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| To: | Council |
| Date: | 13 February 2020 |
| Report of: | Returning Officer |
| Title of Report:  | Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places |

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| 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 |
| Executive Board Member: | Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council  |
| Corporate Priority: | None |
| Policy Framework: | None |
| Recommendations: That the Council: |
| 1 | Approves the schedule of polling districts and polling places (shown at Appendix 1of the report) for the administrative area of the City Council.; |
| 2 | Delegates to the Returning Officer the power to make changes to polling places and polling stations in emergency situations.  |
| 3 | Requests the Returning Officer to investigate the suggested alternative polling places and report back to Council as necessary following the May 2020 elections; |

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| Appendices |
| Appendix 1 – schedule of polling districts and polling places;Appendix 2 – notes of the Member Working Group meeting held on Friday 24 January 2020;Appendix 3 – map of the suggested scheme; |

# Introduction

The Council is required under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to carry out a review of the polling places in Oxford used at parliamentary elections every five years. The Act lays out the scope and timetable of the review and suggests who might be consulted and how.

The last such review was carried out in 2014. Reviews are required every five years.

# What the Council needs to do

The timing of the parliamentary election in December 2019 meant that the register was published early (on 4 November, rather than the usual 1December) and meant that the review was not possible to be completed for implementation on 1December. It is planned that the register will be republished on the new ward boundaries and polling district structure on 1 March 2020.

This review is necessarily more in depth due to the need to ensure the polling district structure reflects the new wards boundaries due for implementation in May 2020.

In drawing up a scheme officers have tried to use the same buildings where possible so that fewest number of people have to move to a different location. However, this is inevitable for some.

Interested parties were invited to give comments. These included local disability groups, City and County councillors, and local MPs. The general public was also invited to comment. The Acting Returning Officer for Oxford West and Abingdon constituency (currently Margaret Reed at South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils) was also consulted on those polling stations in Oxford that form part of the Oxford West and Abingdon constituency.

The Act requires that the Council looks at all aspects of the polling places, location, access and general appropriateness.

# Replies to the consultation

Four replies were received to the consultation covering these matters:

* from a resident in Barton saying that the Leisure Centre was not an appropriate location (because the room was on the first floor and required use of a lift);
* possible use of the White Hart pub instead of the Baptist Church Hall in Wolvercote;
* not to use Florence Park Community Centre but go to Cowley St James School;

# Use of Schools

The City Council only uses schools for polling stations where absolutely necessary. The Council has reduced its use of schools from 13 a decade ago to three currently; which are Pegasus Primary School on Field Avenue; St Francis Primary School nursery building on Horspath Road; and Sandhills Primary School Pre school on Terrets Avenue. At present there are no convenient and suitable alternatives to these three schools and the schools remain open while being used as polling stations.

# Member Working Group Recommendations

A cross-party working group was convened. It was made up of Councillors Curran, Simm and Tanner (Labour group), Altaf Khan (Liberal Democrat group and Simmons (Green group).

On 24 January 2020 the Group considered a draft scheme drawn up by officers. The notes of that meeting are attached at Appendix 2.

In view of the tight timescales caused by the general election several possible alternative locations have been suggested but will not be able to be inspected before Council needs to have approved a scheme. These will be investigated by officers and a report will be made back to Council as necessary following the City Council and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2020.

The Electoral Services Manager has made the changes suggested by the Working Group and the revised scheme is shown in Appendix 1. A map of the proposals is attached as Appendix 3.

An A0 copy will be placed in the Members’ Room and will be on display in the Assembly Room at the Council meeting.

Once agreed by Council the schedule of polling places cannot be altered without a subsequent resolution of Council. This can cause operational difficulties in the lead up to elections when polling stations can become unavailable for various unforeseen reasons (e.g. flooding/vandalism) and an alternative is needed. This would necessitate an extraordinary meeting of Council to approve any change.

Following the first review under this legislation in 2007 Council gave a delegated power to the Returning Officer to change polling places in emergency situations. It is proposed that this delegation continues to cover such changes to polling places and stations.

# Risks

There are no discernible additional risks associated with the proposals set out in this report. Risk assessments, including assessments of polling places, are carried out for each election.

# Equalities impact

The Electoral Services Manager has had due regard to equality considerations and considered whether there would be an impact, either negative or positive, as a result of these proposals. The Electoral Services Manager has concluded that there would be no significant impact on any group which can readily be mitigated by selecting another polling place. If required special arrangements can be put in place for specific polling places.

# Financial Implications

There is a modest cost associated with running a polling place. At national elections the cost is reimbursed to the council. Cost, however, should not be a consideration in determining how many polling places to designate.

# Legal Implications

Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the council to complete its five-yearly review of polling districts and polling places by 31 January 2020. Decisions taken in respect of this report will fulfil that requirement in respect of the new ward boundaries.

Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the Council to have in place a schedule of polling districts and polling places designated within each such district. The schedule in Appendix A to the report fulfils this duty.

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| Background Papers: None |