

This report is public	
Polling District and Polling Places Review 2024	
Committee	Council
Date of Committee	16 December 2024
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Report to be presented by Chair of the Polling Place & Boundary Review Working Group, Councillor Les Sibley
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	Report to be presented by Chair of the Polling Place & Boundary Review Working Group, Councillor Les Sibley, 5 December 2024
Report of	(Acting) Returning Officer, Gordon Stewart

Purpose of report

To agree the recommendations of the council's Polling District and Polling Place Review 2024.

1. Recommendations

Council resolves:

- 1.1 To agree the recommendations for Polling Districts and Polling Places within Cherwell as set out at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 To note that the Polling District codes will be updated for inclusion in the Electoral Register being published on 1 February 2025.
- 1.3 To note that the Constitution gives delegated to the Returning Officer "To amend the Council's Polling Districts and Polling Places Order as necessary".

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report sets out the proposed changes to the polling districts and polling places used at Parliamentary and Local Government elections following a compulsory periodic review of existing arrangements required by the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Electoral Administration Act 2013.
- 2.2 Cherwell District Council completed the last review in December 2019, which came into effect in 2020. This current review must be completed by 31 January 2025. The changes will be included in the electoral register being published on 1 February 2025 and in effect for all elections after this date.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
Finance	<p>The proposed changes to polling stations will result in a small increase in the number of polling places, including a temporary increase to the number of portacabins. The additional portacabin will be required at a cost of £0.010m per annum meaning there is a pressure for the Department until the community building at Graven Hill is built and available for use as a polling station. Thereafter the cost of using the centre will be significantly reduced and should be managed by the service within existing budgets. Payment for polling stations for district elections is paid for by the Council. Costs for County Council and national elections are reimbursed. Where elections are combined, costs are shared across all contested elections.</p> <p>Leanne Lock, Strategic Finance Business Partner, 4 December 2024</p>			
Legal	<p>Under Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983 the authority must designate the polling places for the polling districts in its area. The Returning Officer at election time must provide a sufficient number of polling stations, shall allocate electors to those polling stations, and those polling stations shall be in the polling place for that district.</p> <p>Under Section 18c of the RPA 1983, a review of polling districts and polling places must take place at least every five years. The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020 will extend the length of review to eight years, therefore the next review is due in 2031.</p> <p>Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law and Governance, 2 December 2024</p>			
Risk Management	<p>There are no discernible risks associated with the proposals set out in this report. By undertaking the review the council is meeting its statutory duty.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 4 December 2024</p>			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact		X		<p>The Representation of People Act 1983 requires that, so far as is reasonable and practicable. Every polling station should be accessible to electors who are disabled. It is considered that, as far as is reasonable and practicable, all polling places are accessible to the disabled.</p> <p>The Elections Act 2022 increased the accessibility requirements for electors with visible and non-visible disabilities and the requirement for a privacy area in all polling stations.</p>

				<p>Where new polling places are being used, the accessibility has been assessed as being suitable by the Democratic and Elections Team. Polling Places are kept under constant review and equality considerations form part of this process. For those less able, or would rather not, the option of voting by post or proxy is an alternative option to voting in person.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 4 December 2024</p>
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		N/A
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		N/A
Climate & Environmental Impact				N/A
ICT & Digital Impact				N/A
Data Impact				N/A
Procurement & subsidy				N/A
Council Priorities	N/A			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	<p>See also sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6.</p> <p>The Notice of Review of Polling Districts and Places was published on 21 October 2024. The (Acting) Returning Officer's ((A)RO's) proposals for proposed and existing polling places was published on 21 October 2024. Public comments and submissions were invited until 11 November 2024.</p> <p>All consultation responses received are available on the council's website and attached as Appendix 2 to this report.</p> <p>The cross-party informal Polling Place and Boundary Review Working Group met prior to the consultation commencing to consider the (A)RO's proposals, during the consultation and following the close of the consultation to consider all responses</p>			

	received. The Working Group endorses and recommends all proposals set out at Appendix 1 to Council. Where changes to polling places are proposed, ward councillors have been notified.
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Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 provides that the requirement to review polling districts and polling places relates solely to Parliamentary elections. Constituency boundaries are not the subject of the review, which is confined to the division of Parliamentary constituencies into polling districts and polling places.
- 3.2 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 provides the following definitions:
- Polling district: a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a county division or district ward.
 - Polling place: the building or geographical area in which a polling station will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. There is no legal definition of what a polling place is the geographical area could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.
 - Polling station: the actual room or area within the polling place where voting takes place.
- 3.3 The review requires us to seek to ensure that: all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and, as far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places we are responsible for are accessible to all electors, and when considering the designation of a polling place, we must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

4. Details

Current Practice

- 4.1 The Returning Officer adopts a practice where, following each election, any issues in respect of the suitability of a polling place or a polling station is immediately addressed to ascertain whether there is a need to seek alternative accommodation. Polling places are therefore regularly reviewed and updated which reduces the number of issues that need to be addressed in the statutory polling place reviews.
- 4.2 To allow for changes between reviews, for example, if a polling place becomes unavailable, or a more suitable place is found within the district, the Constitution

delegates authority to the Returning Officer “To amend the Council’s Polling Districts and Polling Places Order as necessary”.

Guidelines

- 4.2 In undertaking the review, we used the following guidelines, which are required in electoral law, to ensure that
- All electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
 - In so far as is reasonable and practicable, that polling places are accessible to those who are disabled
 - The accessibility needs of disabled persons had been considered.
- 4.3 The following considerations and principles are used at all times in determining the suitability of a building or site for use as polling places and have been taken into account during this review. Location and accessibility to electors within the polling district
- Size – can it accommodate more than one polling station if required
 - Availability – is the building readily available in the event of an unscheduled election
 - Facilities available in the venue including parking, heating, lighting, toilet facilities and security
 - Public buildings -the election rules allow the Returning Officer the free use of buildings maintained by the council including schools maintained by the authority and free schools. However, to minimise disruption, we will only use schools where there is no other suitable permanent building available.
 - Private buildings – in the absence of suitable public owned buildings, churches, clubs and other private sector buildings conveniently located and accessible to electors are considered for designation as the polling place
 - Mobiles – in the absence of any suitable public or private building in or adjacent to the polling district a mobile will be considered for designation as a polling place. Given the difficulties of heating, lighting, security, comfort of staff and electors, the negative reaction from residents living close to the site of a mobile and the significantly higher cost of locating a mobile polling station, these are considered only as a last resort.
 - The potential impact on election turnout of moving the polling station to a different location.

Review Process

- 4.4 Public notice of the review was given on 21 October 2024 and information about the review was published on the Council’s website. Details of the current arrangements along with comments of the (Acting) Returning Officer and proposals for each polling place was also published.
- 4.5 The consultation seeking comments and submissions ran from 21 October to 11 November 2024. Cherwell District Council Members, MPs representing constituencies in the Cherwell district, Oxfordshire County Councillors representing divisions in the Cherwell district, Town/Parish Councils in the Cherwell district, Political agents who had been engaged at elections in 2024, keyholders for current polling places and disability groups were directly contacted to advise of the consultation. The consultation was also promoted via the council’s social media.

- 4.6 The Cross-Party Polling Place and Boundary Review Working Group met before the consultation began to review the consultation document, during the consultation to consider responses received up to that time and after the consultation closed. The Working Group considered all submissions and had regard to information from the Democratic and Elections Team who, on behalf of the (Acting) Returning Officer investigated each response and provided information to the Working Group to assist in their deliberations.

Outcome of the Review

- 4.7 Appendix 1 details the outcome of the review setting out the (Acting) Returning Officer's proposal. It includes: the current polling district; the current polling station; the Constituency area; the Parish area; the County Division (the new divisions following the County Boundary review which will take effect at the May 2025 elections); the number of electors as at 1 September 2024 (Please note that under electorate totals, the total electorate for the polling station is highlighted in bold with the electorate registered to vote at the polling station as at 1 September 2024 listed next to PS and electors registered to vote by post indicated next to "P"); and (Acting) Returning Officer's proposals.
- 4.8 All proposals set out at Appendix 1, are endorsed by the Member Working Group.
- 4.9 Appendix 2 sets out all representations received during the consultation with a response from the (Acting) Returning Officer and Member Working Group. The response also sets out whether any change is proposed or not.
- 4.10 The changes are as follows:
- 4.10.1 Bicester South and Ambrosden district ward**
- For electors in polling district CCC1 – move from voting at Langford Community Centre to a mobile station at Graven Hill, until such time as the Graven Hill Community Building is built and available for use.
 - Electors in polling district CBX1 who currently vote at the Garth, will vote at Langford Village Centre. Langford Village Centre would be a double or triple station.
- 4.10.2 Cropredy, Sibfords and Wroxton district ward**
- Electors in polling district CBH2 who currently vote at Hanwell Fields Community Centre to vote at Hardwick Community Centre, until the community building at the Roman Fields development is built and available for use
- 4.10.3 Launton and Otmoor district ward**
- Change of polling place & polling station for electors in polling district CHB1 and CBJ1 from St Mary the Virgin Church, Charlton-on-Otmoor to Charlton-on-Otmoor Community Hall.
- 4.11 The proposals will increase the number of polling places (geographical areas in which a polling station is designated) by one to 105 and the number of polling stations (designated areas for voting) by four (made up of the additional polling place, reallocation of electors and, due to elector numbers, making some polling places into double/triple polling stations) to 139. Depending on the election type, it may be possible to combine polling districts so there would be fewer polling stations.

- 4.12 With regards polling district numbering, Regulations 38 and 39 Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations (RPR) 2001 sets out the following: There shall be a different letter or letters in the register for each parliamentary polling district and such letter or letters shall be deemed to form part of an elector's number in the register.
- 4.13 The current polling district numbering on the Cherwell electoral register starts from CAA1 (Adderbury) through to CKI1 (Yarnton). It has not been reviewed, rather added to, where polling district changes have been made under Returning Officer.
- 4.14 The polling place review is an opportune time to renumber the polling districts. Polling districts will be numbered using the format: AA to AZ restarting at BA to BZ, following this format through the register to the last polling district.
- 4.15 The Democratic and Elections Team are working with the council's GIS Team on the polling districts ahead of publication of the full electoral register on 1 February 2025. A summary sheet of changes will be provided for parties who complete the statutory paperwork to receive the register.
- 4.16 In addition to the renumbering of polling districts, changes to Polling Places will be reflected in the full publication of the full register of electors on 1 February 2025 and effective at elections from this date.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: To amend the recommendations. This is not recommended as the review has been conducted in accordance with the Electoral Administration Act 2013 and Representation of the People Act 1983. The proposals have been considered by the Polling Place Review Member Working Group and are deemed the most appropriate voting arrangements for electors in each area.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 It is a legal requirement to undertake the polling district and polling place review. The recommendations are based on what will provide the best service and experience to voters going forward.

Decision Information

Key Decision	N/A
Subject to Call in	N/A

If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Polling Place Review 2024, (Acting) Returning Officer Proposals
Appendix 2	Public Consultation Submissions with (Acting) Returning Officer response
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
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Corporate Director Approval (unless Corporate Director or Statutory Officer report)	Report of Chief Executive, in his capacity as (Acting) Returning Officer