

Report to COUNCIL

Polling District and Polling Place Review 2019

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Reason for Decision

To present for consideration proposals on polling arrangements for Oldham as a result of a review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

Executive Summary

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the Council to undertake regular reviews of all polling districts and polling places in its area. The Act provides that the next review must be held between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. Subsequent reviews must be every five years within a sixteen-month period beginning with 1 October 2023.

The Council is requested to consider the proposals made to polling districts and polling places

Comments received on the draft proposals have been considered by the Returning Officer and the recommendations for each ward are set out at Appendix A to the report.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Polling District Review be approved incorporating any changes considered appropriate.

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2. The proposed changes to polling districts and polling places incorporating the recommendations attached at Appendix A in respect of Chadderton North, Failsworth East and Werneth be approved.
 3. The Chief Executive, as Returning Officer, in consultation with Group Leaders, be authorized to identify an alternative polling station, in necessary, for any other polling stations unavailable on the date of the election.

Polling District and Polling Place Review 2019

1 Background

- 1.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the Council to undertake regular reviews of all polling districts and polling places in its area. The Act provides that the next review must be held between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. Subsequent reviews must be every five years within a sixteen-month period beginning with 1 October 2023.
- 1.2 The responsibility of designating polling districts is for the Council to determine. In drawing up polling district boundaries, the Council must ensure that all electors in the area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 1.3 The Council must also designate a polling place for every polling district. This is usually within the boundary of the polling district unless there are special circumstances, e.g. lack of suitable buildings.
- 1.4 In designating polling places, the Council must:
- a) Seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
 - 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.
- 1.5 The polling district is the actual area where the voting takes place, i.e. the room or area where electors cast their vote. The Returning Officer is responsible for designating the polling station which must be within the polling place agreed by the Council.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 Notice of the review was given on 8 July 2019 and information about the review was published on the Council's website. All members, presiding officers, owners of premises used as polling stations and other stakeholders were also informed of the review and invited to submit comments and representations. Details were also sent to Access for All. Details on the current arrangements were also posted on the Council's website.
- 2.2 Having received comments and representations on the current polling arrangements, the Returning Officer published proposals for polling districts and polling places for future elections and sought comments on them.
- 2.3 A number of principles were followed in determining the identification of suitable buildings for use as polling places. These included:
- Location and accessibility to electors within the polling district
 - Size – can it accommodate more than one polling station if required
 - Accessibility – is the building accessible to all those entitled to vote at the polling station
 - Availability – is the building readily available in the event of an unscheduled election
 - Facilities available in the venue including parking, heating, lighting, toilet facilities and security

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- Public Buildings – the election rules allow the Returning Officer the free use of buildings maintained by the Council including schools maintained by the authority and free schools. These will be identified in the first instance.
 - Private Buildings – in the absence of suitable public owned buildings, churches, clubs and other private sector buildings conveniently located and accessible to electors are considered for designation as the polling place.
 - Mobiles – in the absence of any suitable public or private building in or adjacent to the polling district, a mobile will be considered for designation as a polling place. Given the difficulties of heating, lighting, security, comfort of staff and electors, the negative reaction from residents living close to the site of a mobile and the significantly higher cost of locating a mobile polling station, these are considered only as a last resort.
 - The potential impact on election turnout of moving the polling station to a different location.

2.4 Current Practice

2.4.1 The Returning Officer adopts a practice where, following each election, any issues in respect of the suitability of a polling place or a polling station is immediately addressed to ascertain whether there is a need to seek alternative accommodation. Polling places are therefore regularly reviewed and updated which reduces the number of issues that need to be addressed in the statutory polling place reviews.

2.4.2 In addition, the disabled access in respect of any polling place is assessed at each election by the completion of an access checklist by each Polling Station Inspector with any necessary actions being taken. The last full election took place on 23 May 2019. This also reduced the number of issues that need to be addressed in the statutory polling place reviews.

2.5 Proposals

2.5.1 Comments received on the draft proposals have been considered by the Returning Officer and the recommendations for each ward are attached at Appendix A. The proposals have also been considered by Group Leaders.

2.5.2 Appendix A of the report sets out proposed changes to polling districts and polling places incorporating the recommendations in respect of Chadderton North, Failsworth East and Werneth. Appendix B refers to ward maps which, due to the size of the plans, are available in the Election Office, Civic Centre).

2.6 Returning Officer Recommendations

2.6.1 Chadderton North – Polling District CN1

The Returning Officer recommends the use of St. Herbert's Parish Centre, 148 Broadway, Oldham OL9 0JY instead of a mobile unit at Hunt Lane Tavern Car Park, Middleton Road, Chadderton OL9 0LD.

2.6.2 Failsworth East – Polling Districts FE2 and FE5

To divide polling district FE2 at the main Oldham Road. Electors south of this divide to remain in FE2 and continue to use Stansfield Road School as a polling station. A new polling district and place to be established for FE5 and electors to use a polling station at Hope Methodist Church on Oldham Road easing the access for voters.

2.6.3 Werneth – Polling District WE4

For St. Thomas Church to be used instead of St. Thomas School. Disabled access was a problem at the school and the church has recently been refurbished to incorporate new disabled access which will ease voter participation for some electors.

2.6.4 The other polling places have been retained as they provide accessible voting places which are conveniently located for voters.

3 **Options/Alternatives**

Option 1 – agree the recommendations

Option 2 – do not agree the recommendations

4 **Preferred Option**

4.1 The preferred option is to agree the recommendations.

5 **Consultation**

5.1 Notice of the review was given on 8 July 2019 and published on the Council's Website. All members, presiding officers, owners of premises used as polling stations and other stakeholders were informed of the review and invited to submit comments and representations.

6 **Financial Implications**

6.1 There will be an additional cost in Failsworth of approximately £1,000 for the extra polling station, staff, etc., and some cost savings in Chadderton North of approximately £1,000 due to the reduction in the number of mobile polling stations.

7 **Legal Services Comments**

7.1 N/A

8. **Co-operative Agenda**

8.1 N/A

9 **Human Resources Comments**

9.1 N/A

10 **Risk Assessments**

10.1 N/A

11 **IT Implications**

11.1 N/A

12 **Property Implications**

12.1 N/A

13 **Procurement Implications**

13.1 N/A

14 **Environmental and Health & Safety Implications**

14.1 N/A

15 **Equality, community cohesion and crime implications**

15.1 N/A

16 **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**

16.1 N/A

17 **Key Decision**

17.1 N/A

18 **Key Decision Reference**

18.1 N/A

19 **Background Papers**

19.1 The following is a list of background papers on which this report is based in accordance with the requirements of Section 100(1) of the Local Government Act 1972. It does not include documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information as defined by the Act :

Records held in the Elections Office, Room 222, Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1UL

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20 **Appendices**

20.1 Appendix A – Proposals for Changes to Polling Places and Districts
Appendix B – Ward Maps (due to the size of the plans, the maps will be available in the Elections Office)