



Council

25 February 2014

Matter for Decision

Title: **Review of Polling Districts and Places**

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to agree a scheme of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places for the Borough of Oadby and Wigston following a recent review and public consultation.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That no changes be made to the existing polling district boundaries in the Borough

2.2 That the scheme for parliamentary polling places, as described in **Appendix 1** be adopted.

2.3 That Members give consideration to designating the Oadby Community Centre as a polling station in place of the Walter Charles Centre in Polling District No.1 (A) of Oadby St Peters Ward.

3. Information

Provisions in the Electoral Administration Act 2006 require the Council to review its parliamentary polling districts and polling places at least every four years. The next review was due later in 2014, but the Council agreed to review arrangements early, in order that any improvements to the scheme could be introduced in advance of the European Parliamentary elections in May 2014 and prior to the resource intensive implementation of Individual Electoral Registration in June 2014.

Further to the report to Council at its meeting held on 3 December 2013, the proposed scheme for parliamentary polling districts and polling places was put out to public consultation and this period ended on 23 January 2014.

The consultation document includes the comments of the Returning Officer for the Harborough Constituency, as required by the regulations and incorporated the Returning Officers proposals for altering the scheme. The proposals retain the existing polling district boundaries, but change buildings designated as polling stations in the following two polling districts:-

- Oadby St Peters Ward – Polling District No. 1 (A)
- Oadby Grange Ward – Polling District No.2 (D)

The scheme for polling places is included at **Appendix 1**.

A wide range of individuals and organisations were consulted as part of the review including organisations with particular expertise on disabled access. Consultees included Age Concern, Scope, Citizens Advice Bureau, Helping Hands, local political parties, Councillors, Local MP and Civic Societies for Oadby and Wigston.

In addition, the complete report, including all relevant maps, was available to view on the Council's website and at the Council Offices throughout the period of the consultation. The information is currently still available as further reading.

Access surveys were carried out at all buildings and a number of additional buildings and will continue to be carried out periodically to assess whether the scheme can be improved.

Oadby Community Centre, Sandhurst Street

During the course of the review, an inspection of Oadby Community Centre was undertaken. This venue would be ideal for use as a polling station in Polling District No.1 (A) Oadby St Peters Ward as it provides good facilities, parking and access for disabled voters. It is also more central within the polling district than the Walter Charles Centre, which has been used as a polling station for recent years. A concern in moving the polling station would be that there is a risk of causing voter confusion by changing the polling station.

Members are asked to consider designating the Oadby Community Centre instead of the Walter Charles Centre. In the event of approving this as a polling station, a letter to households would be delivered prior to the elections in 2014 and 2015. Also, the scheme will be published at the Council Offices and available online following its adoption.

4. Representations

During the consultation period five separate representations were received. All of them related to the proposals for buildings to be used as polling stations and one made reference to the polling district boundaries. Representations were made both in support and against the Returning Officer's proposals. A summary of the comments made is set out below.

Glenmere School - Wigston St Wolstan's Ward

Three of the representations object to the use of Glenmere School in polling district No. 2 (I) of Wigston St Wolstan's Ward as a polling station due to the disruption caused as a result of the School taking a decision to close due to safeguarding concerns. Whilst it is acknowledged that this is an important matter that Electoral Services will take steps to resolve, it is not a relevant consideration when determining a scheme of polling places and districts.

A meeting and several discussions have taken place which has not yet resolved the issue to the extent that the school feels it can remain open during

polling. It is not a requirement that the school is closed during polling and Electoral Services continue to work with Glenmere School to find a solution that satisfies the school's concerns.

The Returning Officer has a legal right to use schools for the purpose of polling and in all other cases where a school is used as a polling station, arrangements have been put in place that allow the school to remain open. In addition to this, the Returning Officer has a duty to ensure that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district, ensuring that facilities are suitable for disabled electors.

Glenmere School is an ideal building to be designated as a polling place in this respect and remains the best option within the polling district. Alternatives were investigated as part of the review but it is considered that they are not suitable, largely as a result of being outside of the polling district.

One of the above representations suggested re-aligning polling district boundaries to avoid having to use Glenmere School. This would not be an appropriate reason to change the boundaries and would result in polling districts failing to follow natural boundary lines, which is not desirable or in line with Electoral Commission guidance.

Wigston Meadowcourt and All Saints Wards

The fourth representation agreed with concerns in relation to the Girl Guide Clubroom on Welford Road, Wigston Meadowcourt Ward – Polling District No.2 (L) and suggested that alternatives are continued to be sought after. Electoral Services will monitor the development of the polling district for more suitable buildings. The representation also supported the comments of the Returning Officer for polling places in All Saints Ward and Polling District No.1 (K) in Wigston Meadowcourt Ward, acknowledging that they were ideal for polling.

Woodland Grange School - Oadby Woodlands Ward

The fifth representation made comment about disabled access arrangements at Woodland Grange School in Polling District No.1 (F) of Oadby Woodlands Ward suggesting that more robust arrangements need to be put in place to facilitate good access for disabled electors. Electoral Services have discussed enhancing the disabled parking facilities and access for future elections with Woodland Grange School, which take into account comments made in the representation.

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Background Papers:-

- Electoral Commission Guidance for the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places.
- The Electoral Administration Act 2006
- The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Implications	
Financial (PL)	No significant implications
Risk (KG)	CR6; Regulatory Governance & CR3; Political Dynamics
Equalities (KG)	An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken by this review and no negative impact has been identified. A former concern of disabled access raised at that time of the last Elections May 2013 had been appropriately remedied and appropriate reasonable adjustments have been made.
Legal (KG)	The Electoral Administration Act 2006 & subsequent amendments to the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 require a compulsory review of polling places and polling districts. The Corporate Resources (Legal) service area is satisfied that a full consultation has been undertaken and that all representations have been considered and addressed.