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Council

14 January 2020

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities – Councillor AS Khan

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Chief Executive

**Ward(s) affected:**

All Wards

**Title: Polling District and Polling Place Review 2020**

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary:**

This report details proposed amendments to the polling district and polling place scheme which was previously approved by Council in January 2017. The Electoral Arrangements Advisory Panel and Ward Members have been consulted and a consultation exercise carried out as required by legislation.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) That Council considers and approves the revised polling district and polling place scheme, as detailed in the report.
- 2) That Council delegates authority to the Chief Executive to make minor amendments to the Polling District and Polling Place scheme as necessary, following consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader and appropriate Ward Members.

**List of Appendices included:**

- Appendix 1: Proposed revisions to the polling district and polling place scheme.  
Appendix 2: A report detailing the suggested roads/properties to be moved from one polling district to another.  
Appendix 3: The Acting Returning Officer's recommendations regarding polling stations.

**Other useful background papers:**

Polling District and Polling Place Review – report to Council 24 January 2017  
<https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=21206#mgDocuments>

Polling District and Polling Place Review – report to Council 13 October 2015:  
<http://moderngov.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s25745/Polling%20District%20and%20Polling%20Places%20Review.pdf>

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

Yes – the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities – Electoral Arrangements Advisory Panel has reviewed and provided advice on the proposed changes.

**Will this report go to Council?**

Yes – 14 January 2020

## Report title: Polling District and Polling Place Review 2020

### 1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Section 18C(5) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) places a duty on all UK local authorities to review their polling places following parliamentary and other elections. The Council conducted its last full review from 1 October 2013 and approved its revised scheme in January 2014. The Council approved small revisions to the scheme again in 2017.
- 1.2 Since January 2017, there has been significant development in some areas of the City, leading to an imbalance across some polling districts. In addition, the unscheduled Parliamentary General Election in June 2017 local elections in 2018 and 2019 and EU Parliamentary Elections in 2019 have exposed the need for some boundaries and venues to be reviewed.
- 1.3 Officers have also reviewed the provision of portacabins as polling stations and sought alternatives where possible. The Returning Officer has a duty to ensure easy access to polling stations for all voters, whilst ensuring polling stations are available in a suitable location.
- 1.4 There are a number of factors that are influencing how we may review the arrangement of polling districts and polling places:

**Accessibility of some polling station locations, including portacabins** – there is continued concern at the accessibility of some locations, particularly portacabins. Whilst some investment has been made in providing safer, semi-permanent ramps, the width of doorway, size of room and ability for wheelchair users to navigate the tight space negatively affects the voter's experience.

**Cabinet Office report on access to elections** – following a call for evidence the Cabinet Office have reported on the barriers that some voters experience. One of the recommendations is to strengthen the work that Councils do to consult with people with disabilities and act on that feedback as part of the review.

**Use of Schools** – the Electoral Services Team has spent some time working closely with schools to ensure that they feel able to stay open whilst hosting a polling station. This has resulted in an increase in the distance some electors travel as the rooms are not always easily accessible from the outside of the school. There have been complaints about access to school car parks and convoluted routes to the rooms that are being used.

**Continued use of portacabins** – In 2019 there was a major fire at the Portacabin sited on Honeysuckle Drive. The cabin was empty and in situ between the 2 May and 23 May elections. No one was harmed in the incident, however this caused in excess of £8,500 of damage, which the council had underwritten, with replacement unit required at short notice. Regardless, the cost of each portacabin once sited and ramped is approximately triple the average cost of a permanent building.

**Increase in number of properties in given areas** – as the revised scheme would be in force for a period of 5 years, consideration must be given to increases in population driven by new estates on large-scale developments as well as the growth in purpose-built student accommodation in and around the City Centre. Officers have considered this in making the recommendations in this report.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 2.1 Following the consultation outlined below, officers have made recommendations and the proposed changes are outlined in the appendices to this report.
- 2.2 Attached at Appendix 1 are the proposed amendments to the polling district and polling place scheme. It confirms the current polling place and issues identified and recommends the future polling place for the polling district
- 2.3 Attached at Appendix 2 is a report detailing the suggested roads/properties to be moved from one polling district to another.
- 2.4 Attached at Appendix 3 is a report containing the Acting Returning Officer's recommendations regarding polling stations.
- 2.5 Following consideration by the Panel, Council will be asked to approve the revisions to the scheme detailed in the report. It is also recommended that delegation be given to the Chief Executive following consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader and the Ward Members to make any amendments to the scheme which may be required ahead of any elections in 2020.

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

- 2.6 All the information relating to the Polling District and Polling Place Review was published on the Council's website for 6 weeks from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019, and consultation documents published on the Council's "Let's Talk" platform.
- 2.7 Ahead of the consultation period all polling stations were contacted to establish if they were available and still suitable. Some feedback was received from schools that did not wish to be used. Where possible alternatives have been explored and amendments suggested where possible. All proposed locations are appropriate for use as polling stations.
- 2.8 Ward Councillors were also given the opportunity to consider the suggestions for alternative polling stations and polling district boundaries. No adverse comments were received to the proposals.
- 2.9 Whilst the overall number of responses to the consultation was small, comments were received regarding the use of portacabins as polling stations. Specifically, respondents felt that the ramps had improved access to the polling stations but the size of the room was not sufficient for larger wheelchairs to navigate easily.

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

- 4.1 The Council is required to publish a revised polling district and polling place scheme by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 at the latest.
- 4.2 A revised register of electors will be published on 1 February 2020 and the new boundaries would take effect from this point. Any changes to polling places would also take effect at any elections held after 1 February 2020.

## **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services**

### **5.1 Financial implications**

There was no additional cost of conducting the review: it was undertaken within existing officer time.

The proposed amendments would result in a small net saving for each election held. Depending on the type of election, different parties will benefit from this saving:

- For local elections, the Council pays for polling station hire from its revenue budget. Therefore the Council would benefit from the saving.
- For national or combined authority elections, the costs incurred are reimbursed to the Council. Therefore the organisation funding the election would benefit from the saving.

### **5.2 Legal implications**

Section 18C(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) places a duty on all local authorities to review their parliamentary polling districts and polling places within 18 months of the next scheduled UK Parliamentary General Election. At the time of amending the legislation, it was anticipated that the next General Election would be held in 2020 and the need to review the scheme is based on this timeframe. Council. The Council must therefore agree a revised polling place scheme before 31st January 2020.

Section 18B RPA 1983 states the authority must designate the polling places for the polling districts in its area. The Returning Officer at election time must provide a sufficient number of polling stations, shall allocate electors to those polling stations, and those polling stations shall be in the polling place for that district.

## **6. Other implications**

### **6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan?**

An effective polling district and polling place scheme supports the Council Plan priority to encourage active communities and empowered citizens.

### **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

The key risk associated with this report is related to electors not being aware of where they should go to vote if their polling station has changed. This is being dealt with by sending poll cards to all electors in the run up to an election.

### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

None

### **6.4 Equality and Consultation Analysis (ECA)**

When assessing the location of polling places, accessibility issues have been fully considered to ensure that all new locations are fully accessible. At each existing location, audits are undertaken at each election by polling station inspectors to assess any potential access issues and take remedial action where necessary.

The Electoral Services Team have acted on the recommendations from the Cabinet Office report referenced above to consider what improvements can be made to ensure that voters with disabilities have a positive voting experience.

## 6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

### Report author:

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Adrian West	Members and Elections Team Manager	Place	25/10/19	06/01/20
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Finance: Graham Clark			06/01/20	06/01/20
Legal: Julie Newman			06/01/20	06/01/20
Barry Hastie	Director of Finance and Corporate Services		06/01/20	06/01/20
Martin Reeves	Chief Executive		30/10/19	05/11/19
Cllr A S Khan	Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities		30/10/19	05/11/19