

Polling Districts and Places Review

Cabinet

Date: 16th October 2019

Authors: Leader of the Council,
Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer

Wards: All Borough Wards

Parishes Affected: All Parish Councils within Swindon Borough Council boundary

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 Cabinet is asked to review the responses to the consultation and to consider the proposed polling districts and locations of polling stations in the Borough, as set in the body of the report and the appendices. Under The Representation of the Peoples Act 1983 local authorities are required to divide their area into polling districts and to designate polling places for each district, and to keep those arrangements under review.
- 1.2 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a duty for all polling districts and polling places to be reviewed at least once every four years. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timings of compulsory reviews, with this current review to be completed by 31st January 2020. The last full review was completed in 2014.
- 1.3 As part of the review, the Returning Officer is required to make representations to Cabinet regarding the suitability of all polling places and stations within each of the polling districts to establish a scheme of polling places suitable in both location and accessibility for electors to cast their vote at all national and local elections and referenda.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to request the Council to:

- 2.1 Endorse the recommendation that no changes be made to those polling stations within the borough as identified in Appendix C.
 - 2.2 Endorse the recommendation to changes to polling stations within the Wroughton and Wichelstowe Ward as identified in Appendix E.
 - 2.3 Endorse the recommendation to changes to polling stations within the Ridgeway Ward as identified in Appendix F.
 - 2.4 Endorse the recommendation to changes to polling stations within the Mannington and Western Ward as identified in Appendix G.
 - 2.5 Adopt the recommendation to set all polling places as coterminous with the polling district as identified in Appendix C.
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Matthew Box, Direct Dial 3999, mbox@swindon.gov.uk.

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- 2.6 Note that any changes arising from this review would be implemented at elections held after 1st December 2019.

3. Details

- 3.1 This review consultation period commenced on Monday 8th July 2019 with the publication of the Notice giving a deadline for comments as Friday 16th August 2019. The Notice was displayed on Swindon Borough Councils website, the Civic Offices (reception area and external noticeboard) and distributed to all Clerks of Parish Councils within the SBC boundary for display on their noticeboard. Electoral Services also consulted with all Ward Members, Members of Parliament and all Parish Councils by sending a copy of the Consultation Document and Table of Places and asking for comments on the current polling place scheme. The disability groups Royal Mencap Society, Swindon MIND, SCOPE and Swindon Blind Association, who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises and facilities for persons who have different forms of disability, were also consulted on the proposals. Appendix B includes the Notice of Review, the Review of Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations consultation document and Table of Places.
- 3.2 The borough population is continuing to increase with pockets of high growth and development areas. Additional voting facilities may need to be identified to accommodate all electors and the Council must be mindful of the Electoral Commission guidelines of elector/polling station ratio that no more than 2,500 electors (excluding postal votes) should be allocated to each polling station.
- 3.3 In addition to any suggestions, comments or requests from interested parties made during the review each polling place and polling station was surveyed for accessibility and suitability with the needs of both the elector and polling staff taken into account. The review found that the majority of the polling stations were both accessible and suitable and as such these locations remain in the new polling place scheme identified in Appendix C.

Responses to the consultation and proposed changes

- 3.4 Wroughton and Wichelstowe Ward
- 3.4.1 Ward Councillors Martyn and Ford and Robert Buckland QC MP expressed concerns that those electors living at Alexandra Park (WWF polling district) may be at a disadvantage. If those electors have no transport they may have difficulty in accessing their polling station located at Ellendune Community Centre as there is no pavement along Priors Hill (which is the main route down to the village and polling station) and an irregular bus service. They requested an alternative location for the polling station.

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- 3.4.2 Alexandra House Hotel has been identified as a suitable location for a new polling station. The Elections Team has undertaken a site visit to the hotel which has a number of large meeting rooms with disabled access and providing good car parking facilities. The hotel conference & events coordinator confirmed that they would be happy for the premises to be used as a polling station.
- 3.4.3 The Elections Team has also identified the polling station to accommodate those electors in the WWE polling district as the journey to their current polling station (at Ellendune Community Centre) takes the same route as WWF electors and therefore could potentially cause the same disadvantages and concerns.
- 3.4.4 It is recommended that the polling station for those electors in WWE and WWF be relocated to Alexandra House Hotel. This will be a single polling station for an electorate total of 843. Appendix E shows the proposed polling station location for WWE and WWF.

3.5 Ridgeway Ward

- 3.5.1 Councillor Sumner and Parish Councillor Horley expressed concerns that those electors living in the newest part of the Badbury Park development within the Ridgeway ward (RWB polling district) who do not have their own transport or who have mobility problems could have difficulty accessing their polling station as they have to cross the busy A419 to reach it. The current RWB polling district covers an area within the Ridgeway Ward to both the east and west of the A419 and the electorate vote at Liddington Village Hall. The area to the west includes the Badbury Park streets, there are currently 8 streets, 145 properties and 57 electors appearing on the Electoral Register, however it is the Elections Team understanding that the area is still in construction and numbers will increase.
- 3.5.2 The Elections Team recommend that to alleviate these problems a new polling district RWF be created, consisting of those streets currently in RWB to the west of the A419. The polling station for the RWF polling district would be at the Richard Jefferies Museum, which is the polling station location for the other streets in Badbury Park (CLC polling district), it is in a more convenient and accessible location for the RWF electors and should resolve any previous issues. This will be a single station for an electorate of 1204. See Appendix F for RWF map and street list.

3.6 Mannington and Western Ward

- 3.6.1 Those electors on the MWC register in Mannington and Western Ward currently vote at Hazelwood Academy School, this was due to the closure of Toothill Community Centre where their polling station used to be located. The Elections Team was informed after the May 2019 local

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elections that the community centre had re-opened and undertook a site visit. The premises has a large hall, good accessibility and car parking facilities, the centre trustees are agreeable for it to be used again as a polling station.

- 3.6.2 Although Hazelwood Academy School is happy for the Council to continue to use the premises as a polling station it does need to close on polling day and as an attempt is always made to use locations other than schools, due to the disruption a whole school closure creates; the recommendation is that the polling station should revert back to Toothill Community Centre. This will be a single station for an electorate of 1619. See Appendix G for the proposed polling station location for MWC.

3.7 Coterminous Polling Places

- 3.7.1 It is common practice for many local authorities to set the polling places as coterminous with the polling district. This ensures, if in the situation of a polling station being unavailable at short notice, the Returning Officer is able to quickly identify suitable alternative polling stations within the polling place. It is recommended that all polling places be coterminous with the polling district, the polling place scheme Appendix C identifies the polling places.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 A number of options have been considered as part of the review and these are highlighted within the report. No other options have been put forward by interested parties. Appendix D gives the full list of comments and responses made during the consultation period.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 The costs for the additional polling station at Alexandra House Hotel will come out of the election budget and is approximately £250.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Legal and Human Rights implications were taken fully into account in the preparation of this report and it is believed the recommendations are compatible with Convention rights.
- 5.3 The Returning Officer has a statutory duty to provide adequate voting facilities for all electors. Too many electors allocated to a polling station or the use of an unsuitable premises in terms of access or location could compromise the election.

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All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.4 No other specific implications were identified during the preparation of this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.5 A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed in relation to this report and a copy can be obtained from the report author. Good practice has been implemented through good and appropriate consultation in relation to all proposals. Good inclusion practice has also been implemented when considering changes in polling venues to ensure they are accessible for voters. This demonstrates our duty to ensure equality of opportunity.

Risk Management

- 5.6 Risks were considered when looking at the possibility of moving to alternative polling venues. It is believed there are no unmitigated risks. For example new venues were visited and assessed regarding their suitability for use as a polling station only if new proposals were suggested.
- 5.7 Electors will be notified of any changes to polling stations on the SBC website and through clear messages on poll cards.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Chief Legal Officer (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.
- 6.2 Mannington & Western, Ridgeway and Wroughton & Wichelstowe Borough Ward Councillors have been consulted
- 6.3 The Members of Parliament for Swindon North and Swindon South parliamentary constituencies have been consulted
- 6.4 The Corporate Management Team was consulted in respect of this report.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A- Definition of Terms
- 8.2 Appendix B- Notice of Review, Review of Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Stations consultation document and Table of Places.

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- 8.3 Appendix C- Polling Place Scheme, Inc. list of wards, polling districts and places and electorate figures.
- 8.4 Appendix D- Suggestions, comments and requests from interested parties.
- 8.5 Appendix E- WWE &WWF map.
- 8.6 Appendix F- RWF map and street list.
- 8.7 Appendix G- MWC map.
- 9. **Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan**
- 9.1 This is not a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for October 2019.