangements agreed by this committee and reflected in The Order and to make sure suitable and convenient polling arrangements are provided for local electors before the next scheduled elections in May 2019, an interim review of polling districts and polling places has been undertaken. The committee is invited to agree the proposals set out in paragraph 16 of this report and note that the returning officer may use delegated authority to address issues that could arise that require changes.

Background papers: “Polling District and Polling Places Review” report to the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee on 27 January 2015.