

Review of Polling Districts

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced the requirement for councils to review polling districts and polling places within their Parliamentary constituencies, and to review them again at least every four years.
- 1.2. The Council appointed a Working Party to oversee this process, and report to council, as this is a matter reserved to full Council. The Council is required to agree a scheme of polling districts and polling places.

2. Background

- 2.1. A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, (an electoral area being a UK Parliamentary constituency, a European Parliamentary electoral region, a parish, parish ward or an electoral division).
- 2.2. A polling place is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. In some councils, polling places are the same as the polling district to allow a greater degree of flexibility in deciding where a polling station should be, particularly in the event of last minute cancellations / unavailability. In other councils, the polling place is tightly set to the confines of the polling station, which can be counter-productive.
- 2.3. A polling station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district. The Returning Officer for the particular election must provide a sufficient number of polling stations, and allocate the electors to those polling stations in such manner as he or she thinks the most convenient.
- 2.4. The Council determines the polling districts and polling places. The Returning Officer decides on the polling stations. In practice the two responsibilities are very closely linked.

3. Main Considerations for the Council

3.1. Following extensive consultation (see Appendix A), it would appear there are very few changes needed to the existing polling districts and places. Where possible, the (Acting) Returning Officer has indicated that the same polling stations will be used from previous years.

3.2. The review has reflected a number of known factors, e.g.

- a. The co-terminosity of unitary division and many town wards from 2013, leading to a rationalisation of some of the smaller polling districts
- b. Direct elections to the New Forest national park in part of the county in 2013, which requires new polling districts to be identified
- c. Reasonable facilities for electors in all areas
- d. Access issues for people with disabilities, i.e. DDA compliance
- e. Where possible, the polling place for a polling district should be within the polling district. Where this is not possible, then the nearest practicable polling place will be used instead.
- f. Comments received from the (Acting) Returning Officer
- g. The geographic location of polling stations
- h. Health, safety and welfare issues for polling staff working a 15 hour day
- i. Car parking
- j. Minimising the use of schools where possible
- k. Minimising the use of temporary buildings where possible
- l. Using the same stations and polling areas for all classes of elections where possible to promote continuity and consistency
- m. The Electoral Commission's direction that polling stations should not serve more than 2,500 electors

4. Equalities Impact of the Proposal

4.1. One of the main purposes of undertaking a review is arrive at a fair and equitable system of polling stations, taking into account a whole range of factors such as access issues, station location, and elector location.

5. Risk Assessment

5.1. Individual stations are assessed for risks at every election, but this is the first real opportunity to examine the location and robustness of the overall polling station stock of the new Council. Electoral risks are reduced by minimising the number of stations serving multiple electoral areas.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. There are no financial consequences arising from this review.

7. Legal Implications

7.1. The Council is required to undertake a review of its Parliamentary polling districts and polling places at least every four years.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

8.1. The formal review of all 400+ polling districts and 380+ polling stations has only identified a few areas where improvements can be made. A spreadsheet is attached at "B" showing the working party's proposals for polling districts, polling places and, for completeness, polling stations based on comments received. There are two significant gaps at the moment, to replace the polling station at the Bradley Road offices, and also the polling station at Morrisons, Chippenham, where the council's large mobile unit is no longer available.

8.2. The working party also looked at polling districts and stations where fewer than 150 electors are registered, but considers that this should be further examined after 2013 in association with the community affected

8.3. There may need to be some minor re-wording in connection with the amalgamation of the smaller registers, but the working party considers the proposals contained in Appendix B, to represent a sound scheme to take effect from the May 2013 elections, based on existing arrangements and comments received in response to the consultations.

9. Proposals

The Working Party recommends

9.1. the adoption of the scheme of polling districts, polling places and polling stations contained in Appendix B, to take effect from the May 2013 elections, with authority delegated to the (Acting) Returning Officer to make any urgent and necessary changes should they be needed and

9.2. that polling districts and stations with fewer than 150 electors be further examined after 2013 in association with the community affected

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15 June 2012.

Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix A - List of consultees

Appendix B – List of recommended polling districts, polling places and polling stations

Appendix A - List of consultees

- The (Acting) Returning Officer, Wiltshire Council covering five constituencies:

Devizes,
Chippenham,
North Wiltshire,
Salisbury,
South West Wiltshire

- All Members of Parliament for the above constituencies:

Chippenham – Duncan Hames MP
Devizes – Claire Perry MP
North Wiltshire – James Gray MP
Salisbury – John Glen MP
South West Wiltshire – Andrew Murrison MP

- Members of European Parliament

Giles Chichester MEP
Trevor Colman MEP
William (The Earl of) Dartmouth MEP
Ashley Fox MEP
Julie Girling MEP
Graham Watson MEP

- All Wiltshire Council Unitary Councillors
- Political Parties with a local interest

British National Party
Conservative Party
Devizes Guardians
English Democrat Party
Green Party
Labour Party
Liberal Democrat Party
United Kingdom Independence Party

- All Parish/Town Councils in Wiltshire
- Community Area Boards
- Age UK
- RNID South West
- Wiltshire Association for the Blind
- Scope

Residents of Wiltshire (via public notice of review and website consultation portal)