

Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

To:

Civic Affairs Committee – 5 December 2024

Report by:

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Wards affected:

All wards.

1. Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that Civic Affairs Committee:

1. Approve the amendments to three polling districts in Cambridge, as laid out in the Proposed Changes, at *Appendix A*.
2. Agree that the polling place for each polling district is the polling district boundary. (See definition of terms at 4.1).

2. Purpose and reason for the report

- 2.1 Under the Electoral Administration Act 2013 a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations must be conducted every five years. The next compulsory review must be completed by 31 January 2025.
- 2.2 Each local authority is responsible for reviewing polling districts and polling places in its area. The Civic Affairs Committee is delegated this function in Cambridge.
- 2.3 Changes to the polling district boundaries will come into force at the next publication of the register of electors, scheduled for 1 February 2025.

3. Alternative options considered

- 3.1 All comments received during the consultation were considered, and reasons for accepting or rejecting can be found at *Appendix B*.

4. Background and key issues

4.1 Definition of terms:

- A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a parliamentary constituency. In practice, the same polling district boundaries are used at all elections, and so they must also be coterminous with city ward and county division boundaries.
- A polling place is the building or area in which a polling station is situated.
- A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places, which are set by the local authority, the relevant Returning Officer selects polling stations for each election.

4.2 The last review of polling arrangements was conducted in 2019 and took account of impending changes to ward boundaries, which came into effect at the elections held in May 2021.

4.3 The current review commenced on 7 October 2024, with a six-week consultation period that ended on 18 November 2024.

4.4 There are currently 54 polling districts within the city area. A list of current polling districts and their relevant areas can be found at *Appendix C*. The new scheme reduces the number of polling districts by two to 52. This is due to recent changes to parliamentary constituency boundaries, being re-aligned with the city wards.

4.5 The allocation of polling stations is at the discretion of the Returning Officer. The attached list at *Appendix D* shows the current list of polling stations, however these may change following further investigation of comments received during the consultation or if the venue availability changes.

4.6 Polling stations across the city are reviewed in advance of each election, to ensure they are suitable and appropriate for polling. The council's Access Officer has been unable to conduct their own inspection during the current review period, however this will be conducted before the next scheduled elections in May 2025, and any recommendations taken into consideration.

5. Corporate plan

- 5.1 The review is statutory, so does not have any direct links to the Council's Corporate Plan. However, provision of suitable polling stations and access to voting ensure residents can actively participate in democratic life to meet the Council's vision of 'One Cambridge, Fair for All'.

6. Consultation, engagement and communication

- 6.1 A consultation was published on the council's Go Vocal consultation platform and promoted through the council's social media and other communication channels.

Comments were sought from the following:

- Electors.
- Elected representatives.
- Those who have a particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

- 6.2 As is also required, the Acting Returning Officer for South Cambridgeshire District Council was consulted on that part of the city area that sits within the South Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency, i.e. the Cherry Hinton and Queen Edith's wards.

- 6.3 The ARO for South Cambridgeshire said: "The Acting Returning Officer (ARO) for the South Cambridgeshire Constituency is committed to supporting Cambridge City Council regarding polling arrangements in the South Cambridgeshire constituency wards that sit within Cambridge City (Cherry Hinton and Queen Ediths). The ARO supports the principles laid out by Cambridge City Council regarding the importance of accessibility of polling stations for voters in the Cherry Hinton and Queen Ediths wards. The ARO believes that existing polling district (and polling station) arrangements largely support these principles well. The ARO notes (and supports) the proposal to merge polling district KDK into KAK, which will improve administrative arrangements with little voter facing impact."

- 6.4 There were 41 participants in the consultation survey, and four comments received via email, with 16 comments specifically relating to polling district boundaries and polling stations, all of which can be viewed at *Appendix B*.

6.5 Several comments were received in relation to issues regarding city ward and local authority boundaries, neither of which are within the scope of this review. These are also listed at *Appendix B* for completion.

7. Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact

7.1 The purpose of the review is to ensure that:

- all voters in Cambridge have such reasonable facilities for voting as are possible in the circumstances, and
- so far as is achievable, every polling station that we are responsible for is accessible to voters who are disabled.

7.2 The proposed changes to three polling districts will ensure that voters are allocated to the most appropriate polling station. Voters in the EDK polling district will continue to vote at Lichfield Hall, Lichfield Road. For voters in the current KDK polling district, this will mean they will vote at future elections at The Wilkinson Room, St John the Evangelist, Hills Road. (Instead of St James's Church, Wulfstan Way). Voters affected in the BAB polling district will continue to vote at the Good Shepherd Church Hall, Mansel Way.

8. Implications

8.1 Relevant risks

Failure to ensure appropriate polling districts, places and stations are in place, could unreasonably disenfranchise voters if the location and accessibility of their allocated station is not properly considered.

Financial Implications

8.2 The review has no financial impact. Voters registered in the three affected polling districts will be voting at polling station locations already in use. There will therefore be no reduction or increase in the cost of polling station venues, staffing or equipment.

Legal Implications

8.3 Failure to conduct the review within the legal timeframe, would result in a breach of

statutory duty by the Electoral Registration Officer.

Equalities and Socio-economic Implications

- 8.4 The review has a positive impact on electors within the following categories: Age (including safeguarding of adults), Disability, and Pregnancy & Maternity. The location and venue used for polling is assessed to ensure it is suitable and provides adequate facilities for those listed above.
- 8.5 The review could have a negative impact on electors within the Religion or Belief category. Some electors are uncomfortable voting in venues used for religious purposes, and while the limited number of venues for hire means that their use cannot always be avoided, it is a consideration when looking for new venues. Other methods of voting can be offered to these electors.

Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications

- 8.6 The review has a NIL Climate Change Impact.

Procurement Implications

- 8.7 No impact.

Community Safety Implications

- 8.8 No impact.
- 8.9 There are no other relevant implications because of the review and decisions to be made.

9. Background documents

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 Maps of the current wards with their polling district arrangements can be found at:
www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/otr0bro/cambridge-polling-districts-map.pdf

10. Appendices

- 10.1 *Appendices A, A1, A2, A3 – Proposed changes and associated maps*
Appendix B – Consultation comments
Appendix C – List of current polling districts and their areas
Appendix D – List of current polling stations

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact
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