

Report of the Returning Officer

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019

1. Summary

This report informs Members of the outcome and resulting recommendations following the conclusion of the review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations, as required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

2. Background

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places with current reviews required to be completed by January 2020. The review by City of York Council was undertaken between 2 September 2019 and 1 November 2019.

By way of assistance:

- A polling district is defined as a geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts;
- A polling place is the room or area (eg a designated building) for a polling district into which polling stations are located; and
- A polling station is the room or area within a polling place where voting is conducted.

3. Aim of the Review

Local Authorities are required to divide their area into polling districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections and to designate polling places for these polling districts and to keep the same under review.

It is essential that the registered electorate is not disenfranchised when seeking to participate in an election and therefore Local Authorities must:

- Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
- 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 polling places, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

In conducting the compulsory review, Local Authorities must:

- Publish a notice of the holding of the review;
- Consult the (Acting) Returning Officer in a constituency which is wholly or partly in its area;
- Seek representations from the (Acting) Returning Officer to include information as to the location of polling stations within polling places;
- Publish the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations within 30 calendar days of receipt;
- Seek representations from persons that have expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for person who have different forms of disability;
- Seek representations from electors in a constituency wholly or partly in the authority's area;
- Encourage representations to be made regarding proposals for alternative polling places;
- Publish the results of the review, giving reasons for its decision.

4. Scope of the Review

Consultation was undertaken with local political parties, ward councillors, parish councils and local community groups.

As part of this consultation exercise, comments and feedback obtained from staff employed and based at polling stations by the Returning Officer in the May elections held in 2019, has also been considered.

Prior to the commencement of the review, 89 of the City's 130 polling stations were visited and surveyed by members of the Electoral Services Team, to explore known concerns or matters raised by staff employed and based at the various polling stations during the May 2019 elections.

5. Representations received

Appendix A details the six representations received during review.

- Members of The Licensing and Regulatory Committee, at the meeting on 4 September 2019, suggested that schools should be avoided for use as polling stations.

For the City of York Council area the (Acting) Returning Officer does currently use 11 schools as polling places (hosting 18 polling stations). These are in polling districts where no other venue is available.

Whilst in legislation the (Acting) Returning Officer is entitled to use (free of charge) schools maintained or assisted by a local authority, as well as those schools that receive grants made out of monies provided by central Government (this includes academies and free schools), the (Acting) Returning Officer does actively review, following each election, the potential for alternative venues to avoid using schools.

- York Green Party submitted comments on the current use of York Barbican for DB polling district as a polling station and also the use of community hubs as possible polling stations.

York Barbican was used for the first time as a polling place for the three elections in 2019, as stated there is no dedicated parking available at the venue. For the size of electorate, York Barbican is suitable, but the (Acting) Returning Officer did receive a small number of comments at each election regarding the parking situation. For the next scheduled election on 7 May 2020, (election of the Police and Crime Commissioner) York Barbican is not available and the (Acting) Returning Officer is recommending as part of this report using an alternative venue of the Christian Science Church on Kilburn Road; this has a dedicated car park but it should be noted that this is a substantially smaller venue.

The possible use of community hubs would always be considered where they provide better alternatives to current venues or where venues become unavailable. They will be included in any future review for the relevant polling districts.

- Councillor Hollyer submitted a suggestion regarding the parish boundaries that polling districts follow. In several parishes the boundary dissects streets, requiring electors to travel further to polling stations.

This review cannot alter parish boundaries, but parish boundaries can be changed through a Community Governance Review with the parish councils, ward councillors and residents affected.

- Councillor Warters raised the ongoing problems encountered with the use of the York Auction Centre in Murton parish (polling district YHB) and a suggestion that Kexby Parish (polling district YHE) be provided with a mobile polling station.

The (Acting) Returning Officer in the Schedule of Polling Stations (Appendix B) has also highlighted that York Auction Centre is not suitable. This has excellent car parking, but the room made available is too small, difficult for the electorate to access given its location in the building and generally unsuitable for use as a polling place.

In Murton, the church has had renovations that would now make it suitable as a venue and it is located on a road with dedicated parking. The majority of the electorate for this polling district reside in Murton and it is believed that the walking distance to the church and the parking arrangements may be appropriate for both staff and those electors visiting by car.

Kexby Parish has not had a polling station located in the polling district since 1999 when a resident was no longer able to provide access to private building. The polling station was relocated as a substation to Dunnington, requiring electors who wish to vote in person to travel in the region of a 5 mile round trip.

Consideration can be given to providing a mobile polling station or approaching Derwent House Care Home to enquire if they are able to host a polling station for 190 electors.

6. (Acting) Returning Officers Comments and Recommendations

Appendix B – Schedule of Polling Stations details the (Acting) Returning Officers comments and recommendations for change of venue(s) which can be summarised as follows:

- For DB polling district the Acting Returning Officer to use Christian Science Church as a polling station instead of York Barbican for next scheduled election.
- For DC polling district the ARO to move the polling station at from the Pupil Support Centre at Danesgate to St. Oswald's Church Hall on Main Street.
- For YHB polling district the ARO to move the polling station at Murton Auction Centre to Murton Church, Murton.
- For YHE polling district the ARO to investigate the best option for providing a polling station in the parish of Kexby and Scoreby Parish, rather than in Dunnington.

7. Corporate Objectives

- Improve the way the Council and its partners work together to deliver better services.
- Improve our focus on the needs of customers and residents in designing and providing services.

There are no financial, human resource, crime and disorder, information technology or property implications.

8. Equalities

A key component of this review is to ensure that those with a disability are able to have easy access to nominated polling places and polling stations. Equalities issues are consistently reviewed when delivering elections so as to ensure no-one eligible to vote is disenfranchised.

9. Legal

As detailed within this report, a compulsory review of Polling Districts and Polling Places is required by the Electoral Administration and Registration Act 2013.

10. Risk management

Failure to meet statutory requirements would represent an unacceptable risk to the authority.

Recommendation

1. The Licensing and Regulatory Committee is asked to:

- a) Consider the outcomes and resulting proposals for the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019 and subject to any amendments;
- b) Recommend the proposals to Council for approval;
- c) Recommend to Council the following changes:
 - Christian Science Church to be used a polling station for DB polling district.
 - St. Oswald's Church Hall to be used a polling station for DC polling district.
 - Murton Church to be used a polling station for YHB polling district
 - A venue be located for Kexby to be used a polling station in YHE polling district.

2. Council is asked to Resolve that:

- a) The proposals for the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019 be approved;
- b) Members are requested to agree to recommendations for changes to venues as set out by the (Acting) Returning Officer in Appendix B – Schedule of Polling Stations and (Acting) Returning Officers comments and recommendations.

Reason

In order to ensure that the Council complies with statutory requirements of the provision of polling places and polling stations for electors.

Contact Details

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Report
Approved



Date 13/1/20

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

Annex A - Schedule of Representations received;
Annex B - Schedule of Polling Station and (Acting) Returning Officer Comments and Recommendations

Background Papers

Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/6/contents/enacted>

Representation of the People Act 1983

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/2>

The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections)
Regulations 2006

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/2965/contents/made>

Report to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee dated 4th September 2019

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=606&MId=11670>