

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

To: Full Council

Date: December 2014

Title of Report: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2014

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To ask Council to approve the schedule of polling districts and polling places (shown at Appendix A) for the administrative area of the City Council as required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006

Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Bob Price

Policy Framework: Not applicable

Recommendation(s): Council is RECOMMENDED to:

- (i) approve the Schedule of polling districts and polling places as in Appendix B, subject to recommendation (ii);
- (ii) to ask the Returning Officer to investigate the alternative polling stations suggested and notify political groups if suitable alternatives can be found;
- (iii) authorise the Returning Officer to make changes to polling stations in emergencies in order to ensure the effective conduct of any elections;

Background

1. The Council is required under the Electoral Administration Act 2006, currently every five years, to carry out a review of the polling places in Oxford used at parliamentary elections. The Act lays out the scope and timetable of the review and suggests who might be consulted and how. For the purposes of this review we are only required to look at places used for the Oxford East parliamentary constituency, but we have taken the opportunity to review those stations used in the Oxford part of the Oxford West and Abingdon parliamentary constituency.
2. The last such review was carried out in 2011. This review is earlier than five years to allow future reviews to take place in the year before parliamentary elections, with the next review then taking place in 2019.

What the Council needs to do

3. The Act requires that the Council must complete the review before 31st December 2014. We are required to consult with local groups and individuals. To that end we

produced a booklet explaining the process, the timetable and the current schedule of polling places.

4. The booklet was distributed to local disability groups, City and County councillors, local MPs etc. The general public was also invited to comment, via an advert in the local press and on the Council's website. The Acting Returning Officer for Oxford West and Abingdon constituency (currently David Buckle at Vale of White Horse District Council) was also consulted on those stations in Oxford that form part of the Oxford West and Abingdon constituency.
5. The Act required that the Council look at all aspects of the polling districts (the area), polling places (the buildings used for voting) and the polling stations (the number of boxes used at a polling place).

Replies to the consultation

6. Two replies were received to the consultation:
 - from Councillor Fooks, who suggested that an alternative polling station should be found for polling district BC, which used to vote at 333 Banbury Road but since its closure now votes at the Summertown URC, along with BA;
 - from the Labour Group of the City Council, making various suggestions across the City (attached as Appendix A);

Other Comments:

- the Acting Returning Officer for Oxford West and Abingdon constituency wrote to say that he was content with the polling arrangements in the Oxford West part of his constituency;

Returning Officer's comments

7. Polling stations at which more than one ward votes should be resisted unless absolutely necessary. The potential for cross-contamination is high and consequential potential delays at the count militate against these types of arrangements. In those places where that type of change has been suggested the Returning Officer will investigate to locate more suitable buildings within the polling district wherever possible. Polling stations should only be moved where there is a demonstrable need or the current building is no longer available, to avoid voter confusion particularly where a polling station has been used for many years. Also wherever possible we also try to avoid electors having to cross an arterial road to vote.
8. The suggested changes to polling stations in Carfax (current FB) and Summertown (BC) will be investigated and the Returning Officer will notify party groups if suitable buildings can be secured for use as polling stations. In the meantime the attached schedule has been altered in FB to allow for the new polling station should a suitable alternative location be found, but with the existing polling station allocated to it.

9. The Returning Officer accepts the Labour Group suggestions to merge polling districts together except in relation to UC with UD and NA with NC as these cannot be merged as they cross parish boundaries.

Recommendations

10. In light of the suggestions and other issues the Returning Officer recommends Council to:

- merge the following polling districts:

Merging	Consequential changes
EA with EB	Rename EC as EB
MA with MD	Rename ME as MD
UC with UD	Rename UE as UD
VB with VC	Rename VE as VC

- to create a new FD polling district from part of FC and a new FE from part of FA and to ask the Returning Officer to investigate a new polling station for the new polling districts and notify party groups if a suitable building can be secured for use as a polling station;
 - to ask the Returning Officer to investigate the suggested polling station change in polling district BC in Summertown ward and notify party groups if a suitable building can be secured for use as a polling station;
11. I have made the changes suggested above to the schedule contained in Appendix A.

Once agreed by Council the schedule cannot be altered without a subsequent resolution of Council. This can cause problems in the lead up to elections when polling stations can become unavailable for various reasons (e.g. flooding/vandalism – as was the case in 2011 at Cardinal House) and an alternative was needed. This would necessitate an extraordinary meeting of Council to approve any change. In 2011 I suggested that Council give a delegated power to the Returning Officer to change polling places in emergency situations. This was agreed and I propose this continues.

Name and contact details of author:-

Name: Martin John

Job title: Electoral Services Manager

Service Area: Law and Governance

Tel: 01865 252518 e-mail: mjohn@oxford.gov.uk

List of background papers: None

Submission to Polling Districts and Polling Places Review

By Oxford Labour Party

Below is a list of suggestions from Oxford Labour Party. In each case, any amendment to polling districts or places has been suggested or agreed to by the relevant Labour councillors for that ward.

Jericho and Osney

Since polling districts EA and EB both vote in the same polling station, and have an electorate lower than that of EC when combined, suggest merging EA and EB to create one larger district, EA, and rename EC and EB.

There will be several suggestions to merge districts where, since they vote at the same Polling Station and are in the same County division, do not really need to be separate districts, and merging them makes things easier for political parties and we assume also the elections office. We appreciate in some instances parish boundaries may prevent the suggestions being taken forward.

Carfax

The St Thomas' area of the current FC polling district is geographically and physically separated from the remainder of the polling district, and the current polling place is a relatively long journey on foot and a complex one by car. Many residents of the St Thomas area travel out of Oxford, so do not naturally visit the city centre on weekdays, making a trip to the current polling place difficult and inconvenient, something reflected in relatively low turnouts from streets in this area at all elections. By creating a new polling district (FD) for the St Thomas area the Council will create the opportunity to identify a new and more convenient polling place for these electors.

In addition, the current FA polling district is about to be split in half by the Westgate construction project, meaning that those streets to the west of the Westgate development will have a long and complex journey to reach the polling station, instead of the current short walk down Old Greyfriars Street. It would be much more convenient for these streets to be moved into the proposed FD polling district as well.

Potential polling places for the new FD polling district include, but are not limited to: the former St Thomas' School, currently used by Aspire; a suitable building on the FE college site; Falkland House, subject to suitable security arrangements being put in place; the OVADA building on Osney Lane; the Said Business School on Frideswide Square (where the polling place could be shared with the EB polling district); a suitable room/building on the Oxford Castle site.

All the potential polling places would need investigation, but an essential pre-requisite is the creation of the separate polling district for St Thomas'.

Streets to included in the proposed FD polling district are:

- from FA: Paradise Square; Paradise Street; Tidmarsh Lane

- from FC: Becket Street; Bookbinders Court; Christchurch Buildings; Hamel Walk; Hollybush Row; Lower Fisher Row; Osney Lane; Park End Street; St Thomas Street; The Hamel; Woodbine Place; Woodin's Way

Iffley Fields

The voters in Boundary Brook estate live significantly closer to Donnington Community Centre than to St Alban's Hall. We suggest moving Boundary Brook Road, George Moore Close, Quartermain Close and Pipkin Way from LC into LA.

LC is by far the largest district in Iffley Fields, and LA is the smallest. This change would probably mean reducing the number of stations St Alban's Hall from 2 to 1, but Donnington Community Centre could maintain the 1, with Boundary Brook estate and the rounds around Donnington Bridge Road voting in the same box.

Rose Hill & Iffley

MA and MD are both in Isis County division and both vote at the same station. Suggest merging the two into a new 'MA', and then to rename 'ME' to 'MD'.

Littlemore

Similarly to EA and EB, NA and NC both vote at the same station and are both in the same County division so could be merged into one district. This would mean a district NA incorporating NA and NC, NB staying as it is and ND being renamed to NC.

Churchill

Our suggestion is to amend the current polling districts to create a new one, covering the 'Slade Park' area – Three Fields Roads, Stubbs Avenue, Leiden Road, Long Close, Broad Oak, Pickett Avenue, Blackstock Close, Territorial Way, Peppercorn Avenue. This new district could vote at St Francis Church Centre on Hollow Way alongside SB in Lye Valley.

This new district could be 'TD', with the current roads in TD not included in the list above put in with the existing TA. There is a suggestion that the polling place for TA could move from its current temporary location at Atkyns Court to Wood Farm Primary School permanently.

TB and TC to remain the same.

Quarry & Risinghurst

Given both UC and UD vote at the same polling station and are in the same County division, there is no need for two polling districts for Risinghurst. We suggest merging UC and UD into one district, UC, which would be roughly the same size as UB. This would be particularly helpful as the current district boundaries cut several roads into two for no real benefit.

Similarly, UA and UE both vote at the same station in the same County division so could be merged into one district, UA.

This would leave three districts for Quarry & Risinghurst, each voting at their own polling place and station.

Barton & Sandhills

The Polling Place for VA, Viking Sports Club, is well outside the district in WA. Cllr Van Coulter has said several people have asked whether they could vote at Headington Community Centre instead. It is much closer to the bulk of the voters in VA than the sports club, and they could vote alongside UB.

VB and VC both vote at the same polling station and are in the same County division. Suggest merging into a new 'VB' and renaming VD to VC and VE to VD as a result