

Special Advisory Group

20 October 2015

Report title	Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Cllr Paul Sweet Governance	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Keith Ireland, Delivery	
Originating service	Electoral Registration	
Accountable employee(s)	Martyn Sargeant	Group Manager - Corporate Administration
	Tel	01902 555045
	Email	martyn.sargeant@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Council	4 November 2015

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Advisory Group is recommended to consider the proposals arising from the review of polling stations and make recommendations to Council as to the polling stations to be employed for the 2016 city council and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Special Advisory Group of the responses received during the consultation period.
- 1.2 To advise Special Advisory Group of proposals for change for consideration and recommendation to Council on 4 November 2015.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 A statutory review of polling stations was conducted between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 in response to the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, which changed the timing of compulsory reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations. At the time of the review, it was agreed by Councillors that a further review of polling stations would continue in 2015 after the General Election.
- 2.2 As part of the further review, the Council must comply with specified access requirements, as follows:
 - (a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
 - (b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

3.0 Formulating the proposals

- 3.1 Employees from Electoral Services conducted a review of polling arrangements across the City. An initial analysis of the number of registered voters at all polling stations in Wolverhampton was conducted, which was then followed by consideration for other factors.
- 3.2 As part of the initial analysis, polling stations were ranked and banded into quartiles according to the number of voters registered to a station as a proportion of the ward. The stations with fewest registered voters were primarily, although not exclusively, assessed to determine whether improved use of stations could be achieved. As can be seen from the proposals, the vast majority of stations under consideration are ones that fall into this category. The data collected for the numbers of registered voters included postal voters who are generally unlikely to use a polling station. This meant the data analysed was conservative.
- 3.3 Other factors were considered as part of the proposal formations, which included consideration of accessibility, suitability of premises, future availability, cost of provision and convenience for voters. Feedback from previous elections was also taken into account, as were Presiding Officers' polling station reports from the 2015 General Election.

- 3.4 Guidance from the 2010 Scope report was considered when identifying appropriate polling stations, particularly the recommendation that the maximum distance a resident should travel to a station is 1,500m (approximately one mile). For each ward affected by the proposals, a half mile walking distance map was created to show the walking route radius from each of the existing polling stations. Given that national guidance is twice as far as the measurement used, allowance for the distance factor was generous. When considering these maps, where there was an overlap of walking radius, the review considered it reasonable for a voter to travel to either station.
- 3.5 The Returning Officer is required to comment on both existing polling stations and the polling stations that would likely be used if any new proposals were accepted. These comments are included in each of the appendices relating to the individual wards, which are listed below:
- Appendix 1: Bilston East.
 - Appendix 2: Bilston North.
 - Appendix 3: Blakenhall.
 - Appendix 4: Bushbury North.
 - Appendix 5: East Park.
 - Appendix 6: Ettingshall.
 - Appendix 7: Heath Town.
 - Appendix 8: Merry Hill.
 - Appendix 9: Penn.
 - Appendix 10: St Peter's.
 - Appendix 11: Tettenhall Regis. (To be presented at SAG)

4.0 Consultation stage

- 4.1 A public consultation ran from 16 September 2015 to 13 October 2015. The consultation was uploaded onto the Council's online consultation database to enable the general public to comment on the proposals. Local press coverage also raised the profile of the consultation to citizens in the City. The following groups, which 'have specific experience of assessing access for persons with different disabilities', were contacted to submit comments:
- Arthritis Care
 - Age UK Wolverhampton
 - SCOPE
 - 'One Voice' Action for Disability
 - Beacon Centre for the Blind
 - Hearingloss
 - Limbless Association – Wolverhampton DSC
 - SHINE
 - Spinal Injuries Association
- 4.2 As part of the consultation, a series of meetings were held with Councillors from wards affected by the proposals. Comments from these meetings can be seen in the table below.

Ward	Comment	Returning Officer's Response
Bilston East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bert Williams Centre would be a good polling station for the HMA and HAA district; however, it would be unsuitable for HEA due to distance and demographic. • To increase the number of voters at Loxdale Primary School, the HEA district boundary should incorporate voters from HIA; this would also be a more convenient station for those voters. • Voters north of Highfield Road and Salop Street in HFA would be more likely to travel in the direction of Bert Williams Leisure Centre. It would be preferable for them to vote there, rather than be expected to travel south to vote. • Removing St Martin's Church Centre would mean some residents had too far to travel to Bradley Methodist Church. However, Bradley Senior Citizens Centre would be a possible central polling station should the HJA and HFA districts merge. 	<p>The HAB district boundary was redrawn to remove HEA and incorporate additional areas in HFA. These areas will vote at Bert Williams Leisure Centre, which is a central location.</p> <p>Loxdale Primary School will remain a polling place rather than be removed; however, the HEA district will absorb additional areas from HIA, which will increase the number of registered voters using the station.</p> <p>The HAB district has been extended to accommodate these areas.</p> <p>Bradley Senior Citizens Centre was judged to be an appropriate future polling place for the following reasons: its central location, good accessibility and facilities, and ample parking.</p>

Ward	Comment	Returning Officer's Response
Bilston North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal for IAB would mean that some elderly residents may have further to walk to the new station, Stowlawn Primary School. • It would be preferable to keep Stowlawn Primary School as a station if only one could be kept in the district. • It would not be unreasonable for many voters from what was IHA to vote at Portobello Community Centre. • A Hindu place of worship on Dilloways Lane, which used to be Long Acres pub, could be a future polling place for the east of the ward. • Improving disabled access at Villiers Primary would be beneficial for future elections to facilitate elderly and disabled voters. 	<p>Although the distance will increase for a small number of residents, it will still be well within the recommended maximum distance of one mile</p> <p>Dilloways Lane was considered as an alternative polling place; however, due to the current locations of stations, it was not felt it would result in a significant improvement at present. With regard to Villiers Primary School, future key holders and Presiding Officers will be notified to open a second door to the premise to help elderly and less mobile electors enter the site.</p>
Blakenhall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors had no objections to the proposals. 	
Bushbury North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors had no objections to the proposals. 	
East Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be reasonable to remove Wolverhampton Seventh Day Adventist Church in KLA . • Two of three Councillors felt removing St Joseph's Church Catholic Club would be 	<p>With regard to the KIA district, there is not currently an appropriate alternative arrangement that would be an improvement on the current situation.</p>

Ward	Comment	Returning Officer's Response
	<p>a reasonable proposal. The other felt it would be quite far for voters to walk to Portobello Community Centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be beneficial to encourage more voters to use a postal vote. • It would be preferable to reinstate a station in KIA rather than use Memorial Hall in Ettingshall. 	
Ettingshall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be unreasonable for voters in LJA to have to travel to Springvale Sports Club due to restricted access out of the estates in LJA. • It would be beneficial to research an alternative arrangement for All Saints Apostolic Church due to concerns about parking and access at the station. A possible alternative would be the Windsor Centre, which is a very short distance from the church. • The merging of the LAA and LLA districts was a sensible use of resources. 	<p>In the light of concerns raised about LJA/LIA, a proposal has been withdrawn.</p> <p>A site visit and evaluation of the Windsor Centre was conducted. The centre was found to be an appropriate future station, with excellent facilities, parking and disabled access. For this reason a proposal has been put forward to replace the Apostolic Church with the centre.</p>
Heath Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors had no objections to the proposals. 	
Merry Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment was received from one Councillor who expressed no issues with the proposal. 	
Penn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be reasonable to merge the QBA and QCA districts; however, Springdale Methodist Church would be the preferable polling place, not Penn 	<p>The proposal has been rewritten to remove Penn Christian Centre rather than Springdale Methodist. Given that Penn Church is currently shared with the OJA district in Merry Hill, this will mean that Springdale Methodist will now become a shared</p>

Ward	Comment	Returning Officer's Response
	<p>Christian Centre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were mixed feelings about closing St Bart's Church: one Councillor commented it would be difficult for residents who vote at St Bart's to travel to Penn United due to a large hill; the other felt it would be a reasonable change. 	<p>station with Merry Hill.</p> <p>With regard to St Bart's, it is not felt it is overly unreasonable for voters to use Penn United Church. Concerns about St Bart's being a shared station with South Staffordshire can be alleviated as the church is rented separately by each Council.</p>
St Peter's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With regard to the REA and RDA districts merging, on balance it would be preferable to use Gloucester Street as the central polling station. There were concerns about access and parking at Dunstall Hill Community Centre, and on balance it was felt that Gloucester Street would be a better location. Moving the Boscobel Estate Tenants' Meeting Room to the University Chaplaincy building was not unreasonable. Previous concerns about elderly residents having to cross two busy roads were alleviated due to the chaplaincy's location. Moving the Civic Centre polling station to the university was deemed reasonable, with the caveat that initially it should be on the library side of the university where voters will easily find it. 	<p>The proposal to merge REA and RDA was re-written in the light of the Councillors' feedback, with Gloucester Street Community Centre being kept as the polling place.</p> <p>The proposal to use the university chaplaincy has remained due to the significant improvement it is felt the station will bring. The university has expressed an interest in volunteering groups being involved to help transport elderly voters from Boscobel should they wish. On balance, given the levels of support being offered and the minimal increase in distance for Boscobel Tenants (less than 0.2 miles), it is not unreasonable to move to what is a significantly better polling station.</p> <p>The station created at the University of Wolverhampton will be clearly signposted for voters who have used the old location at the Civic for many years.</p>

Ward	Comment	Returning Officer's Response
Tettenhall Regis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is currently a lack of balance in the ward, with a 'super polling station' at the King's School in the west and five stations in the east of the ward.• There are concerns about the King's School due to congestion and access at peak times, such as school opening and closing. It is also quite far for voters in the extremities of the districts.• Removing St Michael's Parish Centre would make it difficult for elderly residents in SGA to vote at St Michael's CE School due to a steep incline on the road called 'the Rock'.• Tettenhall Cricket Club could be a more central station for the SGA area.• Note was made of the close proximity of three polling stations in the north of the ward: Palmer's Cross Primary, Christ the King Church and Claregate Primary.• Voters on Wergs Road would be likely to drive to a polling station. To alleviate pressure on the Kings School they could vote at another station due to their transport access.	<p>The King's School is a reasonable central location, with capacity to accommodate a large number of voters in the west of the City. Electoral Services are aware of the concerns raised, but have not located a better polling station for the area. Extra staff will be on shift for peak times to try streamlining the voting process for residents.</p> <p>A proposal will be presented at the SAG meeting following updated ward councillor feedback. This proposal will aim to address the concerns raised by Councillors.</p>

5.0 Changes

Listed in the table below are the proposed changes in numbers of polling stations in the wards affected as part of this review.

Ward	Previous number of stations	Proposed number of stations
Bilston East	10 stations and 9 premises	7 stations and 7 premises
Bilston North	8 stations and 6 premises	6 stations and 4 premises
Blakenhall	6 stations and 5 premises	6 stations and 4 premises
Bushbury North	7 stations and 7 premises	7 stations and 7 premises
East Park	7 stations and 6 premises (plus one station used by Bilston North)	6 stations and 4 premises (plus one station used by Bilston North)
Ettingshall	8 stations and 8 premises	7 stations and 7 premises
Heath Town	7 stations and 7 premises	6 stations and 6 premises
Merry Hill	7 stations and 5 premises	7 stations and 5 premises
Penn	9 stations and 7 premises	7 stations and 5 premises
St Peter's	8 stations and 8 premises	7 stations and 7 premises
Tettenhall Regis	7 stations and 6 premises	6 stations and 5 premises
Total	85 stations and 75 premises	72 stations and 62 premises

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The Council is responsible for funding the cost of local elections, but is reimbursed by the government for its reasonable costs incurred in the administration of national and European elections and referenda.
- 6.2 Any reduction in the number of polling stations creates savings by reducing hire costs and the number of polling staff. The actual saving associated with each polling station removal varies, but the average is around £500. The proposed reduction of thirteen stations would generated an estimated saving of £6,500. [GE/08102015/W]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 The Council is legally required under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 to conduct a review of polling districts, places and stations every five years, within a set 16 month period. The Council is then responsible for determining the polling places in between the quinquennial reviews, subject to appropriate consultation where changes will arise. [TS/07102015/E]

8.0 Equalities implications

- 8.1 An initial screening has been conducted, the result of which indicated that a full analysis was not needed. The key mitigating action was to ensure voters would not be required to walk further than one mile, which is the maximum distance recommended by Scope. Polling station employees are also trained to assist disabled people to vote if required, for

example through the use of tactile voting aids or disabled access polling booths. Community groups with 'specific experience of assessing access for persons with different disabilities' were directly contacted for comment about the review. There were no objections or representations from these groups.

9.0 Environmental implications

9.1 There are no significant environmental implications arising from this report.

10.0 Human resources implications

10.1 There are no human resources implications.

11.0 Corporate landlord implications

11.1 There are no corporate landlord implications

12.0 Schedule of background papers

12.1 n/a