

Gloucester City Council

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| Meeting: | General Purposes Committee Council | Date: | 15 October 2019 21 November 2019 |
| Subject: | 2019 Review of Polling District and Polling Places Review | | |
| Report Of: | Returning Officer | | |
| Wards Affected: | All Wards | | |
| Key Decision: | No | Budget/Policy Framework: | No |
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| Appendices: | 1. Notice of Review 2. List of Consultees 3. Consultation Responses 4. Revised ARO Recommendations 5. Maps of Polling Districts where changes are recommended 6. Draft Final Arrangements | | |

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To outline the recommendations for the 2019 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places. This report has been updated following the meeting of the General Purposes Committee on 15 October 2019.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The General Purposes Committee is asked to

- (1) Consider the proposals for the 2019 Review of Polling District and Polling Places and, subject to any amendments, **RECOMMEND** the proposals to Council for approval.
- (2) **RECOMMEND** to Council a preferred option for the polling district boundaries for L2, L3 and L4.
- (3) **RECOMMEND** to Council a preferred option for the polling station for BT5.
- (4) **RECOMMEND** to Council a preferred option for the polling station for QFC3.

2.3 Council is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- (1) The proposals for the 2019 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places Review be approved.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

3.1 In accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the Council is required to complete a compulsory review of the polling districts and polling places that fall within its area every 5 years. The review had to take place between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020 with a public consultation forming part of that review.

3.2 The aim of the review is to ensure:

- electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- as far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

3.3 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 1)
- The authority must consult the (Acting) Returning Officer (ARO) 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.

3.4 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.

Review Process

3.5 The last review took place in 2015 following a review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), which increased the number of Councillors to 39, created new wards and significantly changed the boundaries of some existing wards, with effect from the elections in May 2016. The review resulted in changes to polling districts and some polling stations.

3.6 The timetable for the review is set out below:

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| 9 July 2019 | Publication of Notice of Review and commencement of public consultation |
| By 19 July 2019 | Publication of (Acting) Returning Officer's submission |
| 8 September 2019 | Close of public consultation |
| 15 October 2019 | General Purposes Committee consideration of proposals and approval of recommendations to Council |
| 21 November 2019 | Council consideration and approval final proposals |
| 1 December 2019 | Implementation of agreed changes (publication of revised Register of Electors) |

3.7 In preparing the ARO for Gloucester's submission, electorate projections and information from the Planning Team on anticipated development was considered. The submission of the ARO for Gloucester was published on 19 July. The ARO for Tewkesbury confirmed that they did not wish to make a submission and had no objections to the proposals put forward by the ARO for Gloucester in respect of the area that falls within the Tewkesbury Constituency.

Consultation

3.8 The public consultation ran from 9 July to 8 September and during this time the review was publicised regularly via the Council's social media channels, in addition to a dedicated page on the Council's website and direct communications with the consultees listed at Appendix 2.

3.9 In total 10 consultation responses were received and these are provided at Appendix 3. Several other responses were received from booking agents of polling stations, but these have not been included because they simply provided an update on contact details and/or access arrangements.

3.10 Two positive responses were received from Booking Agents at Colwell Arts Centre and Longlevens Rugby Club stating that they were happy to continue being used as a polling station.

3.11 Eight responses were received objecting to the use of specific schools as polling stations due to the disruption caused. One response each was received in relation

to Tredworth Junior School and Linden Primary School and the remaining six responses related to Meadowside Primary School.

- 3.12 As a result of the objections and because we are sympathetic regarding the use of schools, work has been undertaken to try and identify suitable alternative locations and the relevant ward Councillors have been consulted in each case. The proposals below outline the outcome of this work.

Proposals

Merging Polling Districts

- 3.13 The ARO's original submission contained several proposals to merge polling districts, thereby reducing the total number. Mergers have only been proposed in areas where the electors already vote at the same polling stations and the Electoral Commission's (EC) maximum recommended number of electors per polling station (2,500) has been taken into account.
- 3.14 There are a number of benefits to having fewer polling districts:
- The number of polling districts dictates the number of polling stations, so by reducing the number of polling districts, the number of polling stations also decreases, meaning that fewer staff are required. Despite constant efforts to recruit polling station staff, at each election it is challenging to fill positions, therefore, by reducing the number of polling stations, it reduces this challenge and enables us to work towards having a 'reserve' list. A reduction in the staffing requirements would also result in a small cost saving.
 - While the larger stations will have only one Presiding Officer (PO), they are allocated multiple Poll Clerks (PC) and feedback from some of our polling station staff indicates that this is preferred to smaller stations that have one PO and only one PC as it provides them with resilience, particularly when dealing with elector queries.
 - Where multiple stations exist in the same location, often in the same room, there is a risk of cross-contamination i.e. ballot papers finding their way into the wrong box and this has knock on implications for the completion of ballot paper accounts and the verification process. By reducing the number of joint stations, the risk of cross-contamination is reduced.
 - Equipment and printing requirements would reduce, resulting in small savings and reduced storage requirements.
 - There may be a positive impact on the speed of the verification and count; although the number of ballot papers handled would not be affected, fewer polling stations means less paperwork to complete and this has a direct impact on the time taken to verify and count the votes.
- 3.15 Having undertaken further analysis since the submission was published a number of other areas where polling districts can be merged have been identified. This is because the further analysis has taken into account the number of postal voters in each polling district and these can be excluded from the number of electors allocated to each polling station making it possible to merge additional polling districts without exceeding the 2,500 electors to polling station limit. In order to allow for electorate growth, the general principle that has been followed when merging existing polling districts is that the total number of electors to polling stations should

be within the region of 2,000, excluding postal voters. The additional areas have been highlighted in Appendix 4, which shows the ARO's revised proposals.

3.16 The mergers propose either, the merging of two existing polling districts by removing the boundary that separates them, or the redrawing of boundaries to reduce three polling districts to two:

- Proposals to merge two polling districts into one:
 - BT1 and BT3 (Appendices 5.1 and 5.2)
 - E1 and E2 (Appendices 5.3 and 5.4)
 - E3 and E4 (Appendices 5.3 and 5.4)
 - H3 and H4 (Appendices 5.5 and 5.6)
 - KW1 and KW3 (Appendices 5.7 and 5.8)
 - L2 and L3 (Appendices 5.9 and 5.10) – the General Purposes Committee recommended this option over an alternative proposal to redraw the boundaries between L2, L3 and L4. The ARO's proposals have been revised to reflect this.
 - MR2 and MR3 (Appendices 5.11 and 5.12)
 - M3 and M4 (Appendices 5.13 and 5.14)
 - M5 and M6 (Appendices 5.13 and 5.14)
 - QSV1 and QSV2 (Appendices 5.17 and 5.18)
 - QSV3 and QSV4 (Appendices 5.17 and 5.18)
 - T1 and T2 (Appendices 5.19 and 5.20)
 - T3 and T4 (Appendices 5.19 and 5.20)
- Proposals to redraw boundaries to reduce three polling districts to two:
 - QFC1, QFC2 and QFC4 (Appendices 5.15 and 5.16)

3.17 There are other areas where mergers would have been proposed because there are some very small polling districts, however, this is where the County Divisions are not coterminous with the City Wards and as such small polling districts exist to keep the Divisions separate on the register.

3.18 No comments were received about the principle of merging polling districts or the specific proposals during the consultation, therefore the original proposals plus the additional areas identified are being recommended for implementation. The maps at Appendix 5 show the existing polling districts and the proposed changes.

3.19 Where polling districts are merged, this will necessitate the renumbering of the polling districts within the ward to maintain consecutive numbering.

Boundary Changes (Appendices 5.21 and 5.22)

3.20 There are two proposals to move polling district boundaries in Westgate Ward. One was identified by a Councillor after the consultation and the other was identified at the meeting of the General Purposes Committee; both have been incorporated into the ARO's proposals.

3.21 The first proposal moves the small section of the boundary between W1 and W2 that currently runs through the land occupied by Sainsburys and the Peel Centre, so that it instead runs along Saint Ann Way. While there are no occupied residential properties in this area at the moment, properties are being built near to Sainsburys and moving the boundary to run along a road provides clarity when the time comes

to allocate the new properties to a polling district. The new properties will be in W1 and vote at Hempsted Village Hall. Properties north of Saint Ann Way will continue to vote at St Mary De Lode Church Hall.

- 3.22 The second proposal moves the boundary between W2 and W4 that currently runs along Brunswick Road to instead run along Southgate Street and Kimbrose Way, enabling the electors in the Greyfriars area to vote at the more convenient location of Montpelier Community Hall. This change results in approximately 300 electors moving from W2 to W4, which is manageable under the existing polling station arrangements.

Polling Stations

- 3.23 **BT5** (Appendix 5.2) – the responsible persons at Tredworth Junior School have consistently objected to the school being used as a polling station for several years. In the past the ward Councillors have been keen to keep the polling station where it is and no alternatives have been considered; however, on this occasion Councillors were open to exploring other locations and made a number of suggestions. The alternatives considered are set out below.

- Friendship Café – outside of Barton and Tredworth Ward, therefore not recommended.
- Charter Court – outside the polling district, but within the ward. Existing polling stations for other parts of the ward are closer, therefore not recommended as it is preferable to either identify a polling station within the polling district or put a second polling station into a closer location.
- St James' School – existing polling station for BT2. The existing polling station for BT4 at Hatherley Infant School is closer, therefore not recommended.
- Hatherley Infant School – existing polling station for BT4, therefore outside the polling district. A site visit was conducted and concluded that a second polling station could easily be accommodated here. The school already closes on polling day; therefore, this option would result in the least disruption, particularly as the school has no objections to being used as a polling station. The school is approximately nine minutes' walk from Tredworth Junior School or a three-minute drive.
- Tredworth Infant and Nursery Academy – within the polling district. A polling station visit was conducted and concluded that a polling station could be accommodated here; however, the school would have to close and is not in favour of doing so. There is no parking directly in front of the school entrance and parking in the vicinity is generally limited. The school is less visible than Tredworth Junior School and by road can only be accessed from a way one system or a no through road. The school is three minutes' walk from Tredworth Junior School or a two-minute drive.

Of the above suggestions, one ward Councillor preferred Tredworth Infant and Nursery Academy, and two preferred that the polling station remain at Tredworth Junior School, with one giving a second preference for Tredworth Infant and Nursery Academy. Members of the General Purposes Committee were asked to recommend one of the following options to Council:

1. Remain at Tredworth Junior School
2. Move to Tredworth Infant and Primary Academy

3. Move to Hatherley Infant School

The General Purposes Committee resolved to recommend that the polling station remains at Tredworth Junior School and the ARO's proposals have been revised to reflect this.

3.24 **M3, M4, M5 and M6** – an objection was received from Linden Primary School to its use as a polling station. The school currently houses four polling stations; however, this will reduce to two if the proposals to merge M3 and M4, and (separately) M5 and M6 are approved. The school made two alternative suggestions and consideration of these is set out below.

- The Lighthouse Children and Family Centre – while this venue is on the same site as Linden Primary School, it is run by Barnardo's. Contact was made with the centre to enquire about suitability and a response was received from Barnardo's stating that it would not be possible to use the centre due to the nature of the activity that takes place at the centre and the inability to cancel scheduled activities to accommodate polling stations.
- City Church – the ward Councillors did not consider this to be a suitable alternative as it is on a very busy road with no designated parking; they also preferred a non-religious venue in this area.

In light of the above, while there is sympathy with the case made by the school, the absence of a suitable alternative location to for the polling stations means that no recommendations are being made to move the polling stations for M3, M4, M5 and M6. It is hoped that the proposed reduction from four polling stations to two may alleviate some of the disruption if less space is required within the school.

3.25 **QFC3** (Appendix 5.17) – the ARO's original submission proposed that the polling station be moved from Quedgeley Community Centre to Waterwells Primary Academy. During the last review there was no suitable location within the polling district therefore Quedgeley Community Centre was designated as the polling station as it is where the other electors in Quedgeley Fieldcourt vote; however, it is outside of the polling district. Waterwells Primary Academy has since been built within the polling district and one of the ward Councillors confirmed that this would be a good location. During the review Waterwells Sports Centre emerged as another alternative location; both options are set out below.

- Waterwells Primary Academy – within the polling district. A site visit has been conducted and concluded that it is a suitable location, however the school would prefer not to be used. It is currently unclear exactly where the polling station would be situated on the site and if the school would have to close in full or only in part. The school's preference would be for the pre-school building to be used to enable the rest of the school to remain open; however, the pre-school provision is due to be moved to a different building on the site during winter of this year and it is hoped that the access arrangements to the building will change to provide dedicated access that is separate from the main school building. If the access is not changed the polling station would most likely be situated in the main school building and the school would have to close. Parking would only be available on site if the school closes, however, there is on street parking available in the vicinity and the area is not too congested. It should be noted that the school is on the boundary of the polling district and the ward, with

properties opposite the entrance being in a different polling district and ward, so there is the potential for some confusion as those electors will have to go to Kingsway Community Centre instead of crossing the road and voting at the school.

- Waterwells Sports Centre – within the polling district. A site visit has been conducted and concluded that it is a suitable location. The location of the building is central within the polling district; however, currently all the residential properties are to the north of it. Access by foot is good to some parts of the polling district, but a number of no through roads prevent access by car from the most direct driving routes, meaning that a slightly more protracted route is required; however, there is ample parking on site and the journey is slightly shorter than the journey to Quedgeley Community Centre for the properties at the far north east of the polling district. This option is less disruptive as it does not involve the closure of any educational provision.

The current ward Councillors were consulted and one expressed a preference for Waterwells Sports Centre. Members of the General Purposes Committee were asked to recommend one of the following options to Council:

1. Move to Waterwells Sports Centre
2. Move to Waterwells Primary Academy
3. Remain at Quedgeley Community Centre

The General Purposes Committee resolved to recommend that the polling station be moved to Waterwells Sports Centre and the ARO's proposals have been revised to reflect this.

3.26 **QSV1 and QSV2** (Appendix 5.19) – an objection was received from Meadowside School to its use as a polling station; this was followed by a further five objections from parents of children at the school. The school currently houses two polling stations; however, this will reduce to one if the proposal to merge QSV1 and QSV2 is approved. The school and parents made some alternative suggestions and consideration of these is set out below.

- Little Meadows Pre-School – some of the objections stated that the pre-school next to the school was willing to be used as a polling station. While the pre-school is run separately from the school, when contact was made the pre-school confirmed that they would be very willing to accommodate a polling station so that the school could stay open; they are also exploring the possibility of moving the pre-school provision to the school for the day to prevent them from shutting completely. Both ward Councillors confirmed that this was a suitable location. A polling station visit was conducted and concluded that one or two polling stations could be accommodated here.
- Quedgeley Village Hall – existing polling station for QSV3 and QSV4. This venue is already outside of the Quedgeley Severn Vale Ward, but was chosen because of a lack of suitable venues in the area. Because it is outside the ward and an alternative suggestion within the ward was deemed to be suitable, a site visit was not conducted to see if additional polling stations could be accommodated here.

Given that it is within the polling district and deemed to be a suitable location, it is recommended that the polling stations for QSV1 and QSV2, or the newly merged QSV1, be moved from Meadowside Primary School to Little Meadows Pre-School.

4.0 Social Value Considerations

4.1 The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places seeks to obtain the views of the community on the best arrangements for voting and relies on the availability of community buildings for use as polling stations. We are grateful to those who responded to the consultation and suggested alternative arrangements.

5.0 Environmental Implications

5.1 It is always preferable for electors to be able to walk to their polling station and access arrangements are a key consideration during the review; however, it is not always possible to provide a polling station within walking distance. The proposals may have a small positive impact on the environment as the proposed new polling station for QFC3 is within the polling district, and it is anticipated that this would result in fewer car journeys.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

6.1 Details of the alternative options considered are outlined in the main body of the report.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

7.1 The review of polling districts and polling places is a statutory requirement. The recommendations made seek to ensure that electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and that the arrangements meet the legislative requirements.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

8.1 If the Council agrees the proposals, the number of polling districts and polling stations, and therefore the number of Presiding Officers required, will reduce from 72 to 58. The number of locations in use will increase from 40 to 41. Appendix 6 sets out the draft final arrangements, should the proposals be approved.

8.2 Following approval of the proposals by Council, details of the new polling districts and polling places will be made available to the public on the council's website. The reasons for choosing a particular polling district and polling place must be given.

8.3 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

8.4 The intention is for the approved changes to be implemented for the new Register of Electors published on 1 December 2019; however, in the event of an unscheduled election taking place before the end of the year, implementation will be deferred until January. If possible, poll cards for electors who's polling station has changed will include a note highlighting the change.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 If the proposals are approved there may be some fluctuation in polling station costs as some new venues have been proposed. There will be some small-scale savings from the reduction in staff, equipment and paperwork.

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

10.0 Legal Implications

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

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

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

11.1 The proposals enable the council to realise a number of opportunities which are detailed at paragraph 3.14.

11.2 There is a risk that electors whose polling station has moved will go to the wrong location. The risk is mitigated by publicising the changes and printing the polling station details on the poll card, which is done as a matter of course. If possible, the poll cards will specifically highlight that there has been a change.

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

12.1 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.

12.2 All new polling station locations have been assessed for their accessibility to disabled voters and found to be suitable.

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

13.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

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

Staffing & Trade Union

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

Background Documents: None