



COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL - 26 FEBRUARY 2020
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM (8)
Subject	REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Council
Accountable officer	Nigel Adams, Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer Tel: 01285 623202 Email: nigel.adams@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the outcome of the review undertaken in respect of polling districts and polling places/stations within the District.
Annexes	Annex A - Schedule of Polling Districts and Polling Places at start of review, including initial comments of the Acting Returning Officer Annex B - Consultation Responses
Recommendation/s	<i>a) That, subject to (i) any comments of the Council and (ii) the changes recommended in paragraph 3.3 of this report in relation to Baunton, Birdlip, Leighterton and Mickleton, the existing polling districts and polling places/stations be retained and approved;</i> <i>b) That, pending any further formal review, delegated authority be given to the Returning Officer to make any further polling place and/or polling station changes as is necessary to enable the efficient and effective conduct of elections;</i> <i>c) That the Electoral Registration Officer be authorised to make any changes as are necessary to the Register of Electors.</i>
Corporate priorities	There is a statutory requirement to conduct a polling district/places review
Key Decision	Not applicable - the matter is reserved to the Council
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Consultation took place between October and December 2019. The MP, MEPs, District and County Councillors were consulted, along with Town/Parish Councils/Meetings and other interested bodies. Public notices and press releases were issued to encourage responses. In addition to direct communications, the review was publicised on the Council's website.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Electoral Administration Act 2006, local authorities are required to undertake a regular (five-yearly) review of all polling districts, polling places and polling stations within their area. The review is conducted having regard to Electoral Commission guidance.
- 1.2. The aims of the review are as follows:-
 - to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
 - 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.
- 1.3. The Parliamentary Acting Returning Officer must comment during any review of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places on both existing polling stations and the polling stations that would likely be used if any new proposal for polling places was to be accepted. The Returning Officer of the District should also be consulted. It should be noted that, for Cotswold, these designations are held by the same person.
- 1.4. It should also be noted that the review cannot consider Parliamentary Constituency, County Division, District Ward, or Town/Parish Council boundaries.
- 1.5. In accordance with statute, every parliamentary constituency must be divided into polling districts; and for each polling district there must be a designated "polling place" and a designated "polling station".
- 1.6. A **polling district** is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election. In England, each parish is to be a separate polling district. This means that a parish must not be in a polling district which has a part of either a different parish within it, unless special circumstances apply. Those special circumstances could arise if, for example, the parish has only a small number of electors and it is not practicable for the parish to be its own polling district. Within Cotswold District, we have traditionally used a Parish or Parish Ward area as the polling district.
- 1.7. A **polling place** is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district. While some authorities have, in the past, designated the entire polling district as the polling place, relevant legislation states that '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'. As a result, it is considered that polling places should always be defined more specifically than simply the polling district - for example, by designating the name of the polling place (normally a particular building or area and its environs). The term "polling place" is not defined in law but it is suggested that it refers to the location in which the polling station is to be situated, e.g. the polling place could be a school with the polling station being a particular room in that school.

- 1.8.** A **polling station** is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places, which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for the election.
- 1.9.** In summary, the following legislative requirements apply regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places:-
- (i) each parish in England is to be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply;
 - (ii) the council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors;
 - (iii) the polling place must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified in the district);
 - (iv) 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.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1.** Consultation documents were sent in October 2019 to the MP, all MEPs, MPs, County and District Councillors, Town/Parish Councils/Meetings within the District, and other interested parties. The documentation provided details of the current arrangements, and comments were invited on whether any changes were considered necessary/beneficial. Public notices and press releases were issued to encourage responses. In addition to direct communications, the review was publicised on the Council's website.
- 2.2.** As part of the consultation, specific views were sought in respect of those polling stations to which fewer than 150 electors are allocated; and the continued use of portacabins in some locations.
- 2.3.** The review was started before the Parliamentary Election was called for 12 December 2019; and suspended during the pre-election period. For differing reasons, two changes were made to polling stations for this election - in Baunton and Leighterton - where, in both cases, portacabins have previously been used but where alternative locations were agreed, at Cirencester Golf Club and Leighterton Primary School respectively. These revised arrangements worked well.
- 2.4.** It should also be noted that, as part of every major election that is carried out, Officers who act as polling station visitors undertake a personal inspection of all polling stations in use, and take a view as to the facilities provided and accessibility issues. The Elections Team also seek to address any issues that occur between elections. Any comments gathered in this way were also fed into the review.
- 2.5.** Details of Polling Districts and Polling Places at the start of review, including initial comments of the Acting Returning Officer, are attached at Annex A.

- 2.6.** The consultation responses are set out in Annex B.
- 2.7.** It is clear that the vast majority of comments received favour the retention of the status quo. There was limited support for the combination of polling stations across polling districts/parishes.
- 2.8.** Only two polling station changes have been put forward - in respect of Birdlip and Mickleton. In each case, there is local support in favour of the change.
- 2.9.** As previously mentioned, the revised arrangements implemented for the parliamentary Election in respect of Baunton and Leighterton worked well, and avoided the need for the use of portacabins. Only one negative comment has been received, from a Baunton resident.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1.** It is considered that the existing polling district arrangements remain fit-for-purpose and are in line with statutory requirements and guidance. As such, every parish/parish ward will continue to be designated as a polling district.
- 3.2.** The consultation responses indicate that the continued use of the vast majority of the existing polling places and stations is supported. It is acknowledged that not every station has total access for all, but they do meet the 'reasonable and practicable test' and alternatives would involve increases in travel.
- 3.3.** The following changes to polling places/stations are therefore recommended:-
- Baunton - to retain the arrangement used at the recent Parliamentary Election whereby voters use the Cirencester Golf Club rather than a portacabin. If a suitable alternative permanent venue was to become available in Baunton Parish, then such facility could be considered.
 - Birdlip - to change the polling place/station from Birdlip Village Hall to St Mary's Church.
 - Leighterton - to retain the arrangement used at the recent Parliamentary Election whereby voters use a facility in Leighterton Primary School rather than a portacabin.
 - Mickleton - to change the polling place/station from Joseph Webb Hall to King George Hall.
- 3.4.** If the proposals are accepted, only one temporary polling station/portacabin would remain, at Coln St Aldwyns. There is local support for the continuation of this arrangement and, as always, there needs to be a balance between locality and accessibility.
- 3.5.** Changes to polling station locations will be notified via poll cards as part of the forthcoming Police and Crime Commissioner election process. Further communications can be undertaken if necessary.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. There are no significant financial implications arising from the changes proposed in this report.
- 4.2. As a generality, the number of polling stations used does impact on the overall cost of an election.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The review has been conducted in accordance with the statutory provisions and associated guidance.
- 5.2. The next full review must be started and completed within the period 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. Completion of this review is a statutory requirement. Failure to complete the work would result in the Council being in breach of the legislation.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 7.1. Polling stations are reviewed as and when required to maintain accessibility, and various methods of voting ensure equality in voting.
- 7.2. The review seeks to ensure that electors are given such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances - this includes such issues as accessibility for the less able-bodied.

8. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS (IF REQUIRED)

- 8.1. The provision of local polling stations will minimise the amount of vehicular travel by electors; thereby reducing CO2 emissions.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 9.1. Alternative locations for polling places and stations have been considered as part of the review (as set out in these papers).

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1. None.

(END)