

Special Advisory Group

24 November 2017

Report title	Polling stations	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Andrew Johnson Resources	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	Graiseley; Wednesfield North	
Accountable director	Kevin O'Keefe, Governance	
Originating service	Democratic Services	
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Report to be/has been considered by	Council	13 December 2017

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Advisory Group is recommended to:

1. Recommend to Council that:
 - (a) Two polling stations in Wednesfield North ward should be merged to be one double station.
 - (b) The number of polling stations in Graiseley ward should be reduced from seven to six.
2. Recommend that the Council delegate to the Returning Officer authority to make such changes to polling stations arrangements as may be operationally necessary to ensure the smooth and efficient delivery of the elections in 2018.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report proposes minor changes to the Council's polling station arrangements in two wards, in advance of the elections to be held in 2018.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the Council has a duty to conduct a complete review of polling places and districts every five years. The next such review is due in the period after 1 October 2018. The Council conducted the first such review in 2014, with some follow-up work taking place in 2015 after the general election.
- 2.2 Following those reviews, the Council normally uses 130 polling stations across the city. The current arrangements have been in place for four polls in 2016 and 2017 – the local/Police and Crime Commissioner elections (May 2016), the EU Referendum (June 2017), the West Midlands Mayoral election (May 2017) and the general election (June 2017).

3.0 2018: proposals for change

- 3.1 Although there is not a statutory requirement to review polling stations, the Council routinely evaluates its arrangements after each election. This has highlighted two opportunities to improve the existing provision.

Wednesfield North

- 3.2 The map attached as appendix one shows the current polling stations for the Wednesfield North ward, of which there are six. In the centre of the ward, there is a cluster of three stations, serving polling districts FBA, FCA and FHA. This group was highlighted by the polling station inspector after the 2017 polls because of their proximity (they are each two to three hundred metres apart). The three stations are:
- Ashmore Park Baptist Church (FCA).
 - St Alban's Church (FBA).
 - Ashmore Park Community Hub (FHA).
- 3.3 It is proposed that the stations at the community hub and St Alban's be co-located at the community hub, which is a modern building with a spacious hall and good facilities, that can easily accommodate a double station. This would yield a small financial saving (by not paying rent) and would have the advantage of creating a double station, which is helpful for training new Presiding Officers (by co-locating them with a more experienced colleague).
- 3.4 Inevitably the change would have an impact on some voters, who would have to travel slightly further to the new polling station. The exact distance between St Alban's and the community hub is 207 metres, so this would be the maximum additional distance that any voter would have to travel.

3.5 Consultation with ward Councillors has identified understandable concerns about inconveniencing voters. However, despite the additional distance, all voters within district FBA are well within the recommended maximum of one mile, albeit slightly over the Council's notional target of half a mile. Councillors also highlighted concerns about the absence of a station in the north of the ward and therefore the distances to be travelled by some voters. It has unfortunately not been possible to identify an alternative permanent station (e.g. a church, community building, school, etc.). Although it might be possible to use a temporary station (i.e. a portacabin), the Council's approach in recent years has been to avoid this option because of the associated costs and constrained space, unless not doing so would require voters to travel unreasonable distances. The table below highlights the maximum distances for those voters living in the roads in the north of the ward that are furthest from a polling station:

Road	Distance to station
Thornley Rd	0.4 miles
Millbank Street	0.5 miles
Cleveland Close	0.5 miles
Kitchen Lane (FCA)	0.6 miles
Wolmer Rd (FCA)	0.6 miles
Wolmer Rd (FHA)	0.6 miles
Drummond Close	0.6 miles
Rogers Close	0.6 miles
Kitchen Lane (FHA)	0.7 miles
Snape Rd (FHA)	0.5 miles

3.6 In light of this, it is not considered that a temporary station is required.

3.7 If the proposed change was implemented, there would still be six polling stations in Wednesfield North, but spread across five locations instead of six.

Graiseley

3.8 The map attached as appendix two shows the current polling stations for the Graiseley ward, of which there are seven. This includes two primary schools – Bantock and Merridale. The electorate in the polling districts in the northern part of the ward (based on the 2017 general election) was:

- NAA: 1,013
- NCA: 518
- NDA: 1,827
- NGA: 1,205

- 3.9 In terms of making best use of resources, the Council's aim is to have an electorate for each station of 1,000 – 2,000 and, ideally, 1,500-1,800. On a turnout of 30%, this ensures a regular flow of voters throughout the day, averaging one every two to three minutes. In some areas, due to local geography, it can be necessary to have a smaller electorate but that is not the case in Graiseley. Polling district NCA is therefore below the optimum electorate level, with a voter presenting once every six minutes on average (based on a 30% turnout).
- 3.10 Although neither school has made any objections about being a polling station, there is an inevitable educational cost of disrupting children's time in school. This is particularly the case on the first Thursday in May (traditionally election day in the UK), when schools will usually have to close on the bank holiday, reopen on Tuesday/Wednesday, close again on Thursday, and open for Friday. The impact of this is exacerbated by the proximity of the national SATs. The Council's aim in using schools is to appropriately balance the cost effectiveness of using its own premises, whilst minimising the disruption to schools.
- 3.11 It is proposed to reallocate the electorate in the northern districts of Graiseley ward, in order to achieve a more even distribution of voters and remove district NCA. This will reduce the number of schools being used as polling stations and offer the possibility of alternating between the two schools, so each would normally only have to be used once every two years. This will generate a small financial saving (by not paying for the school premises and negating the need for polling staff at one location).
- 3.12 Consultation with ward Councillors has highlighted the importance of communicating effectively with voters about any changes to be made.
- 3.13 If the proposed change was implemented, the number of polling stations in Graiseley would be reduced from seven to six, in six locations.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The proposed changes will reduce costs by around £1,000 for each election, of benefit to the Council for local elections and reducing grant claimed for those national or regional elections funded by central government.
[GE/10102017/W]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the Council has a duty to conduct a statutory review of polling places and districts every five years. In between such reviews, the Council has to ensure the adequate and appropriate provision of polling stations for each election or referendum.
[TS/09102017/Q]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 An equalities analysis has identified that there would be some potential negative impacts for disabled and elderly residents, who might have to travel further to vote. The mitigating action is to contact all affected residents and offer them a postal vote as an alternative.

7.0 Environmental implications

- 7.1 There are minimal environmental implications arising from the proposals.

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 There are no human resources implications arising from the report.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

- 9.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from the report.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations, Special Advisory Group, 20 October 2015

<http://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=165&MId=4829&Ver=4>

Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations, Special Advisory Group, 21 October 2014

<http://wolverhampton.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=165&MId=4350&Ver=4>