

Agenda Item 45.

TITLE	Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 20 September 2018
WARD	None specific
LEAD OFFICER	Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To review the boundaries of the Polling Districts and the designated Polling Places to ensure the best possible arrangements are in place for the voters.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council agrees:

- 1) to a formal review of all Polling Districts and Polling Places within the Borough;
- 2) that the decisions reached under this review will be implemented for all elections from the beginning of 2020;
- 3) to the setting up of a small Member/Officer working group to administer and review the responses received and that the composition of this group will be one Member from each of the political groups and the independent Member along with two Officers from the Electoral Services Team.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Council has a duty to review the Polling Districts and Polling Places for all areas within the Wokingham Borough in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983. The report gives details of how the review of all polling district and polling places within the Wokingham Borough will be carried out.

Background

Under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1983, section 18 as amended by s 17 Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the Council is required to undertake a review of polling districts, places and stations.

This review must be carried out within 16 months starting from 1 October 2018.

In preparation for the writing of this report each venue has been assessed. This has been done by a variety of ways – by visits and by comments made by polling station inspectors, polling station staff, candidates, agents and voters.

A schedule is attached which identifies the existing electoral arrangements. It will highlight issues with the current arrangements which have been identified by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). However the schedule will not be totally exhaustive as there may be issues and suggestions that the ERO is not aware of.

Whilst the schedule is available as a paper document an app is in the process of being developed to facilitate an on-line response to the consultation, making co-ordination of the review as easy as possible.

The legislation requires consultation with all MPs, Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, agents, political parties as well as access and disability groups and, of course, electors. A notice of review will be displayed on the Council's website, in the window at the Council offices and also on Town and Parish council notice boards. There will also be a press release issued. The notice will invite people to comment on the current venues used for polling and to make suggestions.

The consultation will start on 1 October and will end on 16 November. Following the consultation each of the Political Groups will have a chance to discuss the issues raised and put forward their views. A small working party, consisting of representatives from all the Council's political groups and the independent Member, will administer and review the responses and feed them through to the Groups for discussion. All responses will be made available for the public to inspect.

It is anticipated that a final recommendation will go before Council on 21 March 2019. It is intended that any changes will come into force for the elections in 2020. A formal statutory re-designation notice will be published in the newspaper following the review and this will detail any changes made and the date that these changes will come into effect.

Analysis of Issues

In designating Polling Places, certain rules have to be followed by the Council under the 1983 Act. These include that:

- (i) all electors must be given 'such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances'.
- (ii) so far as is reasonable and practicable, only places which are accessible to electors who are disabled should be designated, and
- (iii) the Polling Place should be within the Polling District except where special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the Polling District.

There is a risk to the Council with regard to disability discrimination legislation if it chooses not to designate the best venue as a polling place.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The review is run by Electoral Services staff as part of their ongoing duties. There is sufficient budget to cover the cost of advertising any changes in the local press as required by legislation.

Cross-Council Implications

Currently some schools are used as polling places and it would be helpful if affected schools were encouraged to work with the Electoral Services Team to identify suitable alternatives.

List of Background Papers

Representation of the People Act 1983, section 18 as amended by s 17 Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Contact Andrew Moulton	Service Democratic and Electoral Services
Telephone No 07747 777298	Email Andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank