

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2024

COMMENTS FROM THE ACTING RETURNING OFFICER

This sets out the submission of the Returning Officer for South Oxfordshire and Acting Returning Officer for Henley and Thame and Didcot and Wantage (Part) parliamentary constituencies, to the above review.

Reviews of polling districts and polling places have already been undertaken proactively, since the previous compulsory review completed in October 2019, including prior to the district and parish elections in May 2023 and prior to the Police and Crime Commissioner and Parliamentary elections in 2024, to ensure that the council's polling arrangements are kept up to date. I welcome this proactive approach to ensure issues are addressed as they arise and to ensure voters and election staff have suitable venues. In general terms, the majority of buildings used as polling stations are considered fit for purpose, accessible to the majority of the electorate which the venue serves, and accessible for those with a disability. I note there are a few proposals for change suggested to the existing arrangements to address specific issues but that for the majority no changes are proposed. I have a few observations set out below:

- I welcome efforts to designate additional polling stations in both Didcot and Wallingford to provide more convenient locations for electors and to address the growing electorate which has put the existing arrangements under strain.
- The Fox and Hounds Public House is a split polling place serving voters in Pyrton, Shirburn and Watlington parishes. As in the previous statutory review, I welcome the council's investigation of the continued designation of this venue as a polling place having regard to the availability of alternative polling places within the respective parishes, accessibility issues, lack of facilities for polling station staff and the size of the venue to accommodate the required polling station equipment and new legislative requirements – voter ID.
- I suggest no polling place is shared by two district wards/county divisions, 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 encourage an ongoing review of arrangements particularly in circumstances where an existing polling place is not redesignated for specific reasons as part of this review, resulting in electors voting in a neighbouring polling district, which may be subsequently addressed.

Steven Corrigan, Returning Officer for Vale of White Horse District Council and Acting Returning Officer for the Henley and Thame and Didcot and Wantage (Part) Parliamentary Constituencies

November 2024