

# Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee



Report of head of legal and democratic

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To: Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee

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## Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

### Recommendation

That the Committee approves the schedule of proposed changes to polling districts and polling places set out in paragraph 31 of this report.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Signing off officer	Vivien Williams	Emma Creed	Kim Hall	Lorne Grove

### Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out proposals for polling districts and polling places to be actioned prior to the scheduled Oxfordshire County Council elections in May 2025, to ensure electors continue to have reasonable and accessible facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

### Corporate Objectives

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

## Background

3. Under sections 18A to 18E of the Representation of the People Act 1983 as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, local authorities are required to conduct a compulsory review of their polling districts and polling places for UK parliamentary constituencies at least once every five years.
4. The last such review in South Oxfordshire was undertaken in 2019. The results of the polling districts and polling places review were agreed by this committee at its meeting on [29 October 2019](#). It is a requirement that the current statutory review of polling districts and polling places is completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
5. The current polling arrangements within South Oxfordshire are predominantly satisfactory and have been shown at elections conducted in recent years (Police and Crime Commissioner and Oxfordshire County Council elections in 2021, District and Parish elections in 2023 and the Police and Crime Commissioner and Parliamentary elections in 2024) to be practicable.
6. The Elections Act 2022 provides an additional duty for Returning Officers to provide each polling station with such equipment as it is reasonable to provide for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for, voters with a disability to vote independently and in secret. The review should therefore include consideration of whether a polling place can either provide or accommodate accessibility equipment, such as level access or a built-in ramp, disabled car parking spaces, sufficient space to manoeuvre within the building and adequate lighting both inside and outside the venue.

## Terminology

7. **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.
8. **Polling place:** the building(s) within each polling district that will house polling stations.
9. **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

10. Council gave notice of the review in September 2024. 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 25 October 2024. Consultation responses, including the ARO's comments, are set out in the appendix to this report.

### **Key issues**

11. Waterperry Gardens Limited was included in this review as it was considered not suitable to remain as a designated polling place due to accessibility concerns (i.e. small location and lack of space), as well as the fact it has poor visibility from the main road in the local area. It was proposed that Holton Village Hall could be a suitable alternative for this polling district, but after further investigation it was concluded that residents in LEG (Waterperry with Thomley) polling district do not have sufficient access to public transport to travel to Holton. It will instead be noted that this polling place requires additional signage to improve visibility when being used for a polling station, and the designation will be reconsidered if or when a more suitable venue within the polling district is identified.
12. Goring Village Hall (Belleme Room) was included in this review to propose that the reference to a specific room is removed from the designation for this polling place, so the full building 'Goring Village Hall' becomes the designated polling place. Public feedback for this proposal (see Appendix B) indicated that residents would prefer an alternative location, as it was noted that Goring Community Centre is a more accessible venue and more central to the polling district. Officers consequently investigated Goring Community Centre and concluded that it was a suitable and accessible venue, with good pedestrian access as well as nearby parking. It is therefore proposed that polling district LGA2 (Goring on Thames No.2) is re-designated to Goring Community Centre.
13. Stadhampton Village Hall was included in this review as it was considered not suitable to remain as a designated polling place due to accessibility concerns. Officers visited the area and determined that there are currently no other suitable locations available within the polling district. Further, representations received by email and via the public consultation survey oppose the change and note that there is nowhere else available within the polling district (see Appendices A and B). It is consequently proposed that there is no change to this designation until a more suitable venue within the polling district is identified.
14. Tetsworth Memorial Hall was included in this review in the context of being the designated polling place for LHH (Wheatfield). Currently, Tetsworth Memorial Hall is the designated polling place for both polling district LHG (Tetsworth) and LHH (Wheatfield), as no suitable venues are available within the polling district of LHH. It was proposed that electors in LHH (Wheatfield) should be moved to the alternative venue of Lewknor Village Hall, as this would mean they are voting in the same district ward and county division as the other electors at that polling place. In addition to this, travel to Lewknor Village Hall is comparable to travel to Tetsworth Memorial Hall, so it will not inconvenience residents in this polling district any more than to travel to the proposed location. As such, it is therefore proposed that LHH (Wheatfield) is re-designated to Lewknor Village Hall.
15. Henley Leisure Centre was included in this review as concerns were raised about accessibility at the venue. Officers visited the area and determined that the venue is suitable and the noted accessibility concerns have now been addressed, and also established that there are currently no suitable locations available within the

polling district. Further, representations received via the public consultation survey oppose the change to either Henley on Thames Town Hall (for LIA2) or Sacred Heart Parish Church (for LIA4) (see Appendix B). It is consequently proposed that there is no change to this designation for LIA4, and that there is no change to the designation for LIA2 until a suitable venue within the polling district is identified.

16. Shiplake Scout Hut was included in this review as it is not suitable to remain as a designated polling place due to accessibility concerns (i.e. poor disabled access and limited room within the venue) and issues with booking availability, with historic feedback also referencing the fact that the venue has no dedicated pedestrian access due to a lack of footpaths in the local area. One response was received via the public consultation (see Appendix B) also noted the Scout Hut can be hazardous to access by road. It is noted that email feedback from Binfield Heath Parish Council expressed a preference for the designated polling place to remain as Shiplake Scout Hut until a new premises known as 'The Forge' is available, but as this premises is not due for completion in the immediate future an alternative location must be designated now to address the aforementioned issues. The public consultation proposed an alternative venue of Shiplake Memorial Hall, as although it is outside of the polling district, this venue is accessible and has been used successfully for both the Police and Crime Commissioner and UK Parliamentary elections in 2024 for polling district LMA (Binfield Heath). It is therefore proposed that Shiplake Memorial Hall is designated as the polling place for polling district LMA (Binfield Heath).
17. The Fox & Hounds Public House was included in this review as it is not suitable to remain as a designated polling place due to accessibility concerns and a lack of facilities for staff. It is noted that it is a very small venue with restricted space, which negatively impacts on the equipment that can be provided for the polling station and could also be viewed as negatively impacting on the secrecy of the ballot (i.e. there is a minimal amount of space that can be allocated between staff and voters). At present, three very small polling districts are allocated to the venue – LOD2, LOE2, and LOH2. It is therefore proposed that multiple changes are made to polling districts in this local area to re-designate electors to other suitable polling places:
  - a. Merge polling districts LOD1 and LOD2 to create a single polling district for Pyrton (LOD)
  - b. Merge polling districts LOE1 and LOE2 to create a single polling district for Shirburn (LOE)
  - c. Merge polling districts LOH1 and LOH2 to create a single polling district for Watlington (LOH)

LOD1 is currently designated to Pyrton Village Hall, which would remain as the designated polling place for the new polling district of LOD. LOE1 is also currently designated to Pyrton Village Hall, and would remain as the designated polling place for the new polling district LOE. LOH1 is currently designated to Watlington Parish office, and this would remain as the designated polling place for the new polling district of LOH.
18. Watlington Parish Office was included in this review as concerns were raised about the size of the venue, and whether it was suitable to accommodate its existing electorate as well as the addition of LOH2, should the polling districts of LOH1 and LOH2 be merged as proposed. Officers visited the venue and confirmed that there is enough space for polling stations – as such, it is proposed

that there is no change to this designated polling place, and the aforementioned polling districts are merged as outlined in paragraph 17.

19. Stoke Row Village Hall was included in this review in the context of being the designated polling place for LPC (Highmoor). Currently, Stoke Row Village Hall is the designated polling place for both polling district LPI (Stoke Row) and LPC (Highmoor). It was proposed that electors in LPC (Highmoor) should be moved to the alternative venue of Rotherfield Greys Village Hall, as this would mean they are voting in the same district ward and county division as the other electors at that polling place. However, after taking into consideration the upcoming boundary changes as a result of the Oxfordshire County boundary review (referenced in paragraph 29), it is proposed that no change is made to this polling place. After the changes take effect, electors in this polling district will be voting in the same district ward and county division as other electors at their existing polling place.
20. The Crown in South Moreton was included in this review as concerns were raised about accessibility at the venue. It was proposed that it may be preferable to re-designate the polling place to North Moreton Village Hall, and investigate whether there is an alternative suitable venue within the polling district. Officers visited the area and determined that the venue is suitable with regard to accessibility, and also established that there are currently no other suitable locations available within the polling district. Further, responses received via the public consultation (see Appendix B) noted that there was a lack of public transport between North and South Moreton, and responses indicated that residents would prefer to remain at the existing polling place. Consequently, it is proposed that no change is made.
21. Ladygrove Community Centre was included in this review to determine whether there was an alternative suitable venue within the polling district, in order to avoid disruption to the connected school and also as a result of the growing electorate within this polling district (<4400). Officers visited the area and determined that there are currently no other suitable locations available within the polling district, but suggested that it would be preferable to split the polling district to accommodate new housing developments and the increase in electorate this will result in. It is therefore proposed that polling district RBA1 (Didcot No.1 Ladygrove) is split into two polling districts – RBA1 and RBA3, with RBA1 encompassing the existing part of the polling district and RBA3 encompassing the new housing developments on the other side of the A4130. Both RBA1 and RBA3 will be designated to Ladygrove Community Centre, until a more suitable venue is identified within either polling district. Officers have been informed that a new community centre is due to be built in the proposed polling district of RBA3, with the intention being that building works are completed in 2025.
22. Barnes Close Community Centre was included in this review to determine whether there was an alternative suitable venue within the polling district, as the venue was reported to be not easily located from local main roads, as well as issues with booking availability. Additionally, it was noted that concerns have previously been raised by the venue's management with regard to parking issues and security risks when the building is used as a polling place. Officers visited the area and determined that it was difficult to find the venue due to a lack of signage from local main roads, and that although it appears to be accessible and of a suitable size, there is an alternative venue that appears more suitable. It is therefore proposed that electors in RCA1 (Didcot No. 4 Northbourne) are re-designated to Didcot

Leisure Centre, as this venue is deemed more suitable in terms of being a more central location within the polling district and having good accessibility.

23. Didcot Civic Hall was included in this review in the context of being the designated polling place for RCA2 (Didcot No.5 Park). The size of the electorate in RCA2 (<6000) and the fact that another polling district is already designated to Didcot Civic Hall means that there is a limited amount of space at the venue, and use of the venue for two large polling districts is considered to be unsustainable. Consequently, two suitable venues were identified as alternatives – GWP Southern Community Centre and Edmond’s Park Pavilion – and it was proposed that the polling district should be subdivided into two smaller polling districts. Officers visited the area and confirmed the alternative venues were suitable and met accessibility requirements, as well as confirming that they would be easy to access for residents in the new proposed polling districts. It is therefore recommended that polling district RCA2 is split into RCA2 and RCA4, with electors resident in the newer housing developments designated to GWP Southern Community Centre, and electors resident in older housing designated to Edmond’s Park Pavilion (see Appendix F). Both designated polling places would also be located within the boundaries of the new polling districts. Feedback from the public consultation did note some concerns about travelling to the newly proposed venues, but splitting the polling district into two as proposed above would resolve these concerns.
24. The Northbourne Centre was included in this review as concerns were raised about accessibility at the venue. The Northbourne Centre is currently the designated polling place for both RCA3 (Didcot No.6 Orchard) and RDB (Didcot No.9 Northbourne). An alternative suitable polling place was identified for polling district RCA3 – King Alfred Drive Community Centre – which is noted to be within the RCA3 polling district boundary, whereas The Northbourne Centre is not. It is noted that comments received queried usage of other venues, such as Cornerstone or All Saints Church Hall (see Appendix A), but these locations were deemed less suitable venues. It is therefore proposed that as a suitable and accessible venue has now been identified within the boundary of the polling district, the polling place for RCA3 should be re-designated to King Alfred Drive Community Centre.
25. The Northbourne Centre was included in this review as concerns were raised about accessibility at the venue. The Northbourne Centre is currently the designated polling place for both RCA3 (Didcot No.6 Orchard) and RDB (Didcot No.9 Northbourne). An alternative polling place was identified for polling district RDB – Didcot Methodist Church – with this venue also being located within the RDB polling district and having good accessibility. In addition, Didcot Methodist Church is more easily visible from the main Broadway road, which is an advantage in helping electors more easily locate their designated polling place. It is therefore proposed that polling district RDB is re-designated to Didcot Methodist Church.
26. 2<sup>nd</sup> Wallingford Scout Group was included in this review to determine whether there was an alternative suitable venue within the polling district, as concerns had been raised regarding the size of the venue and whether it is sufficient to accommodate the electorate in this polling district (<2300). Officers visited the area and determined that there are currently no other suitable locations available

within the polling district, and advised that the size within the existing polling place is sufficient to accommodate the electorate. Feedback from the public consultation indicated that residents would prefer to stay at the existing polling place as well, as it is accessible and convenient to travel to. Alternative venues that were proposed in consultation responses were deemed less suitable compared to 2<sup>nd</sup> Wallingford Scout Group, as they were either less central to the polling district or buildings on school premises, which generally are not used to avoid disruption to children and parents and eliminate any safeguarding risks. It is therefore proposed that no change is made to the designated polling place for this polling district.

27. St Mary's Church was included in this review as it is not considered sustainable to continue sending the full electorate in this polling district to a single polling place due to its size (<4400). It has been noted that there is no parking available at St Mary's Church, which is an inconvenience for local electors, and concerns have previously been raised about queues at the venue. An alternative venue was proposed in the public consultation, Centre 70, which appeared to be a potentially suitable alternative location. Officers visited the area to establish whether there are any other larger, more suitable venues available within the polling district, but could not find a venue large enough to avoid experiencing the same issues affecting the current designated polling place. Officers also considered that Centre 70 would experience the same issues if the entirety of the polling district was designated here. It is therefore proposed that the polling district of RFA2 (Wallingford No. 2) is subdivided into two smaller polling districts, RFA2 and RFA3. RFA2 can then be designated to St Mary's Church (in accordance with the current arrangement) and RFA3 can be designated to Centre 70 (see Appendix G).
28. It is noted that two other recommendations were received as part of the public consultation – to review the designation of Garsington Village Hall for LFB (Garsington) and Stewart Hall for RAC2 (Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Shillingford). The Sports and Social Club in Garsington was proposed as an alternative for polling district LFB, but whilst this appears to be an accessible and suitable venue, it has no pedestrian access and is located on the outskirts of the village, whereas Garsington Village Hall is more central.
29. Two comments were received regarding the inconvenience of travelling to Stewart Hall in Brightwell-cum-Sotwell for residents in polling district RAC2, but there are no suitable and accessible alternative venues available within the RAC2 polling district that can be designated as a polling place. It should be noted that polling places are reviewed on an ongoing basis to determine whether any new suitable and accessible venues become available within existing polling districts, so there is potential for future changes to be made to address such concerns
30. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) Electoral Review of Oxfordshire has confirmed final recommendations to create or amend certain parish wards and county division boundaries, to ensure electoral equality across the district. It may therefore be necessary to create further polling districts to accommodate the aforementioned changes, until a further comprehensive review of polling districts and polling places is conducted. 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.

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

Polling district / Parish	Issue	Proposal
LEG – Waterperry with Thomley	Waterperry Gardens Limited is unsuitable as a polling place due to accessibility concerns (small location) and the fact it has poor visibility from the main road, but it is noted that there are no other suitable alternative venues in the polling district.	No change.
LGA2 – Goring on Thames No.2	Goring Village Hall includes reference to a specific room in its designation – intention is to remove the reference so the entire building is the designated polling place.	Re-designate to Goring Community Centre, following feedback from the public consultation.
LHF – Stadhampton	Stadhampton Village Hall is unsuitable as a polling place due to accessibility concerns, but it is noted that there are no other suitable alternative venues in the polling district.	No change.
LHH – Wheatfield	LHH Wheatfield electors are designated to Tetsworth Memorial Hall, which is both outside their polling district and is used for electors in a different County Division.	Re-designate to Lewknor Village Hall.
LIA2 – Henley 2 (North)	The suitability of Henley Leisure Centre was queried following accessibility concerns. It is also located outside of the polling district for LIA2.	No change.
LIA4 – Henley 4 (South)	The suitability of Henley Leisure Centre was queried following accessibility concerns.	No change.



LMA – Binfield Heath	Shiplake Scout Hut is unsuitable as a polling place due to accessibility concerns and booking issues.	Re-designate to Shiplake Memorial Hall.
LOD1 – Pyrton No.1	There is no need to maintain a polling district divide in this area – LOD2 Pyrton No.2 is within the same wards, divisions and constituencies as LOD1.	Merge with LOD2, creating a single polling district – LOD.
LOD2 – Pyrton No.2	There is no need to maintain a polling district divide in this area – LOD1 Pyrton No.1 is within the same wards, divisions and constituencies as LOD2.  Additionally, the Fox & Hounds Public House is unsuitable as a polling place due to accessibility issues and lack of facilities for staff.	Merge with LOD1, creating a single polling district – LOD.  Designate LOD polling district to Pyrton Village Hall.
LOE1 – Shirburn No.1	There is no need to maintain a polling district divide in this area – LOE2 Shirburn No.2 is within the same wards, divisions and constituencies as LOE1.	Merge with LOE2, creating a single polling district – LOE.
LOE2 – Shirburn No.2	There is no need to maintain a polling district divide in this area – LOD1 Pyrton No.1 is within the same wards, divisions and constituencies as LOD2.  Additionally, the Fox & Hounds Public House is unsuitable as a polling place due to accessibility issues and lack of facilities for staff.	Merge with LOE1, creating a single polling district – LOE.  Designate LOE polling district to Pyrton Village Hall.

<p>LOH1 – Watlington No.1</p>	<p>There is no need to maintain a polling district divide in this area – LOH1 Watlington No.1 is within the same wards, divisions and constituencies as LOH2.</p> <p>Watlington Parish Office was included in the review as it was unclear whether the venue was large enough to accommodate more electors.</p>	<p>Merge with LOH2, creating a single polling district – LOH.</p> <p>Designate LOH to Watlington Parish Office.</p>
<p>LOH2 – Watlington No.2</p>	<p>There is no need to maintain a polling district divide in this area – LOH2 Watlington No.2 is within the same wards, divisions and constituencies as LOH1.</p> <p>Additionally, the Fox &amp; Hounds Public House is unsuitable as a polling place due to accessibility issues and lack of facilities for staff.</p>	<p>Merge with LOH1, creating a single polling district – LOH.</p> <p>Designate LOH to Watlington Parish Office.</p>
<p>LPC – Highmoor</p>	<p>Stoke Row Village Hall is outside of the polling district for LPC Highmoor, and is also currently used by electors in a different County division.</p>	<p>No change.</p>
<p>RAH – South Moreton</p>	<p>The suitability of The Crown was queried following accessibility concerns.</p>	<p>No change.</p>
<p>RBA1 – Didcot No.4 (Northbourne)</p>	<p>Ladygrove Community Centre is no longer suitable as the only polling place used for RBA1 due to the growing size of the electorate (&lt;4400), and splitting the polling district due to the size of the electorate must be considered.</p>	<p>Split RBA1 into two polling districts – RBA1 and RBA3, using the A4130 and Lady Grove as dividing roads.</p> <p>Designate both RBA1 and RBA3 to Ladygrove Community Centre.</p>

<p>RCA1 – Didcot No.4 (Northbourne)</p>	<p>Barnes Close Community Centre is no longer suitable as a polling place due to a lack of signage/visibility from main roads and concerns raised by venue management (i.e. parking issues, security risks).</p>	<p>Re-designate to Didcot Leisure Centre.</p>
<p>RCA2 – Didcot No.5 (Park)</p>	<p>Didcot Civic Hall is no longer suitable as the polling place for RCA2 due to the growing size of the electorate (&lt;6000) and the fact it is outside of the polling district.</p> <p>Splitting the polling district must also be considered due to the size of the electorate.</p>	<p>Split RCA2 into two polling districts – RCA2 and RCA4, according to proximity to polling stations and taking into consideration new and old housing.</p> <p>Designate RCA2 to Edmond’s Park Pavilion.</p> <p>Designate RCA4 to GWP Southern Community Centre.</p>
<p>RCA3 – Didcot No.6 (Orchard)</p>	<p>The Northbourne Centre is no longer suitable as the polling place for RCA3, as it is located outside of the polling district.</p>	<p>Re-designate to King Alfred Drive Community Centre.</p>
<p>RDB – Didcot No.9 (Northbourne)</p>	<p>The Northbourne Centre is no longer suitable as the polling place for RDB due to accessibility concerns.</p>	<p>Re-designate to Didcot Methodist Church.</p>
<p>RFA1 – Wallingford No.1</p>	<p>The suitability of 2<sup>nd</sup> Wallingford Scout Group was queried following accessibility concerns regarding available space inside the venue, given the size of the electorate (&lt;2300).</p>	<p>No change.</p>
<p>RFA2 – Wallingford No.2</p>	<p>St Mary’s Church is no longer suitable as the only polling place used for RBA1 due to the size of the electorate in this polling district (&lt;4400), and a noted issue with limited parking.</p> <p>Splitting the polling district must also be considered due to the size of the electorate.</p>	<p>Split RFA2 geographically (North and South) into two polling districts – RFA2 and RFA3.</p> <p>Designate RFA2 to St Mary’s Church.</p> <p>Designate RFA3 to Centre 70.</p>

## Financial Implications

32. 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 and costs for hire of polling places can be met from existing budgets.

## Legal Implications

33. In accordance with sections 18A to 18E of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, a compulsory review of the polling districts and polling places for UK parliamentary constituencies must be conducted at least once every five years. This review satisfies the aforementioned requirement.
34. However, it is noted that 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, should this be required.

## Climate and ecological impact implications

35. As agreed with the climate team, the use of the Climate Impact Assessment Tool is not appropriate for the multiple decisions as set out in this report. There are no negative climate or ecological impact implications with the proposals set out as the changes proposed do not have any impact beyond the existing arrangements, which is to have a designated polling place per polling district. However, the proposals resulting in an increase in the number of polling places/polling districts would have slightly positive climate and ecological impact implications owing to reducing the need for travel by car or the need to travel as far to reach the designated polling place, as the venues would be located closer geographically to the electorate in that new polling district.

## Equalities implications

36. An Equality Screening Assessment was carried out prior to the public consultation for this report, and no negative implications were identified as a result of this review (see Appendix D). This report seeks to ensure that the council and Returning Officer comply with both the Elections Act provisions to assist voters with a disability in addition to the duties under the Equality Act 2010.

## Risks

37. There are no discernable risks associated with the proposals set out in this report. By undertaking the review the council is meeting its statutory duty.

## Conclusion

38. To meet its statutory obligation to conduct a review by 31 January 2025, and make sure suitable and convenient polling arrangements are provided for local electors

before the next scheduled elections in May 2025, a review of polling districts and polling places has been undertaken. The committee is invited to agree the proposals set out in paragraph 31 of this report and note that the Returning Officer may use delegated authority to address issues that could arise which require future changes.