

Cheltenham Borough Council

Council – 18 October 2021

Interim Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations for Charlton Park, Lansdown, Leckhampton, St. Mark's and Up Hatherley Wards

Accountable member	Cabinet Member Safety and Communities, Flo Clucas
Accountable officer	Director of Finance and Assets, Paul Jones
Ward(s) affected	Charlton Park, Lansdown, Leckhampton, St. Mark's and Up Hatherley
Key/Significant Decision	Yes
Executive summary	<p>The Council has a duty 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 for the Charlton Park, Lansdown, Leckhampton, St. Mark's and Up Hatherley Wards and consideration has been given to the views put forward.</p>
Recommendations	<p>That Council approves:</p> <p>Charlton Park Ward, polling district EB – move the polling station from Leckhampton Baptist Hall, Pilley Lane to Squash Court, Old Patesians Sports and Social Club, Everest Road</p> <p>Charlton Park Ward – merge polling district ED with polling district EB</p> <p>Lansdown Ward, polling district HC – move the polling station from St Gregorys RC School, Knapp Road to The Old Priory Room, St Gregorys RC Church, Clarence Street</p> <p>Leckhampton Ward, polling district IA – move the polling station from Zion Hall, Pilley Lane to Leckhampton Baptist Hall, Pilley Lane</p> <p>Leckhampton Ward, polling district IB – retain polling station at Leckhampton Primary School</p> <p>Leckhampton Ward, polling district IC - move the polling station from Leckhampton Primary School, Hall Road to The Pavilion, Burrows Field, Moorend Grove</p> <p>St. Mark's Ward, polling district OA – retain polling station at Rowanfield Junior School</p> <p>Up Hatherley Ward, polling district SA - move the polling station from</p>

**Lakeside Primary School, Hatherley Road to St Philip and St James
Church Centre, Cold Pool Lane**

Financial implications	<p>There are no significant financial implications of note, any small costs that may be incurred can be absorbed within existing budgets.</p> <p>Jon Whitlock Finance Business Partner jon.whitlock@cheltenham.gov.uk 01242 26 4354</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), Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. 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: One Legal, legal.services@onelegal.org.uk 01684 272691</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>None arising from the report or recommendations</p> <p>Contact officer: Georgie Tweddell, Georgie.tweddell@publicagroup.uk 01285 623110</p>
Key risks	<p>There is a risk that electors in polling districts where the polling station has changed may attempt to vote at the previous polling station instead of the new polling station. The Returning Officer will issue poll cards that will state on the front of the card that the polling station has changed.</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	<p>The proposed changes to polling venues are not expected to have environmental or climate change implications. Polling stations are located to be accessible to electors within polling districts. This includes minimising the need for travel, which encourages electors to walk or cycle to the polling station.</p>
Property/Asset Implications	<p>Contact officer: Gemma Bell, Gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>

1. Background

- 1.1** At the elections held in May this year, some of the venues used as polling stations were not available, due to the pandemic. Alternative venues sourced prompted the review to change some of the polling station venues permanently. Some schools also requested we look for alternative venues. An interim review of Charlton Park, Lansdown, Leckhampton, St. Mark's and Up Hatherley Wards was undertaken to ensure that all electors in these wards have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable and to ensure that the polling stations are accessible to all electors, including those with special needs. The Acting Returning Officer for Cheltenham has made formal comment as part of this review, both into the existing polling stations and the polling stations that may be used based on the newly recommended polling places.

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 Officer for Cheltenham (see paragraph 3 below), correspondence was received from two other sources.
- 2.2** The first comment received was from Councillor Richard Pineger of St. Mark's Ward who raised concerns with the proposed change of polling station from Rowanfield Junior School to Rowanfield Children's Centre. Councillor Pineger voiced concern that the Children's Centre is a relatively unknown venue and could cause electors to be unclear about where they are voting. The head at Rowanfield Junior School has also given assurance that accommodating a polling station within the school did not cause any disruption to the school.
- 2.3** Having considered Councillor Pineger's comments and that of the Head, the Acting Returning Officer has decided to disregard the original proposed change to move the polling station for polling district OA to the Children's Centre from Rowanfield Junior School.
- 2.4** The second comment was from Councillor Martin Horwood of Leckhampton Ward with regard to the proposed changes for all of the polling stations serving Leckhampton Ward as set out below.
- 2.5** Councillor Horwood welcomed the proposal to change the polling station for polling district IA to Leckhampton Baptist Hall from Zion Hall.
- 2.6** Councillor Horwood expressed concerns with the proposed change for polling district IB to Leckhampton Village Hall from Leckhampton Primary School. "There is no great geographical issue in the shift from the school to the Village Hall as the two are very close to one another. But the newly expanded Primary School will have better parking for elderly and disabled voters, better disabled access and more space than the Village Hall which has very limited and quite awkward parking and a small period entrance which opens directly into the path of cars using the car park. It is also a sloping driveway which could be treacherous in icy weather. Although aware of one or two complaints about the use of the school hall, the use of schools as polling stations is a well-established practice generally but also in Leckhampton specifically, and the new school will have more flexibility than before to minimise disruption." He thought that the review should bear in mind the significant population at the Lanes and Brizen Lane and subsidiary roads and the likely building of nearly 400 new homes within the ward in that immediate area in the near future. "This should prompt a possible review of ward boundaries but also of the possibility of a polling station in that part of IB which is a significant distance from the Village Hall."
- 2.7** Having considered Councillor Horwood's concerns with regard to accessibility, the Acting Returning Officer has decided to disregard the proposed change to move the polling station for polling district IB to the Village Hall from Leckhampton Primary School. The electoral arrangements for Cheltenham Borough Council are to be reviewed, when polling places and stations will also be reviewed.

2.8 Councillor Horwood supported the proposed change for polling district IC to Burrow's Field Pavilion from Leckhampton Primary School suggesting a further improvement would be to locate the polling station further north and so even more conveniently for the majority of the population of this polling district in the Moorend area towards the north of the ward. "Although it appears to be a minor move from the primary school, this location will have good access and parking, it will be significantly more convenient for voters on the 'birds' estate and it will reduce walking and cycling times from Moorend, thus discouraging car use. But if an even better location further north can be found (why not the Somerset Arms?), that would be even better."

2.9 The Acting Returning Officer did consider the Somerset Arms as a venue for the polling station for polling district IC before the consultation opened; unfortunately, the Landlord was unable to accommodate.

3. Response from the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) for Cheltenham

3.1 The list of polling stations along with the ARO's comments is set out in Appendix B.

4. Reasons for recommendations

4.1 **Charlton Park Ward, proposed change of polling station for polling district EB and merge of polling district ED with polling district EB** – The Squash Court at Old Patesians Sports and Social Club is situated in the Charlton Park Ward just outside of the polling district EB. It was used at the elections held in May when the designated polling station for polling district EB was not available due to essential health and safety works that had not be undertaken because of the pandemic. The proposed venue better serves the electorate in polling district EB as it is within the ward and there is ample parking. Polling district ED is a very small polling district with electors currently voting at Sacred Hearts Parish Hall with electors in polling district EC. Polling district EC includes the West Ward of the Parish of Charlton Kings. Polling districts EB and ED are not part of the parish. The electors currently in polling district ED are equidistant to Old Patesians Sports and Social Club, Everest Road and Sacred Hearts Parish Hall, Moorend Road.

4.2 **Lansdown Ward, proposed change of polling station for polling district HC** – To prevent disruption to the school.

4.3 **Leckhampton Ward, proposed change to polling stations** – Because of the proposed move of polling district EB (4.1) Leckhampton Baptist Hall is a more suitable venue than the designated polling station, Zion Hall, situated behind the Baptist Hall. With regard to polling district IC, the newly refurbished pavilion is located within the polling district and will reduce the number of electors to Leckhampton Primary School.

4.4 **Up Hatherley Ward, proposed change to polling station for polling district SA** – To prevent disruption to the school.

5. How this initiative contributes to the corporate plan

5.1 The proposed recommendations will help ensure that polling stations remain accessible to as many electors as possible including those with special needs.

6. Consultation and feedback

6.1 A consultation exercise was carried out and proposal and comments on the review were requested. Views and comments were requested from the following:

- MP for Cheltenham
- Borough Councillors for the Wards concerned
- County Councillors for the Electoral Divisions concerned
- Parish Councils
- Local Community Group

7. Performance management –monitoring and review

7.1 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 EB and ED 3. Plan B map of Polling District HC 4. Plan C map of Polling Districts IA and IC 5. Plan D map of Polling District SA 6. Appendix B – ARO Comments 7. Appendix C - List for publication
Background information	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
	Elector unsure of location of polling station	RO	15 Sep	1	1	2	A	Poll card with note highlighting Polling Station has changed. Helpline and office contact details included on poll card	Next election	Electoral Services Officer	Elections risk register

Explanatory notes

Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)

Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6 (1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)

Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close