

Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



Report of the head of legal and democratic services
Author: Steven Corrigan
Telephone: 01235 422526
E-mail: steven.corrigan@southandvale.gov.uk
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Interim Review of Polling District and Polling Places

Recommendation

That the Committee approves the schedule of polling districts and polling places set out in paragraph 9 of this report

Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out proposals for polling districts and polling places following an interim review of one polling district and four polling places to address issues that arose during recent elections.

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

2. 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 South Oxfordshire was undertaken in October 2014. The results of the polling places and polling districts review were agreed by this committee at its meeting on 26 January 2015.
3. 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.

4. The changes to polling districts and polling places were first used at the parliamentary and local elections in May 2015. In the Returning Officer's 2015 post elections report to this committee on 20 October 2015, it was reported that there were issues with queues at the polling place at Willowbrook Leisure Centre in polling district RBA. To address this issue he used his delegated powers to designate a temporary additional polling place at Ladygrove Community Centre, Tamar Way, Didcot for electors within the polling district for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) election and EU Referendum.
5. In addition the Returning Officer designated alternative polling places for Culham, Nuffield and South Moreton for the PCC and EU Referendum to address issues with the unsuitability of the previous arrangements or the lack of availability of the designated polling place.

The review

6. Council gave notice of the review in August 2016. Notice of the review was published on the council's website and given to the Acting Returning Officer, those parish councils affected by the review, district councillors, the relevant members of parliament, political agents and access groups operating in Oxfordshire. The closing date for consultation responses was 30 September 2016. A copy of the notice is **attached**.
7. Four consultation responses were received from the following stakeholders: The Acting Returning Officer – **attached**; Culham Parsh Council; Didcot Town Council and South Moreton Parish Council.

Key issues

8. Didcot Town Council and South Moreton Parish Council were supportive of the proposals. Culham Parish Council does not support the current arrangements for the residents of Culham to vote in Clifton Hampden and suggests that the church is put forward as a possible venue for voting at elections pointing out that the church has a small kitchen area and it is possible for a portaloos to be installed within the church on a temporary basis (this has been done before). Officers have previously considered the church as a polling place and concluded that it is not a suitable venue due to external and internal access issues and the lack of suitable facilities for staff working on elections. The parish council has drawn attention to plans for works to the church to convert it into a community space with better facilities of which officers are aware. However, at this time the church is not a suitable venue. Therefore, in order to provide a polling place within Culham officers propose the designation of the school as the polling place. Unfortunately this may require the closure of the school which the council has previously avoided. Officers would discuss the practicalities with the school if the committee supports the proposal.

9. The issues, responses to the consultation and officer proposals are set out below. The former Acting Returning Officer representations are attached. The current Acting Returning Officer has no comments to add although he shares the aspiration to avoid the need to close schools.

Parish	Issue	Consultation responses	Proposal
Culham	<p>In recent years we have been unable to use the only available room in the school due to the education needs of a child with learning difficulties. A small mobile unit was provided on the school site which does not provide suitable access for electors or amenities for staff and is expensive. There is no suitable alternative within Culham – the remaining pub has recently closed.</p>	<p>Culham Parish Council - the current arrangements for the residents of Culham to vote in Clifton Hampden are unsatisfactory.</p> <p>Suggest that the church is put forward as a possible venue for voting at elections. The church has a small kitchen area and it is possible for a portaloo to be installed within the church on a temporary basis (this has been done before). Going forward plans are underway for works to the church to convert it into a community space with better facilities.</p>	<p>Options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If the committee favours designating a polling place within the parish it will need to designate Culham School as the polling place for Culham. Officers will liaise with the head regarding practical arrangements. 2. To designate Clifton Hampden Village as the polling place for Culham. <p>Officers will monitor progress with the redevelopment of the church.</p>
Didcot	<p>The returning officer's report into the 2015 local and parliamentary elections concluded that an additional polling place</p>	<p>Didcot Town Council is supportive of the proposals relating to Ladygrove.</p>	<p>Subdivide the existing polling district RBA (Didcot North East) to create two polling districts with Ladygrove Community Centre, Tamar Way, Didcot and Willowbrook Leisure Centre, Bowmont Water, Didcot as the respective</p>

	should be designated in polling district RBA to address the queues that were experienced at those elections.		polling places to reflect arrangements put in place for the PCC and EU Referendum in 2016.
Nuffield	No suitable venue available in Nuffield. Although a mobile unit was provided on the Huntercombe Golf Club site in 2015 this arrangement was not an ideal arrangement for staff or the club.	The local district ward councillor and chair of the parish council feel that the democratic process is best served by having a polling place within the parish. The church has been offered as a future option once internal works are undertaken.	Designate Nettlebed Village Club, Nettlebed as the polling place for Nuffield. Officers to work with the parish council to investigate alternative options in the parish. Officers will monitor progress with the redevelopment of the church.
South Moreton	Following the closure of The Crown Public House electors voted in North Moreton in 2016. The other facilities in the village (Boxing Club and churches) are not suitable or available. Use of school would require its closure.	South Moreton Parish Council agrees that there is no alternate appropriate location. Support proposal to designate polling place in North Moreton.	Designate North Moreton Village Hall as the polling place for South Moreton.

Financial Implications

- 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

12. 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

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

Conclusion

14. The council met its legal requirement to complete a review of polling districts and polling places by the end of January 2015. Due to a number of circumstances set out in the report the council has undertaken an interim review of polling districts and polling places. The committee is invited to agree the proposals set out in paragraph 9 of this report.

Background Papers

Reports to the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee on the

- Polling District and Polling Places Review - 26 January 2015
- Final report of the Returning Officer on the delivery of the May 2015 Elections - Henley, Oxford West and Abingdon and Wantage parliamentary constituencies; South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts; and various parish and town councils – 20 October 2015