
Council

17 January 2023

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

Title:

Polling District and Polling Place Review 2023

Is this a key decision?

No

No - although the proposals affect more than two electoral wards, the impact is not expected to be significant.

Executive summary:

This report details proposed amendments to the polling district and polling place scheme which was previously approved by Council in January 2020. 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 Legal Officer 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:

The following appendices are attached to the report:

- 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.

Background papers:

Polling District and Polling Place Review – report to Council January 2020 -

<https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s46168/Polling%20District%20and%20Polling%20Place%20Review%202020.pdf>

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:

<https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s25745/Polling%20District%20and%20Polling%20Places%20Review.pdf>

Other useful documents

Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission - <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/electoral-administrator/returning-officer/polling-place-reviews>

Has it or will it be considered by scrutiny?

No

Has it 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 on 12 December 2022 reviewed and provided advice on the proposed changes.

Will this report go to Council?

Yes - 17 January 2023

Report title: Polling District and Polling Place Review 2022

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 districts and polling places every five years or as required. The Council conducted its last full review in 2019.
- 1.2 The following definitions will be used within the review and are useful to explain here:
 - Polling District – a geographical sub-division of an electoral area e.g. ward.
 - Polling Place – a geographical area in which a polling station is located. There is no legal definition of what a polling place is, it can be as tightly defined as a building, a street, or as wide as the whole district.
 - Polling Station – is the actual room where the process of voting takes place. It must be located within the polling place that the authority has designated for the polling district. The location of the room within the polling place is the responsibility of the Returning Officer.
- 1.3 There is no set distance that an elector should travel within a polling district to a polling place. The Council must divide the electoral area adequately. The Returning Officer must then provide sufficient polling stations to ensure all voters are able to access a polling station.
- 1.4 For the purposes of this report, it is important to note that the Council takes the decision on the polling district boundaries and polling places, but the Returning Officer for the election makes the decision on the actual polling stations to be used.

1.5 Current Pressures and Context influencing the review

- 1.5.1 There are a number of factors that are influencing how we may review the arrangement of polling districts and polling places:
- 1.5.2 **Elections Act 2022** – increases the accessibility requirements for electors with visible and non-visible disabilities and the requirement for a privacy area in all stations.
- 1.5.3 **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.
- 1.5.4 **Returning Officer Performance Standards** – the Returning Officer is required to rate accessibility of polling stations. They will need to demonstrate they have assessed the accessibility of polling stations, identified and provided equipment to support voters with accessibility needs.
- 1.5.5 **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.
- 1.5.6 **Continued use of portacabins** – In 2019 there was a major fire at the Portacabin sited on Honeysuckle Drive, whilst the cabin was empty and in situ between the May elections. This caused in excess of £8,500 of damage, which the council had underwritten, with a replacement unit required at short notice. The cost of each portacabin once sited and ramped is approximately triple the average cost of a permanent building. If we continue to use cabins they will have to be larger units to meet accessibility requirements which will increase the costs further.
- 1.5.7 **Unavailability of previous locations** – some of the existing locations are no longer available for use as polling stations and changes are required as part of the review for those areas.

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. 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
 - recommends the future polling place for the polling district
- 2.2 Attached at Appendix 2 is a report detailing the suggested roads/properties to be moved from one polling district to another.
- 2.3 Attached at Appendix 3 is a report containing the Acting Returning Officer's recommendations regarding polling stations.
- 2.4 Council is recommended to approve the revisions to the scheme detailed in the report. It is also recommended that delegation be given to the Chief Legal Officer following consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader and the Ward Members to make any amendments to the scheme which may be required.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 All the information relating to the Polling District and Polling Place Review was published on the Council's website from 17 October 2022.
- 3.2 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 other locations are appropriate for use as polling stations.
- 3.3 Meetings were held with Ward Councillors and they were given the opportunity to consider the suggestions for alternative polling stations and polling district boundaries. Where changes are proposed further consultation has taken place with the Ward members to seek any comments and considerations which have been taken into account.
- 3.4 The MP's for Coventry North West and Coventry South submitted comments regarding stations within their constituencies which have been taken into account.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 The Electoral Registration Officer has delayed publication of the revised register of electors until 1 February 2023 due to having an election during the canvass period as allowed in legislation. Therefore it is required that any revised scheme be approved by the Council by 31st January 2023 at the latest.
- 4.2 It is intended that the revised register of electors, which will be published on 1st February 2023 will incorporate the changes detailed in this report. The new boundaries would take effect from that point. Any changes to polling places would also take effect at any elections held after 1 February 2023.
- 4.3 Work is continuing with some sites which have accessibility issues to identify alternative locations for the polling stations which will be dealt with under the delegation but completed by end of February 2023 as these will not affect the published register of electors there will be no requirement to re-publish.

5. Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and Chief Legal Officer

- 5.1 Financial Implications
- 5.2 Conducting the review has had no specific resource implications. The proposed amendments would lead to an increase of one in the number of polling station locations, however, look to reduce the number of portacabin sites.
- 5.3 Payment for polling stations is made from existing budgets, however certain stations have higher costs than others. Each portacabin currently costs approximately £2,500 per site, as

opposed to an average cost of around £350 for permanent venue. Due to the accessibility requirements the type of portacabins required mean there is a significant increase in the cost of providing the cabins from £2,500 to approximately £4,500 - £5,000.

- 5.4. Payment for polling stations for local elections is paid for by the Council, while costs for national or Combined Authority elections are reimbursed.
- 5.5. Legal Implications
- 5.6. 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. However, reviews can be conducted at appropriate times based on the requirements of the authority.
- 5.7. 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 (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

- 6.2. An effective polling district and polling place scheme supports the Council Plan priority to making places and services easily accessible.

6.3. How is risk being managed?

- 6.4. 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 and signage at the previous locations.

6.5. What is the impact on the organisation?

None.

6.6. Equalities / EIA?

- 6.7. 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.
- 6.8. The Electoral Services Team have acted on the changes required as part of the Elections Act 2022 regarding accessibility requirements and considered what improvements can be made to ensure that voters with disabilities have a positive voting experience and where possible implemented any identified improvements.

6.9. Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment?

None

6.10. Implications for partner organisations?

None

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Enquiries should be directed to the above person

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Legal: Julie Newman	Chief Legal Officer	Law and Governance	05/01/2023	06/01/2023
Director: Martin Reeves	Chief Executive	-	05/01/2023	06/01/2023
Members: Councillor Abdul Khan	Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities	-	06/01/2023	09/01/2023
Governance: Usha Patel			05/01/2023	06/01/2023

This report is published on the council's website: www.coventry.gov.uk/meetings

Proposed changes to Polling Districts and Polling Place Scheme - Polling

Ward	Current Polling Station and Polling District	New Polling Station and Polling District	Comments
Cheylesmore	Howes Primary School - Cd Portacabin – War Memorial Park - Cg Meadow Park School (formerly Whitley Academy) - Ca	Cheylesmore Community Centre - Cd Dalecote House - Cg The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - Ca	Polling Districts Cd & Cg amended see appendix 2 for road moves.
Henley	Potters Green United Reformed Church - Fi	Potters Green Social Club - Fg	Polling Districts Fi deleted and streets split between PD's Fd & Fg see appendix 2 for road moves.
Longford	Portacabin – Honeysuckle Drive - Hi	North Point Church - Hi	
Lower Stoke	Portacabin – Barley Lea and The Lindfield - Jc	St Catherine's Church - Jc	
Radford	Hill Farm Primary School - Kb	St Augustine's Sports Centre - Kb	
Sherbourne	Spon Gate Primary School - Me	Bethal Church, Spon End Street - Me	
Woodlands	New station for Bannerbrook Estate	Massey Ferguson Cricket Club - Sa	

Any further changes to the location of polling stations will be dealt with under the delegation in the recommendations.