

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2023

Report Title	Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2023			
Purpose of Report	To consider the final recommendations for the polling districts and places arrangements in the district following public consultation and changes as a result of the Community Governance Review.			
Decision(s)	<p>The Council RESOLVES to:</p> <p>a) Approve the schedule of polling districts and polling places as listed in Appendix B;</p> <p>b) Authorise the Corporate Policy and Governance Manager to make necessary amendments to the register of electors; and</p> <p>c) Delegate authority to the (Acting) Returning Officer to approve alternative polling places in the event any polling place becomes unavailable or unsuitable.</p>			
Consultation and Feedback	<p>The review has been undertaken in accordance with the published guidance from the Electoral Commission and section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.</p> <p>An initial consultation took place between Tuesday 25 July 2023 and Sunday 17 September 2023 and a final consultation took place between Tuesday 17 October 2023 and Wednesday 22 November 2023. Both consultation responses are included in Appendix A.</p> <p>For both consultations, Elected Members, County Councillor's, MP's, Parish and Town Councils, Polling Station Premises, Local Political Parties, Community Groups, local disability groups and local residents were invited to comment.</p>			
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Options	<p>The polling district and polling place review is a statutory obligation on local authorities. The options are as follows:</p> <p>Option 1 – Not to approve the changes;</p> <p>Option 2 – Council to amend any the proposals made; or</p> <p>Option 3 – Adopt the proposed changes. This is the recommended option to ensure that the polling district boundaries are cohesive and coterminous with the changes from the Community Governance Review and to ensure that all electors have reasonable and suitable facilities for voting.</p>			
Background Papers	<p>Community Governance Review Final Recommendations (Item 12)</p> <p>Interim Polling District Review Consultation Document</p> <p>Statutory Polling District Review Consultation Document</p>			
Appendices	<p>Appendix A – Polling District Review Consultation Responses</p> <p>Appendix B – Schedule of Polling Station Places</p> <p>Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment</p> <p>Appendix D – Map of Great Oldbury Parish</p>			
Implications (further details at end of report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Review was undertaken as required under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Electoral Administration Act 2013. Under current legislation, Local Authorities are required to review their polling districts and polling places for UK parliamentary constituencies at least once every five years. We are legally required to carry out a review between the 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 1.2 The boundaries for the parliamentary constituencies, county divisions, district ward and parish boundaries are not considered by this review.
- 1.3 The Acting Returning Officer (ARO) for each constituency which is wholly or partly within its local authority area is required to comment on the existing and proposed arrangements. The North Cotswold and South Cotswold ARO responded to the review, their comments can be found in Appendix A.
- 1.4 **Key Definitions**
 - 1.4.1 **Polling District** – A geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary Constituency. All electors within the polling district will attend the same voting place (unless a postal vote is in place).
 - 1.4.2 **Polling Place** – The building or area in which a polling station will be provided by the Acting Returning Officer within the polling district (unless special circumstances mean this is not possible) e.g. a village hall.
 - 1.4.3 **Polling Station** - The room or area within the polling place where the process of voting takes place during an election e.g. a room in a village hall.
- 1.5 The Acting Returning Officer, under the Elections Act 2022, is required to take reasonable steps to ensure accessibility is considered when reviewing polling stations and where necessary, implement processes and have due regard for accessibility to ensure electors are not disenfranchised. Consultation was carried out on the designation of polling districts, polling places and polling stations throughout the Stroud District, in particular to ensure that the stations were accessible to all, including people with accessibility requirements.
- 1.6 The Council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and designate a polling place for each polling district. The legislative statutes also require:
 - 1.6.1 Each parish is to be its own separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply;
 - 1.6.2 The Council must designate a polling place for each polling district unless the situation of a polling station does not materially affect or impact the convenience of electors;
 - 1.6.3 The polling place must be an area in the district unless special circumstances apply;
 - 1.6.4 The polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station;
 - 1.6.5 Seek to ensure that all electors in the local authority have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable;
 - 1.6.6 Seek to ensure, as far as is reasonable, every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.

- 1.7 An initial consultation was carried out between Tuesday 25 July 2023 and Sunday 17 September 2023 to ensure the required amendments resulting from the Community Governance Review (CGR) were consulted upon and importantly, appropriate voting facilities are put in place for the new Parish of Great Oldbury.
- 1.8 A further consultation was carried out between Tuesday 17 October and Wednesday 22 November 2023 to review the arrangements of the whole district.
- 1.9 All submissions received from both consultations were reviewed and considered against the legislative guidance.

2. PROPOSED AMEMENDMENTS TO THE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS

2.1 Appendix A to the report details the responses received from both consultations.

2.2 Berkeley (BVB)

2.2.1 **No change to arrangements:** A consultation response was received regarding the disabled parking and access for Berkeley Town Hall polling station and Canon Park was suggested as an alternative venue. We have investigated the parking arrangements for this station and whilst there is no designated accessible parking bay immediately outside of the polling station, there is accessible on street parking opposite the venue. Additionally, the access to the polling station is via a gradual slope and feedback received from previous elections has not indicated that there are any concerns regarding accessibility of the venue. Furthermore, Berkeley Town Hall is in a more central location to the Polling District compared to Canon Park as the alternative venue referenced in the submission. It is therefore recommended for the polling place to remain as Berkeley Town Hall.

2.2.2 **Creation of a double polling station:** It is proposed that Berkeley Town Hall becomes a double station as two polling districts vote at this polling station (BVB – Berkeley and BVE – Hamfallow Div 1) and there is capacity in the main hall to facilitate this. This change is required because the electorate (2,251) now exceeds the 2,250 electorate requirement to remain as a single station.

2.3 Cainscross (Ebley Ward) - CD

2.3.1 **New polling station:** It is proposed that the polling station be changed from Ebley Chapel to Pavilion in the Park. Comments have previously been received from polling station staff and voters on the lack of accessibility of Ebley Chapel and the Pavilion in the Park was subsequently used at the 2021 elections. The Pavilion has good disabled access and positive feedback was received following the 2021 elections. The Pavilion in the Park have confirmed that the venue is available to be used as the polling station for this polling district.

2.4 Cam East (Div 2) - CEB

2.4.1 **New polling station:** It is proposed that the polling station be changed from Cam Parish Council Offices to GL11 Community Hub. Feedback received from previous elections indicated that access to the Parish Council Offices was difficult and the space provided for a polling station was too small. Cam Parish Council have agreed that the venue may no longer be suitable due to the increased development in the area and the size of the electorate. The GL11 Community Hub was used in the 2021 elections as more space was needed for social distancing requirements. The GL11 Community Hub is well located within the polling district, has good disabled access and is a suitable size for the number of electors voting at the station. GL11 Community Hub have confirmed that the venue is available to be used as the polling station for this polling district.

2.5 Chalford (Hill Ward) – CHC

2.5.1 **New polling station:** It is proposed that the polling station be changed from Chalford Methodist Church to France Lynch Church Rooms. We were made aware at the 2021 election that the Methodist Church would be closing ahead of the May 2024 elections and therefore an alternative venue would be required. Chalford Sports and Social Club was proposed during the first consultation, however feedback suggested that the France Lynch Church Rooms would be a more suitable and centralised location for the electorate of this polling district. A visit to the France Lynch Church Rooms was carried out and it was found that recent works to improve groundwork access, including a ramp for the polling station entrance had been completed. The location of the venue and improved access make it a suitable polling place for Chalford (Hill Ward).

2.6 Dursley (Central Ward) – DA

2.6.1 **Creation of a double polling station:** It is proposed that Dursley Methodist Church becomes a double station and subsequently a larger room in the Church will be used to accommodate this. The Gabriel Hale Room has been used in the past, however due to the larger electorate, use of the Main Hall will be requested. This change is required because the electorate (2,470) now exceeds the 2,250 electorate requirement to remain as a single station.

2.6.2 **No change to arrangements:** A consultation response was received regarding the parking relating to the Dursley Methodist Church as a result of the old bank car park which was previously used now being privatised. We have investigated the parking arrangements for this station and whilst there is limited parking directly outside of the venue, there are other parking facilities within walking distance from the station including in Long Street, the Pulse, Sainsburys and Parsonage Street car parks and some on street parking. We have also explored other possible venues within the vicinity including the Chantry Centre and Dursley Tabernacle, whilst both venues would be suitable, the parking arrangements were just as limited. Furthermore, the entrance to both venues from the available parking is via sloped access whereas Dursley Methodist Church has a level access. It is therefore recommended that the polling station remains as Dursley Methodist Church.

2.7 Longney – HG

2.7.1 **New polling station:** Submissions received from Longney Parish Council and the polling premises (St Laurence Church) used as a polling station since 2019, advised that the Methodist Chapel which we previously used prior to 2019 was no longer available and instead, the Church or primary school would need to be explored as an alternative venue. St Laurence Church has been successfully used as a polling station since 2019 which included the UK General Parliamentary Election in 2019 and Local Elections in May 2021, and it is therefore proposed that this polling station is formally appointed. The electorate are already familiar with this venue and no comments or concerns have been received regarding the venue.

2.8 Standish – HI

2.8.1 **Amendment to polling district boundary:** As a result of the CGR, a new Parish Council for Great Oldbury has been established, this required an amendment to the parish boundary for Standish and therefore a subsequent amendment to the HI polling district is required to ensure these boundaries are coterminous.

2.10 Minchinhampton Brimscombe Ward - MBB

2.10.1 New polling station proposed: It is proposed that the polling station be changed from Brimscombe Methodist Church to the Holy Trinity Church. We were made aware at the 2021 election that the Methodist Church would be closing ahead of the May 2024 elections and therefore an alternative venue would be needed. We extensively explored venue options within this polling district, however due to its geographical size and locality there were limited options available. Both the Primary School and Burleigh Court were contacted on several occasions, however we were unable to engage with them and they did not respond to our request to explore their venues as polling stations. We were able to visit the Holy Trinity Church and believe that it is a suitable polling venue, we therefore propose that the room on the upper level of the church is used as a polling station as there is better disabled access. We are proposing the upper level of the church as the lower level, whilst the room is larger is down a steep hill decline, located around the back of the church and has no ramped access. The upper level however is flat from the main gate entrance from the road and is much more appropriate in terms of accessibility for disabled electors.

2.11 Minchinhampton (Scar Hill) – MEE

2.11.1 New polling station proposed: The polling station for this polling district has been changed to 'Box Village Hall' to correct a previous anomaly following a change to the boundary.

2.12 Eastington – SE

2.12.1 Amendment to polling district boundary: As a result of the CGR, a new Parish Council for Great Oldbury has been established, this required an amendment to the parish boundary of Eastington and a subsequent amendment to the SE polling district is required to ensure these boundaries are coterminous.

2.13 Great Oldbury – SF

2.13.1 New polling district and polling station: As a result of the CGR, a new Parish Council for Great Oldbury has been established, this has required an amendment to the boundaries of Eastington, Stonehouse and Standish and the subsequent creation of a new polling district named Great Oldbury to ensure the boundaries are coterminous.

2.13.2 New polling districts also require a polling district reference to be allocated. It is proposed that the polling district reference of SF is used to follow the polling district referencing sequence used throughout the district.

2.13.3 It is proposed that Great Oldbury Primary School is allocated as the polling station for Great Oldbury as an interim polling station whilst the community building is in development as it is currently the only suitable building within the polling district. Once the community building is complete the polling arrangements for this polling district will be reviewed to identify which venue is the most suitable. The Primary School are in agreement with the venue being used as an interim measure as a result of there being no other appropriate venues or buildings that could be used as a polling station at this current time. Additional equipment and signage will be put in place to ensure the safeguarding of the children at the school and that voting is not impeded.

2.14 Whitminster – SG

2.14.1 Change to polling district reference: It is recommended that the SF reference previously allocated for Whitminster is used for the new Great Oldbury Polling District. We therefore recommend that the polling district reference for Whitminster is amended to SG because it is the next sequential reference.

2.15 Stonehouse (North Ward, Central Ward & South Ward) - STA, STB & STC

2.15.1 Change of polling district boundaries: As a result of the CGR a new Parish Council for Great Oldbury has been established, this has required an amendment to the parish boundary of Stonehouse, Central Ward, North Ward and South Ward and a subsequent amendment to the polling districts STA, STB, and STB is required to ensure these boundaries are coterminous. This is listed as appendix D to the report.

2.15.2 New polling station in STC: It is proposed that the polling station be changed from Bethel Church to Stonehouse Community Centre. Bethel Church has been successfully used for a number of town council by-elections and the May 2021 elections as prior to the boundary changes, the venue fell within the allocated polling district. With the boundary amendment between Stonehouse (Central Ward, STB) and Stonehouse (South Ward, STC), it is proposed that the polling station for Stonehouse (South Ward) be returned to Stonehouse Community Centre to meet guidance and statue of having a polling station located within the polling station as this polling venue is now located in the amended boundary. We have visited the venue and the disabled access and parking is good for the size of the electorate which would vote at this polling station. We have received concerns regarding both Bethel Church and Stonehouse Community Centre however we believe that concerns can be adequately managed at Stonehouse Community Centre and will look at the use the main hall instead of the lounge which is a larger room capacity and better access and room flow for the electors.

2.15.3 Change of polling district titles: The CGR Working Group recommended to change the names of the polling districts in Stonehouse to remove the word 'division' and instead name the polling districts after the Ward. It is therefore recommended to change Stonehouse Div 2 to Stonehouse (North Ward) with a new polling district reference of STA, Stonehouse Div 1 to Stonehouse (Central Ward) with a new polling district reference of STB and Stonehouse Div 3 to Stonehouse (South Ward) with a new polling district reference of STC.

2.16 Stonehouse (Ryeford Ward) – STD

2.16.1 Abolishment of Ryeford Ward polling district: As a result of the amendments to the warding arrangements approved at the CGR, Ryeford Ward has been abolished and therefore the Ryeford Ward polling district is no longer required as it has been absorbed into Stonehouse (South Ward), excluding a small rectangle of land to the North East of the polling district which has been absorbed into Stonehouse (Central Ward). Subsequent amendments as mentioned above are required to both the STB and STC polling districts to reflect the boundary change from the CGR.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The review of polling districts and polling stations is a legislative requirement of the Acting Returning Officer to ensure that the electorate of the Stroud District have reasonable and suitable facilities for voting.
- 3.2 The review of polling districts and places must be conducted and completed by the 30 January 2025 as outlined in statutory legislation before the next scheduled UK General Parliamentary Election.
- 3.3 The review took into consideration the requirements and guidance listed within both the legislation and guidance from the Electoral Commission. This includes guidance on the accessibility of the polling station and practical considerations on the useability and location of the polling place.

3.4 If the recommendations are approved, the changes will take effect from the February 2024 when the register will be republished and any changes to boundaries and polling stations will be in force for elections on Thursday 2 May 2024.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

The use of additional polling stations, or the creation of double polling stations does create additional cost. These costs are through the direct cost of the stations themselves as well as additional staffing. The full cost of running the 2024 elections will be included in the budget for consideration by Council in February 2024.

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4.2 Legal Implications

Any changes to the polling districts, polling places and polling stations must be made in accordance with the provisions of the Representation of People Act 1983 (as amended), the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and the Equalities Act 2010.

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.

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4.3 Equality Implications

An EIA has been carried out by Officers in relation to the decision made in this report and due regard will be given to any implications identified in it.

4.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.