



# Special Advisory Group

21 October 2014

<b>Report title</b>	Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Cllr Paul Sweet Governance and Performance	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Keith Ireland, Delivery	
<b>Originating service</b>	Electoral Registration	
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Council	5 November 2014

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## Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Advisory Group is recommended to review the proposals arising from the review of polling stations and make recommendations to Council as to the polling stations to be employed for the 2015 General Election.

## 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, if appropriate, recommendation to Council on 5 November 2014.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 changed the timing of compulsory reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations. They must now be completed every five years within a specified 16 month period, the latest of which is between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015.

- 2.2 The review must consider the following areas:

**Polling district:** the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors.

**Polling place:** the building area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.

**Polling station:** the room or building where the poll takes place. Chosen by the Returning Officer for the election and publicised on the Notice of Poll or the Notice of Situation of Polling Stations and communicated via poll card after the Notice of Election. The Returning Officer must make a formal comment as part of this review both into the existing polling stations used and the polling stations that would probably be used based on any newly recommended polling places.

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 Prior to the introduction of the current quinquennial review arrangements, the Council had carried out a rolling programme of reviews across wards. The baseline for comparison is therefore the polling arrangements used in 2012 for the local elections.

### **3.0 Formulating the proposals**

- 3.1 Employees from Electoral Services conducted a review of polling arrangements across the city. This considered factors such as accessibility and suitability of premises, future availability, cost of provision and convenience for voters. Mapping technology was used to calculate the number of residents that would use each station.
- 3.2 Guidance from the 2010 Scope report was taken into account 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).
- 3.3 The changing landscape of the Council's portfolio also had to be taken into account. A number of premises previously used for polling stations were in the process of being sold, or transferred to the community. Property Services employees have also identified a number of stations which are likely to be sold or undergo community asset transfer in the future. As the timescale for such transfer or selling is unclear, these polling stations remain as part of the proposals within this report. It is likely that premises that are transferred to the community will still be available for use as polling stations. However this cannot be guaranteed until after the relevant transfer contracts have been approved. Therefore, by the general election in May 2015, some of these assets may no longer be available for Council use. Hence, there is a potential for polling stations to change before the general election. If this did occur, the correct procedure would be followed at the time.
- 3.4 Other community premises will, in the near future, be primarily managed by community groups but still remain in the ownership of the Council. The agreement with such community groups stipulates that 'the Licensor may use the Centre at any time for Council business including but not limited to Council meetings, elections and dealing with emergencies or unplanned events.' Therefore, these will remain available for election use.
- 3.5 The Acting 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: Bushbury South and Low Hill.
  - Appendix 6: East Park.
  - Appendix 7: Ettingshall.
  - Appendix 8: Fallings Park.
  - Appendix 9: Graiseley.
  - Appendix 10: Heath Town.
  - Appendix 11: Merry Hill.

- Appendix 12: Oxley.
- Appendix 13: Park.
- Appendix 14: Penn.
- Appendix 15: Spring Vale.
- Appendix 16: St Peter's.
- Appendix 17: Tettenhall Wightwick.
- Appendix 18: Tettenhall Regis.
- Appendix 19: Wednesfield North.
- Appendix 20: Wednesfield South.

#### **4.0 Consultation stage**

4.1 Notice of the three month consultation was given on 1 May 2014. The consultation was uploaded onto the online consultation database to enable the general public to comment on the proposals. The following groups, which 'have specific experience of assessing access for persons with different disabilities', were contacted to submit comments:

- Age Concern
- Church Association for the Deaf
- Wolverhampton Association of the Disabled
- Arthritis Care
- SCOPE
- 'One Voice' Action for Disability
- Beacon Centre for the Blind
- Association for Hydrocephalus and Spina Bifida
- RNID
- Spinal Injuries Association
- Wolverhampton Pensioners Convention
- The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

4.2 Representations were received from Pat McFadden MP, the Labour Group, Cllr Paul Sweet and Cllr Neville Patten, leader of the Conservative group. These are attached in appendix 21.

4.3 The table below outlines the main concerns in the representations received and a comment on the issues highlighted.

Ward	Concern raised	Raised by	Response	Changes proposed as a result of concerns raised
Bilston East	Electors will have to walk a long distance unless stations at Horning Drive, Elizabeth Avenue and SWB Academy/Bert Williams Leisure Centre are retained.	Labour Group  Pat McFadden MP	The temporary polling station in Elizabeth Avenue received multiple complaints over a number of years, including that it lacked disabled access, was too small, very cold and in a dark location. There were issues with anti-social behaviour, slip hazards and a slope leading to the station which may limit access. The temporary station in Horning Drive received the same comments from electors and presiding officers, including that it was very cold, there were issues with electricity supply, the location was cramped so votes could not be cast in private, and there were problems with ramps and slip hazards in wet weather. Therefore, both locations were judged inadequate as stations and a potential danger to electors and staff. The creation of the new polling district HFA means the proposed station at St Martin's Church Hall is the most central location for electors in the district. SWB Academy and Bert Williams are both located in the neighbouring proposed districts of HMA and HAA, whose boundaries have been drawn to accommodate proposed housing developments in the area.	The temporary polling station at Horning Drive will be retained.
Bushbury North	Northycote Farm is poorly lit which may cause issues in the winter months. There was a request for a more central location.	Cllr Neville Patten	Northycote Farm is proposed to replace the temporary polling station on Cromwell Road. This station lacked disabled access, was very cold and cramped. Therefore, due to a lack of alternative locations in the area, Northycote Farm is deemed to be a preferable alternative to a temporary polling station.	None.

Ward	Concern raised	Raised by	Response	Changes proposed as a result of concerns raised
Bilston North	Reinstate Moseley Park school, as Villiers School has traffic problems and a steep hill leading up to the station.	Labour Group  Pat McFadden MP	Moseley Park school's headteacher formally requested that the school no longer be used as a polling station due to the "impact on students' education and the [existing] disruption caused by BSF works." Furthermore, presiding officers have not noted any complaints from electors. The merging of three polling districts (IC, IE and IF) requires a central polling station. Villiers is more central to the larger polling district than Moseley Park.	None.
Bushbury South and Low Hill	Retain Coven Lodge as a station, and do not merge it with Methodist Church New Hall, as the electorate who use Coven Lodge are elderly.	Labour Group  Cllr Sweet	The proposed merge of the two stations results in a combined electorate of only 900, which is smaller than many stations. The Church Hall is still within the maximum recommended distance for electors to travel.	Coven Lodge will be retained as a polling station, and the Methodist Church New Hall will be removed as a station. Electors will vote at Coven Lodge instead.
Ettingshall	Reinstate the temporary polling station at Overfield Drive to remove the need for residents of Sedgemoor Park estate to cross a main road.	Labour Group  Pat McFadden MP	Staff feedback showed that the temporary polling station was inadequate. There were no disabled parking spaces, access was limited, it was cold and presented a slip hazard in wet weather. The premises was very cramped and there were reported issues with the electricity supply. Therefore this station was judged inadequate. There are traffic lights across the road and a well-lit footpath giving access to the new location.	None.

Ward	Concern raised	Raised by	Response	Changes proposed as a result of concerns raised
Merry Hill	Uplands School is a 20 minute walk for residents of Bhylls Lane, and there is a school on Bhylls Lane itself.	Labour Group	There has not been a polling station at Bhylls Lane since before 2001. As the school in Bhylls Lane is in Staffordshire, it is more difficult for the Council to use it as a polling station.	
Oxley	Removing Rakegates Tenant Association Meeting Rooms as a station will mean that residents, many of whom are elderly, will have to walk further to vote.	Labour Group	The Rakegates Tenants' Association meeting rooms have limited disabled access. There is a step into the room and the door is not wide enough to allow a powered wheelchair through. In addition, there had been feedback that the alternative disabled access had cars blocking it. Rakegate Primary school offers excellent modern facilities with better access for disabled access. The electors furthest away still have less than a mile to walk.	None.
St Peter's	The removal of the Tenants' Meeting Room as a station will mean residents have to cross two main roads to vote.	Labour Group	The Tenants' Meeting Room has four steps to the entrance and no ramp to enable disabled access. Therefore voters in wheelchairs are unable to enter the polling station. Dunstall Hill Community Centre offers excellent facilities and improved access.	None.
East Park	Removal of both temporary polling stations (one on Holloway Street, one on Deans Road) resulted in voters having to walk long distances at the local election.	Pat McFadden MP	Feedback was received for both temporary stations which raised a number of issues, including that the station were cold and badly lit, that they were cramped inside and meant voters couldn't cast their vote in privacy, and there was no parking for voters. Therefore, both stations were judged inadequate.	None.

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Concern raised</b>	<b>Raised by</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Changes proposed as a result of concerns raised</b>
Tettenhall Wightwick	Wightwick Manor is difficult to access as there is a long steep walk through the grounds.	Cllr Wendy Thompson	Wightwick Hall school, the previous polling station, was located outside of the polling district. Wightwick Manor offers a more central location.	Wightwick Manor will be removed as a polling station. There is an option to resume the use of Wightwick Hall school or to create a double polling station at Tettenhall Wood United Reformed Church.



## 5.0 Changes

Listed in the table below are the proposed changes in numbers of polling stations and the proposal total of polling stations in the city:

Ward	Previous number of stations	Proposed number of stations
Bilston East	11	10 (one double) <i>one reinstated as result of consultation</i>
Bilston North	7	7 (one double)
Blakenhall	8 (one double)	6
Bushbury North	7	7
Bushbury South and Low Hill	9	7 (one double and one double joint with Heath Town)
East Park	10 (one double)	7
Ettingshall	10	8
Fallings Park	8	7
Graiseley	8	7
Heath Town	10	8 (one double joint with Bushbury South)
Merry Hill	7 (one double)	6 (one double joint with Penn)
Oxley	7 (two doubles and one double joint with St Peter's)	5 (one double and one double joint with St Peters)
Park	8 (two double)	6
Penn	8 (two double)	8 (one double joint with Merry Hill)
Springvale	8	6
St Peter's	8 (one double)	7 (one double joint with Oxley)
Tettenhall Regis	8 (two double and one double joint with Tettenhall Wightwick)	7 (one double)
Tettenhall Wightwick	10 (one double and one joint with Tettenhall Regis)	6
Wednesfield North	8 (one double)	6
Wednesfield South	7	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>167 stations (152 premises)</b>	<b>145 stations (137 premises)</b>

## 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 removal of ten of the temporary polling stations has already resulted in a saving of around £22,000 per election. [GE/13102014/C]

## **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 consultation and review process is stipulated within the Electoral Commission's guidance and has been adhered to throughout.

[RB/09102014/C]

## **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. The consultation was a full twelve week period and community groups with 'specific experience of assessing access for persons with different disabilities' were directly contacted for comment. There were no objections or representations from these groups.

## **9.0 Environmental implications**

- 9.1 There are no major environmental implications associated with this report. However, the removal of temporary polling stations provides a better working environment for employees and fewer disturbances to a neighbourhood on and in the run up to election day.

## **10.0 Human resources implications**

- 10.1 There are no human resources implications.

## **11.0 Corporate landlord implications**

- 11.1 The implications of the corporate landlord programme for polling stations are outlined in paragraph 3.3. The transfer or selling of community assets may affect the availability of polling stations in the long term.

## **12.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 12.1 n/a