

Governance and Ethics Committee

20 October 2022

Report title	Final polling district and polling place proposals	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Electoral Services	
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Report to be/has been considered by	Council	2 November 2022
	Election Board	7 November 2022

Recommendations for decision:

The Governance and Ethics Committee recommends that Council:

1. Approve the polling district and polling place scheme contained in Appendix 1 to be adopted in relation to all elections.
2. Approve the necessary amendments to polling districts for the publication of the 1 December 2022 electoral register.
3. Approve the delegation of authority to the Returning Officer and Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Governance, Leader and Leader of the Opposition to make minor alterations to the polling station scheme prior to the next compulsory review (October 2023 to January 2025).

Recommendations for noting:

The Governance Committee is asked to note:

1. The submissions made to the Council as part of the consultation on the review of polling districts and polling place, along with the Acting Returning Officer Response are set out in Appendix 5.

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2. That a double polling station in Bilston South is yet to be confirmed. A site visit is required to assess the suitability of alternative venues in place Lower Bradley Community Centre. Assets confirmed that the Council are currently in the process of disposing this asset, and that all ward Councillors have been consulted on this project.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report presents the final proposals for the polling district and polling place scheme for 2023 for approval by the Council. It is recommended that the Council approves this scheme.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) Order for the Wolverhampton Electoral Review was laid before parliament on 15 June 2022. The Order was made on 20 September 2022 which confirms the creation of new ward boundaries in Wolverhampton effective from May 2023. This will result in changes to the majority of ward boundaries, but the number of wards and the number of councillors will remain the same. A new polling district and polling place scheme is required to reflect the new boundaries at the revision of the electoral register on 1 December 2022.
- 2.2 All councillors will be up for election in May 2023. The council will then return to a cycle of election by thirds with elections in 2024, 2026 and 2027. The councillor with the highest number of votes will be elected to the four-year term, the second highest to the three-year term and the lowest to the one-year term. The Chief Operating Officer has written to DLUCH to request that the fallow year be in 2024 instead of 2025. The outcome of this request is yet to be received.
- 2.3 The differences between a polling district, place and station are as follows:
- A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area (ward in this instance), as well as parliamentary constituency boundaries.
 - A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the 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.
 - A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes places. 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. 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 they think the most convenient.

3.0 Review process 2022

- 3.1 The Governance and Ethics Committee approved the timetable for the formal review process at its meeting on 7 July 2022, and this is set out below:

Activity	Date
Publish notice of holding review and start of public formal consultation	18 July 2022

Drop-in sessions with ward Councillors to share feedback on proposals	18 July 2022 – 26 August 2022
End of formal consultation	26 August 2022
Collate results from consultation and prepare final scheme of polling districts and stations	29 August 2022 – 30 September 2022
Attend political group meeting to share final scheme of polling district and stations for comment	September 2022
Final scheme of polling districts and stations taken to Governance and Ethics Committee for recommendation to full council	20 October 2022
Final recommendations presented to the council	2 November 2022
Publish electoral register on new boundaries	1 December 2022
Poll cards will be sent to electors with polling station details on	March 2023

3.2 In accordance with the requirements set out in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the following steps were carried out for the formal review:

- Publish a notice of the holding of a review.
- Consult the ARO for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area.
- Publish all representations made by an ARO within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area and, if the authority maintains a website, by placing a copy on the authority's website.
- Seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the AROs.
- On completion of a review, give reasons for its decisions and publish:
 - all correspondence sent to an (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review.

- all correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.
- all representations made by any person in connection with the review.
- the minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review.
- details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review.

3.3 To comply with Electoral Commission guidance, the number of electors allocated to each polling station should not exceed 2,500.

3.4 To facilitate the consultation process, a draft scheme was launched for comment, and the following information and principles were used to propose the draft scheme:

- Data provided to the LG BCE detailing proposed areas of new development, the approximate number of dwellings and expected population numbers for those areas.
- Details of current polling places and an indication as to their overall suitability for purpose.
- Presiding Officer/Polling Station Inspector comments from May 2021 and May 2022 local elections.
- Alternative venues to schools to minimise the impact on children's education.
- Alternative venues to temporary polling stations (portacabins).
- Polling places should be within one mile of each elector.
- Site visits were undertaken to assess the suitability of alternative venues.

4.0 Consultation approach and responses received.

4.1 The consultation was published on the council's main consultation page. Representations could be made via the online questionnaire, or in writing via email or post.

4.2 As part of the consultation process, all ward councillors were invited to drop-in sessions during the period 18 July – 25 August, to offer information and local knowledge to aid the Returning Officer when considering proposals for both polling districts and polling places.

4.3 All Members of Parliament for Wolverhampton's three parliamentary constituencies, and candidates and agents who stood in the May 2022 elections were invited to respond to the consultation via email.

4.4 The consultation was forwarded on to around 50 key stakeholders including community centres, resident's groups, faith groups and charities.

4.5 The public consultation was advertised on the Council website, the Council's social media channels, resident's newsletter, in local newspapers and internal staff channels. A leaflet was included in canvass letters to all households as part of the annual canvass.

- 4.6 The councils staff disability group were also invited to comment on the accessibility of polling stations.
- 4.7 In total, 72 responses were received. All responses are summarised in Appendix 5.
- 4.8 A large number of suggestions were taken on board and further changes were made to 13 wards with the majority being changes to polling station venues.
- 4.9 In September, meetings were held with both Labour and Conservative Group to discuss the representations received, and in the main both groups supported the Acting Returning Officer's amendments as a result, with only a few minor amendments made.

5.0 Changes to the draft scheme

- 5.1 The table below details the changes that have been made to the draft scheme which was presented to Governance and Ethics Committee on 7 July 2022:

Ward	Polling District/Polling Station Draft proposal	Comments received during consultation	Amendment proposed in final scheme
Bilston North	BN1 - Tenants Meeting Room, Hugh Gaitskell Court	Councillors were concerned about the vulnerable residents at the tenants meeting room and having this building open for public access. They also said that there is restricted access to parking because it is used by the residents, and it is not as central to the polling district.	Return to Stowlawn Primary School
Bilston North	BN4 and BN5 – Bilston Methodist Church	Feedback was received from ward councillors that this would not be suitable as the entrance is too close to traffic lights and would cause congestion. A concern for parking was also raised and that it would double the distance for electors to travel.	Return to Villiers Primary School
Bilston North	BN5 boundary to include the take in area from Ettingshall and Bilston South	Councillors said it was a busy junction and it would be more convenient for these electors to vote at the excel church as it has a better fit for this community.	Split in to two polling districts along the Wellington Road to create an additional polling district. The polling station for the new polling district will be at the excel church.

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Bilston South	Merge original BEH and BEA to become BS1 and to vote at Bert Williams	The horning drive polling station was closer for these electors, and it will also be the polling station to serve the new bilston urban village.	Return to Temporary Station, Horning Drive, WV14 0RR
Bilston South	BS6 and BS7	Assets have advised that Lower Bradley Community Centre will no longer be available as a polling station.	A site visit will be arranged to assess the suitability of Rocket Pool Strengthening Families Hub.
Blakenhall	BO3 – Temporary station, Colton Hills school BO4 – St Johns Methodist Church	Ward councillors said that a large proportion of the residents are elderly who could not travel to the polling station, and many did not know where it was. They felt the polling station would be more suitable returning to Goldthorn Park Primary School.	Return to double polling station at Goldthorn Park Primary School.
Bushbury North	BUC - Northcote Farm, Underhill Lane, Bushbury, WV10 7JF	Northcote farm is too far away from the residential area	Temporary Station on park next to Mayfield Medical Practice, Cromwell Road, Wolverhampton, WV10 8UT.
Bushbury North	BUD - St Mary's Church, Bushbury Ln, WV10 8JP	Ward councillor fed back that this would not be suitable due to lighting concerns and the lack of parking available, whereas the library is closer and more suitable.	Return to Collingwood Library, Broadway, WV10 8EA
Ettingshall South and Spring Vale	ES1 – to take in the previous ETF (overfield drive) to vote at Hilton Hall.	Response to public consultation said that merging these districts would be unacceptable and too far for people to access from Overfield Drive area.	New polling district and return to Temporary Polling Station, Overfield Drive, WV14 9XW
Graiseley	GR2 – Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain.	This would not be suitable due to the polling station being outside the district.	Bingley Strengthening Families Hub, Norfolk Road, Pennfields, WV3 0JE

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Heath Town	HT1 – Woden Primary School	Reduces need for a school and it is in the same polling district	Double polling station at NTCG Harvest Temple Church, 1 Wolverhampton Road, WV10 0PD
Merry Hill	MH4 - St Josephs Church Hall, Coalway Road, WV3 7LF – existing PD boundary lines	Ward councillors commented that this change would make it easier for electors to travel to vote from this area as the polling station is located in this area.	Same station but to give away Pinfold Grove to MHE
Merry Hill	MH5 - Warstones Library, Pinfold Grove, WV4 4PT – existing PD boundary lines	Ward councillors commented that this change would make it easier for electors to vote from this area	Same station but to move boundary lines to follow Warstones road and Stourton drive
Oxley	OX4 - Rakegate primary school	Ward councillor fed back that these electors used to be in this district, and it is more convenient for them to vote here.	Polling district boundary change to take in the area north of lodge road from OX5
Oxley	OX5 - Polish catholic centre	Ward councillor fed back that these electors used to be in this district – as its lost some of St Annes area, and these electors did use to vote at this school.	Polling district boundary change to give away area north of lodge road to OX4.
Oxley	OX7 - Goodyear Sports and Social Club The Pavillion, Stafford Rd, WV10 6AJ	Ward councillor fed back that it is quite far for people to travel . Too difficult to come across the Stafford road. Bushbury Lane academy doesn't have much connection for the Akron estate and the southside is currently being developed.	Temporary polling station on Gatehouse Pub Cark Park, Donnington Grove, WV10 6EE
Penn	PN6 - Penn United Reformed Church	Ward councillor fed back that there was a high electorate for Penn United Reformed Church and this is more central to this area. Redraw the boundary so that electors in the area	Penn Bowling and Social Club, Manor Road, WV4 5PY

		immediately next to the church in PN6 can vote at this church.	
St Peters	SP3 - University Chaplaincy building	Ward councillor commented that this is too far for elector to get to university chaplaincy due to city centre navigation and lack of parking	Reinstate the boundary line and for these electors to vote at Newhampton Arts Centre
St Peters	SP5 - University Chaplaincy building	Ward councillors commented that this is too far and difficult to get to for the 28 electors coming from Heath Town	For these electors to stay at a polling station in the Heath Town ward – NTCG Harvest Temple Church
Tettenhall Regis	TR2 – Claregate Primary School	A response from the public consultation said that we can avoid use of school by using the Pavilion building	Pavilion building, Claregate playing fields
Wednesfield North	WN4 – to remain as is	Ward councillors commented that it is difficult for people in these areas to get to polling stations. This location is easier for electors to travel, as it is on a local bus route that is used frequently by voters.	Temporary Station on Griffiths Road, Top of Higgs Road, WV11 2PD

6.0 Final polling district and polling place proposals

6.1 The scheme is set out in detail in Appendix 2. It includes the following details:

- Map showing the polling district boundaries and location of polling place.
- Polling district reference letters
- Parliamentary constituency
- Polling place
- Estimated electorate
- Justification for proposal.

6.2 The following labelling convention for polling district references has been used:

- First two letters denote the ward (e.g. BN for Bilston North).
- Second letter denotes the polling district (e.g. 1, 2, 3)

6.3 A map to show the proposals across the city is set out in Appendix 3.

7.0 Summary of final proposal

7.1 The final proposal recommends a total of:

- 125 polling districts and polling places
- 106 venues (19 double polling stations)
- 15 schools
- 6 temporary polling stations

7.2 The following 6 polling stations are outside of the ward boundary, but they are in close proximity to the boundary line and there have been no negative comments received in relation to these during the consultation period as they are more convenient for electors to get to:

- Bilston North – (BN2 – Portobello Community Centre is in East Park ward and is a double polling station with EP4)
- Bilston North – (BN6 – Bilston’s People Centre, Excel Church is in Ettingshall North ward and is a double polling station with EN5).
- Ettingshall North – (EN1 - All Saints Community Centre is in St Peters ward)
- Merry Hill – (MH6 – Springdale Methodist Church is in Penn ward and is a double polling station with PN2).
- St Peters – (SP5 – NTCG Harvest Temple Church is in Heath Town Ward. This is for 28 electors who will share a polling station with HT1 and HT2).
- Tettenhall Regis – (TR4 – St Michaels Parish Centre is in Tettenhall Wightwick ward)

7.3 Temporary polling stations can only be used where there are no suitable alternatives. They cannot be used instead of schools because the legislation states that the Returning Officer can use schools free of charge, so therefore any costs for temporary polling stations in place of schools would not be reimbursed by the Elections Claims Unit for national elections. Each temporary polling station unit costs around £2,000 and some sites would need two units so the additional costs would reach £64,000 if they were in place of each school. In addition to the financial implications, there are also significant health and safety risks as there needs to be parking nearby and a safer space for electors to queue, which will be an even greater need with the introduction of voter ID.

8.0 Schools as Polling Stations

8.1 This proposed polling scheme reduces the number of schools by a further 8 to 15. Two of these schools remain open and 7 plan for it to be used as an inset day. We will work closely with the schools identified as polling places to support them to keep the majority of their building open on polling day wherever possible, or to plan to use polling day as one of the inset days.

8.2 The number of schools has significantly reduced over the last five years:

Year – Election	Number of schools used
2017 - Combined Authority Mayoral Election	37
2017 – General Election	38
2018 – Local Election	38
2019 – Local Election	34
2019 – European Parliamentary Election	33
2019 – General Election	33
2021 – Local, PCC and CAM election	28
2022 - Local Election	24
2023 – Local Election (Proposed)	15

8.3 The number of schools used by the other metropolitan councils in the region (correct as of September 2022):

Authority	Number of Schools Used
Birmingham	170+
Coventry	36
Dudley	60
Sandwell	25
Solihull	27
Walsall	26

9.0 Parliamentary boundaries

9.1 The parliamentary boundaries are affected by the ward boundary changes coming into effect in May 2023. Oxley and St Peter Wards are no longer coterminous with the parliamentary constituency boundaries. Therefore, it is required to retain a separate polling district to enable the electors to be registered within the existing parliamentary constituency boundary, which is why there are a number of small electorate polling districts in these wards.

10.0 Financial implications

10.1 Whilst legislation states that Returning Officers can use schools free of charge, they have been paid £275 to cover the costs of heating, lighting and caretaking duties. Non-school venues typically charge much more for hire. Total polling station hire costs have been in

the region of £40,000, with the proposed reduction in schools and use of temporary polling stations now estimated to add a further £10,000. This estimated total cost will be kept under review as polling station hire charges may also increase against a background of rising energy prices.

- 10.2 There is a £192,000 budget currently set aside to cover the cost of local elections each year. In the event of combined elections or fallow years significant underspends against the local elections budget are expected and provide scope for contributions to the Elections Reserve. Standalone election costs are conversely expected to exceed the local elections budget. In these years the additional costs are to be funded from the Elections Reserve.
- 10.3 The Elections Reserve currently stands at just over £183,000. It is currently anticipated that part of this funding will be utilised in 2022-2023 for the standalone local election costs incurred in excess of budget, inclusive of increased polling station costs.
[GE/29092022/P]

11.0 Legal implications

- 11.1 The process undertaken and all recommendations arising from this report are in line with the statutory provisions covering the review of polling districts and polling places. Electoral Commission guidance for conducting polling district and polling place reviews has been complied with. [DP/12102022/B]

12.0 Equalities implications

- 12.1 Local authorities have a duty to review the accessibility of all polling places to disabled voters and ensure that every polling place, and prospective polling place, for which it is responsible is accessible to disabled voters 'so far as is reasonable and practicable'. All polling stations that have been proposed are either accessible for disabled voters or provisions will be made to make them accessible for disabled voters on polling day.
- 12.2 An equalities analysis has been undertaken to identify the positive and negative impacts against the key equality themes and solutions identified to mitigate against negative impacts. The analysis is in Appendix 4.
- 12.3 Groups and individuals with expertise in access issues within Wolverhampton were invited to respond to the ARO's representations during the public consultation phase.

13.0 All other implications

There are no other implications arising from this report at the current time.

14.0 Schedule of background papers

- 14.1 Local Government Boundary Commission for England report Implementation Plan, Governance and Ethics Committee, 25 February 2022.
- 14.2 Boundary Review Implementation Plan and Polling District and Polling Place Review, Governance and Ethics Committee, 7 July 2022.
- 14.3 Update on polling district and polling station review, Governance and Ethics Committee, 1 September 2022.

14.4 Electoral Commission, Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations
https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/word_doc/Pollingdistrict-review-guidance.do

15.0 Appendices

15.1 Appendix 1: Polling district and polling place scheme 2023

15.2 Appendix 2: Detailed polling district and polling place scheme 2023

15.3 Appendix 3: Polling scheme 2023 (Map of whole city)

15.4 Appendix 4: Equality Analysis

15.5 Appendix 5: Summary of representations received in the polling district and polling place review consultation.