

# Gloucester City Council

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Constitutional &amp; Electoral Working Group</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>13 October 2015</b>
	<b>Council</b>		<b>19 November 2015</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Polling District and Polling Places Review 2015</b>		
<b>Report Of:</b>	<b>Returning Officer</b>		
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All Wards</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Budget/Policy Framework:</b>	<b>No</b>
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<b>Appendices:</b>	<b>1. Notice of Review</b>		
	<b>2. Recommendations</b>		
	<b>3. Maps of recommended Polling Districts</b>		
	<b>4. Responses to Consultation</b>		

## FOR GENERAL RELEASE

### 1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To outline the recommendations for the 2015 Polling District and Polling Places Review.

### 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Constitutional and Electoral Working Group is asked to

- (1) Consider the proposals for the 2015 Polling District and Polling Places Review and, subject to any amendments, **RECOMMEND** the proposals to Council for approval.
- (2) Put forward recommendations to the Returning Officer in respect of polling stations for Polling Districts AD3, B4, E5, G5, KW4.

2.3 Council is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- (1) The proposals for the 2015 Polling District and Polling Places Review be approved.
- (2) That the Returning Officer's decisions regarding polling station arrangements be noted, subject to final decisions being made in respect of Polling Districts BT5 and W3.

### **3.0 Background and Key Issues**

3.1 The last review of Polling Districts and Polling Places took place in 2014 to comply with Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 which provided that all local authorities must undertake and complete a review in the period of 16 months from the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013. No changes were made as a result of that review. The next review was due to take place within five years; however, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) published its final recommendations for the Gloucester City ward boundaries on 30 June 2015 following an electoral boundary review. The recommendations increase the number of Councillors to 39, create new wards and significantly change the boundaries of some existing wards, with effect from the elections in May 2016. As a result the Council now needs to amend the polling districts in some wards and, in some cases, the polling stations.

#### **Review Process**

3.2 It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that all electors have access to a polling station which is considered to be as suitable as possible for voting purposes. The local authority must take measures to ensure that, where possible, polling stations are accessible to disabled electors. Polling stations must be located in the polling district they are serving unless there are special circumstances. It should also be in a location which is easy for electors from all areas of the district to find.

3.3 The Council is required to publish any correspondence submitted in respect of this polling station review.

3.4 The Council must adhere to the following regulations whilst conducting the Polling District and Polling Places/Station Review:

- The authority must publish notice of the holding of a review (Appendix 2)
- The authority must consult the (Acting) Returning Officer in a constituency which is wholly or partly in its area
- The (Acting) Returning Officer must make representations to the local authority which must include information as to the location of polling stations (existing or proposed) within polling places (existing or proposed)
- The local authority must publish the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations within 30 calendar days of receipt, in such manner as is prescribed
- The authority must seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the returning officer's representations
- Any elector in a constituency situated in whole or in part of the authority's area may make representations
- Representations made by any person in connection with a review of polling places may include proposals for specified alternative polling places
- On completion of a review, the authority must give reasons for its decisions in the review and publish such other information as is prescribed.

3.5 As part of the review process, local authorities must:

- Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
- Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable the polling places are accessible to those who are disabled, and
- When considering or reviewing the designation of a polling place, have regard for the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

3.6 Any changes made to the location of a polling station must adhere to the following rules:

- (a) the authority must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in its area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
- (b) the authority must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled;
- (c) the authority must have regard to the accessibility to disabled persons of potential polling stations in any place which it is considering designating as a polling place.
- (d) the polling place for a polling district must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate any area wholly or partly outside the district;
- (e) the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station.

3.7 The timetable for the review is as follows:

Publication of Notice of the Review and Information Sheet	4 September 2015
Consultation period	4 September 2015 – 2 October 2015
Publication of the Returning Officers representations	within 30 days of receipt
Report to Constitutional and Electoral Working Group	13 October 2015
Submit to Council	19 November 2015
Implementation of report recommendations	from Register of Electors published on 1 December 2015, to take effect for the PCC, City Council and Parish elections expected to take place on 5 May 2016

3.8 List of Consultees:

The Returning Officer, Gloucester City Council  
 The (Acting) Returning Officer, Gloucester City Council (Gloucester Constituency)  
 The (Acting) Returning Officer, Tewkesbury Borough Council (Tewkesbury Constituency)  
 Gloucester City Councillors  
 Richard Graham MP (Gloucester Constituency)

Laurence Robertson MP (Tewkesbury Constituency)  
Labour Party  
Liberal Democrats  
Conservative Party  
Green Party  
UKIP  
TUSC  
Disability and Mobility Groups via Gloshub Bulletin  
All Polling Stations used in 2015

## **Proposals**

- 3.8 Natural boundaries have been taken into consideration when looking at new polling districts. The Electoral Commission's (EC) maximum recommended number of electors per polling station has also been taken into account.
- 3.9 Some recommended polling districts are slightly larger than some of the existing districts. These are still within the maximum number set by the EC and cater for the fact that there will be an increase in the number of Presiding Officers required from 68 to 72. The Elections team has difficulty recruiting enough experienced and reliable Presiding Officers and the more polling districts the more difficult this will be.
- 3.10 Some polling districts are significantly smaller than others. This is where the county divisions are not coterminous with the city wards and as such small districts must be created to keep the divisions separate on the register.
- 3.11 It is recommended that we rename the Polling districts to reflect the Ward names to make the register easier to use.

## **4.0 ABCD Considerations**

- 4.1 Not applicable. Polling District and Polling Place Reviews are governed by legislation.

## **5.0 Alternative Options Considered**

- 5.1 There are no alternative options to holding a review; the review is required because of the changes to the boundaries.
- 5.2 The Constitutional and Electoral Working Group (CEWG) considered the proposals on 13 October 2015 and where there was more than one reasonable option in respect of polling stations, the Group discussed and agreed on a recommendation. The Group make a number of other amendments to the recommendations, which are reflected in the proposals contained in Appendix 2.
- 5.3 The CEWG agreed that to prevent confusion, wherever possible, electors should expect to vote in the same location at every type of election, irrespective of whether this resulted in polling stations being situated outside of the voting area for a particular election (this is relevant only for County Council elections).
- 5.4 The Group instructed officers to explore alternative options for the location of a number of polling stations and the outcomes are as follows:

- **Barnwood:** St Lawrence Church Centre – visit confirmed venue is suitable for accommodating two polling districts, including enough space to sufficiently separate them at County elections when the polling districts will be in different County divisions.
- **Barton and Tredworth:** a consultation response was received from Tredworth Junior School (Appendix 4) requesting that the school no longer be used as a polling station. Alternative options have been explored in previous years and ward Councillors have been consulted, however, options are limited and an alternative venue had not yet been identified. Members requested that officers visit the Trust Centre on Conduit Street to assess its suitability. The visit confirmed that the only room large enough to accommodate a polling station was on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. There is disabled access to the building and a lift that goes directly into the room, but a decision will need to be made as to whether a 1<sup>st</sup> floor polling station is preferable to closing the school. Members of the CEWG and the relevant ward Councillors have been consulted and the Returning Officer will make the final decision.
- **Elmbridge, Kingsholm and Wotton:** St Peter’s Nursery – visit confirmed that venue is large enough to accommodate two small polling stations. Therefore there is no need to find an alternative venue for either polling district.
- **Grange:** Members preferred Murray Hall to Tuffley Community Association for the part of Grange that is also part of Quedgeley Parish – visit confirmed venue to be large enough to accommodate two polling stations.
- **Westgate:** W3 – Members requested that an alternative, more convenient, polling station be identified for this polling district. Visits to the Extra Care Village and Chinese Resource Centre conducted. Both venues have suitable rooms, however the Chinese Resource Centre is only accessible from behind a secured gate that could not be kept open, therefore the venue is not suitable. Use of the Extra Care Village is due to be discussed at a residents' meeting and the Returning Officer will make a final decision based on the outcome.

## 6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 Changes to polling districts and stations are required as a result of the changes to the ward boundaries and the proposed changes are considered to create the optimum arrangements and reflect the considerations required by the relevant legislation.

## 7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 7.1 The final decision on polling districts and polling places is made by the Council and the final decision on the situation of polling stations rests with the Returning Officer. Polling stations can be moved at any time through a decision of the Returning Officer and feedback and suggestions from Members in relation to polling stations is always welcomed. Decisions on polling stations for polling districts BT5 and W3 will be made by the Returning Officer in due course, as detailed in paragraph 5.4.
- 7.2 Once the Council has agreed the proposals, details of the new polling districts and polling places must be made available to the public. These should be made available at the local authority offices, in at least one conspicuous place in the constituency, and on the council’s website. The reasons for choosing a particular polling district and polling place must be given.

7.3 Along with the reasons for the final decision of the review, the following must also be published:

- All correspondence sent to the (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review
- All correspondence sent to any person whom the authority contacted because they had particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people
- All representations made by any person in connection with the review
- The minutes of any meeting held by the authority to consider any revision to the designation of any polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review
- Details of the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review
- Details of the places where the results of the review have been published

7.4 The approved changes to polling districts will be implemented for the new Register of Electors published on 1 December 2015 and formally take effect from the elections in May 2016. The next review must take place by 1 December 2020.

## **8.0 Financial Implications**

8.1 There may be a slight increase or decrease in polling station costs if new venues are used.

8.2 There will be an increase in polling districts, which will result in more staff being appointed at an election; this will lead to increased costs which will be met from existing budgets.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

## **9.0 Legal Implications**

9.1 The legal implications are detailed in the body of the report.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report)

## **10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications**

10.1 There are no risk management implications scoring 8 or above resulting from this report.

## **11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):**

11.1 As part of the review process, local authorities must have regard to accessibility issues and must take measures to ensure that, where possible, polling stations are accessible to disabled electors.

11.2 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

## 12.0 Other Corporate Implications

### Community Safety

12.1 There are no community safety implications resulting from this report.

### Sustainability

12.2 There are no sustainability implications resulting from this report.

### Staffing & Trade Union

12.3 There are no issues relating to trade unions arising from this report.

### Press release drafted/approved

12.4 The public awareness strategy for the review is as follows:

Press release including details of consultation period and where to find information. Article to be printed in Gloshub Bulletin to consult Gloucestershire disability/mobility organisations	4 September 2015
Website updated – new page with full details and links to all reports and notices. Link on main home page. Update the Gloucester City Council Facebook and Twitter pages with link to website. All Member briefing note.	4 September 2015
Send letters to the consultees listed below	4 September 2015
Update website with submissions from consultees and Returning Officer	9 October 2015
Press release upon publication of final report	November 2015

**Background Documents:** None