

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	General Purposes Committee Council	Date:	11 January 2024 25 January 2024
Subject:	Review of Polling District and Polling Places		
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. Revised ARO Recommendations 4. Maps of Polling Districts where changes are recommended		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To outline the recommendations for the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, which aimed to ensure that:
- electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
 - as far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors and, when considering the designation of a polling place, the Council has regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The General Purposes Committee is asked to

- (1) Consider the proposals for the 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 station for
 - a. BT3.
 - b. E3 and KW3
 - c. H1 and H2
 - d. M3 and M4
 - e. W2

- (3) **RECOMMEND** to Council that, where a decision is required at short notice and it is not possible to await a decision of Council, power to designate polling places in accordance with section 18 and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 be delegated to the Managing Director following consultation with Group Leaders and the relevant Ward Councillors.

2.3 Council is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- (1) The proposals for the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places Review be approved.
- (2) Where a decision is required at short notice and it is not possible to await a decision of Council, power to designate polling places in accordance with section 18 and 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 be delegated to the Managing Director following consultation with Group Leaders and the relevant Ward Councillors.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

3.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. The following definitions may be helpful:

- 'Polling districts' are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.
- 'Polling places' are the buildings or areas designated by the council where electors in a polling district go to vote in person.
- 'Polling stations' are the number of issuing desks in the building or area that is the designated polling place.

3.2 The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years and, under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, Councils must undertake a compulsory review within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

3.3 The intention of the legislation was reviews would be completed by the January before a UK parliamentary general election. However, since the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011, there is no longer any certainty as to when the next general election will be, except that it must take place before Tuesday 28 January 2025.

3.4 In addition, the Boundary Commission for England has undertaken a review of Parliamentary constituency boundaries. The final recommendations have been published and once the Orders for new parliamentary constituencies have been made, the new boundaries will be used for the next general election. If a parliamentary by-election is called in the meantime, it would be run on existing boundaries.

3.5 These issues meant that it was important that the review of polling districts and places was carried out as early as possible, so that the Council has agreed polling districts and places to be used for the next Parliamentary election, as well as the scheduled local elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024, and has a polling scheme in place which reflects the new constituencies. A

further interim review will be required to deal with any impact resulting from the review of Gloucestershire County Council divisions that is due to conclude soon and come into force for their next elections in May 2025.

Review timetable

- 3.6 Although the review could not commence prior to 1 October 2023, preparatory work began earlier. This report does not currently propose any changes to the boundaries of polling districts, but if any are proposed, the register of electors will be republished by 1 March 2024 to implement those changes ahead of the nomination period for the May 2024 elections. The timetable for the review is set out below:

September 2023	Preparatory work
2 October 2023	Notice of formal review and commencement of public consultation
By 20 October 2023	Publication of AROs' comments
12 November 2023	End of public consultation period
11 January 2024	General Purposes Committee consider proposals and make recommendations to Council
25 January 2024	Council to consider and approve final proposals
No later than 1 March 2024	Publish revised register of electors (only if boundary changes are proposed)

Review process

- 3.7 The process for a polling district and places review is set out in Schedule A1, Representation of the People Act 1983.
- 3.8 The Council must:
- publish a notice of the holding of a review
 - consult the (Acting) Returning Officer ((A)RO) for every Parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area
 - publish all representations made by an (A)RO within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area and, if the authority maintains a website, by placing a copy on the authority's website
 - 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 representations made by the (A)RO(s).
 - On completion of the review, publish details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review, giving reasons, and publish all correspondence and representations received.
- 3.9 In preparing the ARO for Gloucester's submission, electorate projections and information from the Planning Policy Team on anticipated development was considered. This information did not result in any proposals to increase the number or change the boundaries of any polling districts. As such, the ARO's initial proposals focused on polling places and stations and more specifically:
- Ensuring that polling places can support the requirements of the Elections Act, for example with sufficient space to undertake Voter ID checks, whether

privately or in view of others, and to accommodate equipment to assist disabled voters.

- Identifying alternative polling places in polling districts where schools are currently used.

3.10 Visits to all existing and all suggested alternative polling places took place from September to November, with a full assessment carried out to ensure suitability. Some suggested alternatives were included in the ARO for Gloucester's initial proposals and others were identified or visited later.

3.11 The proposals of the ARO for Gloucester was published on 20 October. The ARO for Tewkesbury confirmed that they support the proposals put forward by the ARO for Gloucester in respect of the area that falls within the Tewkesbury Constituency.

Consultation

3.12 The public consultation ran from 2 October to 12 November 2023. This was publicised via the Council's social media channels and via a dedicated page on the Council's website and direct communications with the consultees listed at Appendix 2. Despite the large number of individuals and organisations directly contacted, the only consultation responses received were from Councillors regarding polling places in specific wards and most of these were as a result of requests for comments on suggested alternatives in some polling districts.

3.13 During the consultation the Council was contacted by Gloucestershire Sight Loss Council. Officers met with their representative, who provided valuable feedback on the voting process for a blind or visually impaired person. Of particular significance was information on the best methods for raising awareness amongst these voters of Voter ID requirements and the availability of free Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) for those without another acceptable form of ID. As a result, the Council will be creating adverts for talking newspapers that are circulated in Gloucester, which will also publicise the availability of appointments for anyone who would like assistance with completing the VAC application process, including taking photographs.

Proposals

3.14 The ARO's original proposals contained several suggestions for alternative polling places and additional alternatives have been identified since. In every case, the current ward Councillors have been asked for their views on moving the polling place to the alternative location.

3.15 **BT3** (Appendix 4a) – Successive reviews have failed to identify suitable alternatives to the schools used as polling places in Barton and Tredworth ward, however, on this occasion the Ukrainian Association was identified as a possible alternative to Hatherley Infant School in BT3. A visit was conducted and the Ukrainian Association was deemed to be suitably accessible for all voters and with the necessary facilities. While it is located at the opposite end of the polling district to the current polling place, it is also at the more highly populated end and, crucially, its use would mean that the school would not have to close to accommodate elections, which is currently has to do.

The current Barton and Tredworth ward Councillors were consulted and two indicated that they would be content with moving the polling place to the Ukrainian

Association. Members of the General Purposes Committee are asked to recommend one of the following options to Council:

1. Remain at Hatherley Infant School
2. Move to the Ukrainian Association

- 3.16 **E3 and KW3** (Appendix 4b) – Gloucester Old Boys RFC was initially suggested as a possible alternative to St Peters Under 5s by one of the Elmbridge ward Councillors. St Peters Under 5s is located in Elmbridge ward, but due to the fact that there is no suitable location in KW3, voters from parts of both Elmbridge and Kingsholm and Wotton wards currently vote there. A visit was conducted and Gloucester Old Boys RFC was deemed suitably accessible for all voters and with the necessary facilities, including the availability of adequate parking. Its use would prevent the preschool setting from having to close, which it currently has to do and avoid issues on the congested road outside the current polling place.

The other current ward Councillors for both Elmbridge and Kingsholm and Wotton were consulted and all indicated that they would be content with moving the polling place to Gloucester Old Boys RFC. Members of the General Purposes Committee are asked to recommend one of the following options to Council:

1. Remain at St Peters Under 5s
2. Move to Gloucester Old Boys RFC

- 3.17 **H1 and H2** (Appendix 4c) – In an effort not to close the whole school, the current polling place for H1 and H2, Hillview Primary School, has allocated a separate and relatively small building for use as a polling station. This has proved a challenge during recent elections therefore, with the requirement for polling places to have sufficient space to undertake Voter ID checks, it is considered that this venue is no longer suitable. To avoid closing the school, alternative venues have been explored and St Philip and St James Church, which is a four minute walk from the current polling place, has been identified as a possible alternative. A visit was conducted and it was deemed suitably accessible for all voters and with the necessary facilities, including the availability of adequate parking.

The current Hucclecote ward Councillors were consulted and both indicated that they would be content with moving the polling place to St Philip and St James' Church. Members of the General Purposes Committee are asked to recommend one of the following options to Council:

1. Remain at Hillview Primary School – not recommended due to insufficient space.
2. Move to St Philip and St James' Church

- 3.18 **M3 and M4** (Appendix 4d) – When making arrangements for the May 2021 elections, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, the usual M3 and M4 polling place, Linden Primary, expressed significant concerns about being used as a polling place while trying to adhere to social distancing requirements and keep staff and pupils safe because the school doesn't typically close for elections. To prevent the school from having to close entirely, the polling place was relocated to The Chapel on Seymour Road, which was deemed to be a suitable replacement and only a five minute walk from Linden Primary School. As this was a successful change, and in order to prevent the disruption caused to the school, it is proposed

that the polling place for M3 and M4 be moved to The Chapel permanently. This venue also benefits from having a car park, which the current polling place does not have.

The current Moreland ward Councillors were consulted and two indicated that they would be content with moving the polling place to The Chapel. Members of the General Purposes Committee are asked to recommend one of the following options to Council:

1. Remain at Linden Primary School
2. Move to The Chapel, Seymour Road

- 3.19 **W2** (Appendix 4e) – When making arrangements for the March 2023 Westgate By-Election the usual W2 polling place, St Mary de Lode Church, was not available due to works being carried out. The polling place was relocated to the nearby St Mary’s Congregational Church, which was deemed to be a suitable replacement and only a two minute walk from St Mary de Lode. As this was a successful change, and due to the higher cost of St Mary de Lode, it is proposed that the polling place for W2 be moved to St Mary’s Congregational Church permanently. This venue also benefits from having a modest car park, though many of the voters in this polling district walk, which they will still be able to do.

The current ward Westgate Councillors were consulted and one indicated that they would be content with moving the polling place to St Mary’s Congregational Church. Members of the General Purposes Committee are asked to recommend one of the following options to Council:

1. Remain at St Mary de Lode Church
2. Move to St Mary’s Congregational Church.

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.

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.

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 new polling places will take effect immediately will be made available to the public on the council's website, along with all documents that the Council is required to publish.
- 8.2 Unless polling district boundary reviews are approved, it will not be necessary to republish the register of electors, but if any such proposals are approved the register will be re-published by 1 March 2024 so that the changes are in place ahead of the nomination period for the May 2024 elections. If possible, poll cards for electors whose polling station has changed will include a note highlighting the change.
- 8.3 A further interim review will take place after the May 2024 elections to deal with any changes required as a result of the Gloucester County Council boundary review.

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, but at least one alternative location costs significantly less than the current venue.

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

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 The Council has a statutory duty to review its polling districts, polling places and polling stations to ensure that the polling stations are accessible to all electors including those with special needs. A consultation has been completed and consideration has been given to the views put forward.
- 10.2 Any changes to the polling districts, polling places and polling stations must be made in accordance with the provisions of the Representation of People Act 1983 (as amended), Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and Equalities Act 2010.

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

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 11.1 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