

Cheltenham Borough Council
Council – 14 October 2019
Review of Polling Districts, Places and Stations
Report of the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO)

Accountable member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Councillor Alex Hegenbarth
Accountable officer	Executive Director Finance and Assets, Paul Jones
Ward(s) affected	All, with specific impact on Battledown Ward
Key Decision	Yes
Executive summary	<p>The council has a statutory duty to review its polling districts, polling places and polling stations, to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable and to ensure that the polling stations are accessible to all electors including those with special needs.</p> <p>A consultation exercise has been completed and consideration has been given to the views put forward.</p>
Recommendations	<p>That Council approves:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Battledown Ward - create polling district BC to vote at Holy Apostles Primary School, Battledown Approach. Polling district BC to consist of the following roads that are currently in polling district BB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battledown Approach • Battledown Drive • Birchley Road • Harp Hill; 27, 29, 31, 33, Ashwold House, Craigmount, Homewood, Rambling Views, Sherwood, The Heights, The Lodge, Whitefield House, Widcombe & Woodbank • Oakley Road • Stanley Road 2. That the full list of polling districts, polling places and polling stations as set out in appendix D and E are published for a further period of six weeks, during which time individuals have the right to make representations to the Electoral Commission

Financial implications	<p>The proposed changes to polling districts as set out within this report will have minimal financial implications.</p> <p>Any small costs as a result of the changes will be absorbed within current budgets.</p> <p>Contact officer: Jon Whitlock, jon.whitlock@publicagroup.uk, 01242 264354</p>
Legal implications	<p>The council has a statutory duty to review its polling districts, polling places and polling stations. Any changes to the current polling districts, polling places and polling stations will take into account the provisions of the Equalities Act, Representation of People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.</p> <p>The council must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. The council 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.</p> <p>Contact officer: Sarah Farooqi – sarah.farooqi@tewkesbury.gov.uk – 01684 272012</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>There are no HR implications.</p> <p>Contact officer: Carmel Togher, HR Business Partner</p> <p>Email: carmel.togher@publicagroup.uk</p> <p>Tel: 01242 264391</p>
Key risks	<p>There is a risk that individuals in the new polling district of BC who have previously voted at Holy Apostles Church Hall may be unable to locate the new polling station or go to the incorrect polling place. Poll cards will be issued by the Returning Officer to each elector providing details of the new location.</p>
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>Keeping the provision of polling stations under review is an important part of commitment to ensure that the polling stations are accessible as possible to all electors</p>
Environmental and climate change implications	
Property/Asset Implications	<p>Contact officer: Dominic Stead@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>

1. Background

- 1.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a new timetable of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places requiring each local authority to carry out an initial review by 31 January 2015 and then every 5 years thereafter. The reason for the review is to ensure that all electors in the Cheltenham Borough Council area have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable and to ensure that polling stations are accessible to all electors, including those with special needs. The Acting Returning Officers for Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Parliamentary Constituencies (for the areas within the Borough of Cheltenham) have made formal comment as part of this review, both into the existing polling stations and the polling stations that would probably be used based on the newly recommended polling places.
- 1.2 **What is not being reviewed** – The Cheltenham or Tewkesbury Parliamentary Constituency, Gloucestershire County Council Electoral Division, Cheltenham Borough Council Ward, Parish Ward boundaries.

2. Responses from interested parties

- 2.1 Following the closing date for the review, as well as the formal comments from the Parliamentary Acting Returning Officers for Cheltenham and Tewkesbury (see paragraph 3 below), correspondence was received from five other sources.
- 2.2 The first comment received was from Councillor Paul Baker concerning Charlton Park ward and the merging of polling district ED with EB. Councillor Baker was unsure if the affected electors would be better served now going to the Baptist Hall as it is just as, if not easier, to get to Sacred Hearts Parish Hall, where there is also parking. Several electors voiced their concerns to Councillor Baker that it is in fact easier for them to remain voting at Sacred Hearts Parish Hall, especially due to the lack of parking.
- 2.3 Following comments from both Councillor Baker and passed on from electors in the area, the Acting Returning Officer has decided to disregard the original proposed change, concerning the merging of polling district ED with EB.
- 2.4 The second comment received was from an elector stating that they believed that more churches or church halls should be used as polling stations. Unfortunately, no specific polling station was mentioned.
- 2.5 The Acting Returning Officer aims to restrict the use of schools as Polling Stations, however, in certain areas there are no alternative options that reach even the minimum requirements a premise must meet in order to serve as a polling station. In the circumstances that a school is used as a polling station the Acting Returning Officer works closely with the school in order to try and cause as little disruption as possible.
- 2.6 Regarding Pittville ward, comment was received from Councillor Dennis Parsons with regard to the current use of Robert Harvey House as a polling station, polling district LB, and that he wished for an alternative to be used, suggesting Holy Trinity Primary School (currently a polling station for polling district AA).
- 2.7 To date, the Acting Returning Officer has not received complaints or comments about this polling station with the exception of Councillor Parsons. Although Holy Trinity Primary School is within the polling district LB, it is situated right on the edge of polling district AA and is in a central position to the length of the polling district. Electors in AA have voted at this polling station for many years – including before the ward boundary changes in 2001, which was when Robert Harvey House was selected as polling station for polling district LB. No suggestions for any alternative station for polling district AA have been received. Councillor Parsons understood that it would be difficult to change.

2.8 The last two comments received were from Councillor Dilys Barrell and Councillor Tim Harman of Park Ward. Both councillors were concerned with the originally proposed change from St Stephens Parish Church to the Cheltenham Bowling Club, Unwin Pavilion for polling districts KA and KC. Neither had received any complaints from residents about the facilities at St Stephens and that the recommendation was some distance from the far end of the ward and that a change of polling station should only occur if absolutely necessary due to the current electorates' familiarity having voted at St Stephens for many years.

2.9 Following both Councillor Barrell and Harman's comments the Acting Returning Officer has decided to disregard the original proposed change, concerning polling districts KA and KC, to move to the Cheltenham Bowling Green, Unwin Pavilion from St Stephens Parish Church, St Stephens Road.

3. Responses from the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Acting Returning Officers (ARO)

3.1 A full list of the Cheltenham Constituency polling stations is set out at appendix B and the Tewkesbury Constituency polling stations at appendix C along with the AROs' comments.

4. Reasons for recommendations

4.1 **Battledown Ward, proposed polling district BC** – The majority of these roads have previously voted at Holy Apostles School, however, they were moved polling stations following the implementation of the Cheltenham Borough Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) (Charlton Kings Parish) Order 2018, which amended parish and therefore polling district boundaries. The review has given opportunity to ensure that the electorate is best served by their closest polling station. (Plan A).

4.2 **Charlton Park Ward** – to disregard the originally proposed merging of polling district ED with EB.

4.3 **Park Ward** – to disregard the original proposed changes for polling districts KA and KC to move to the Cheltenham Bowling Green, Unwin Pavilion from St Stephens Parish Church, St Stephens Road.

5. Consultation and feedback

5.1 A consultation exercise was carried out and proposals and comments on the review were requested. Views and comments were requested from the following:-

- Local MPs
- Cheltenham Borough Councillors
- Gloucestershire County Councillors
- Local Political Parties
- Parish Councils
- Various Sports/Community Groups
- Various Disabled/Neighbourhood Projects etc.
- Various Local Religious Groups/Churches

6. Performance management – monitoring and review

6.1 The electoral team always undertake an informal review of polling stations after each election to identify any issues which may arise from time to time.

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Appendices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Risk Assessment 2. Plan A map of Polling Districts BA, BB and BC 3. Appendix B – ARO comments Cheltenham 4. Appendix C – ARO comments Tewkesbury 5. Appendix D - Cheltenham list for publication 6. Appendix E – Tewkesbury list for publication
Background information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
	If the polling station changes, elector unsure of location of polling station	RO	13 September	1	1	2	A	Poll card with note highlighting Polling Station location may have changed. Helpline and contact details on poll card	Next election	Electoral Registration Manager	Divisional risk register