

## **SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2019**

### **COMMENTS FROM THE ACTING RETURNING OFFICER**

This sets out the Acting Returning Officer's (ARO) submission to the above review.

The ARO is responsible for the conduct of the elections for one Parliamentary Constituency which covers part of South Oxfordshire District Council – namely Henley. The boundary of this constituency extends to also cover part of Cherwell District Council. Part of South Oxfordshire District Council is within the Wantage constituency which is the responsibility of the ARO for Vale of White Horse District Council.

The following comments concentrate solely on the polling districts and polling places which are located within South Oxfordshire District Council.

The council undertook an interim review in 2018 in preparation for the district and parish council elections in May 2019. There have been very few adverse comments from voters, political parties or polling station staff about the polling places used. Consequently, I am content with the current designations, which on the whole have been in place for the District, County, Police and Crime Commissioner, Parliamentary and European elections in the past four years. In general terms, all the buildings used as polling stations are considered to be fit for purpose, accessible to the majority of the electorate which the venue serves, and accessible for those with a disability.

Because of recent community governance reviews the council has adjusted some parish boundaries and proposed, and received consent, to make related alterations to district ward and county division boundaries. These changes have resulted in changes to some polling districts to reflect the changes at parish level.

The table available on the [council's website](#) sets out the name of each polling district and the polling place used. It also shows where a polling place is outside a polling district. As stated, I am content with the current arrangements but do have a few observations set out below:

- Where possible I suggest that the council should identify an alternative polling place for that designated in case it is not available for a particular election.
- Attempts are made not to use schools for polling places as, understandably, head teachers and parents do not welcome either the disruption of closing the whole school for a day or the security issues if a room is used as a polling place and the remainder of the school remains open. As part of the 2018 interim review the council designated the Thame Snooker Club to replace Barley Hill School. The council currently designates the Youth Centre at Lord Williams Schools as a polling place for polling district LNA4 and Culham Parochial Primary School for polling district LLA. I would urge the council to seek an alternative venue if possible.

- The council should revisit the designation of polling places in Henley-on-Thames in light of comments received from Henley Town Council during the 2018 review and concerns that the Henley Leisure Centre is not suitable as a polling place in terms of a convenient location and accessibility issues within the venue.
- The Fox and Hounds Public House is a split polling place serving voters in Pyrton, Shirburn and Watlington parishes. I ask the council to investigate the continued designation of this venue as a polling place having regard to the availability of alternative polling places within the respective parishes.
- I suggest no polling place is shared by two district wards, unless special circumstances apply, such as the lack of a suitable building for polling stations in the adjoining areas, to avoid potential confusion for voters. Where this is not avoidable, or is considered to offer geographical convenience to voters, the use of separate rooms or a physical boundary should be considered.

I will continue to monitor developments in respect of the major residential developments in South Oxfordshire and make recommendations to change polling districts and polling places as required.

I reserve the right to make further comments after the close of the public consultation period.

Margaret Reed

Acting Returning Officer for the Henley Parliamentary Constituency

6 August 2019