

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES IN THE DISTRICT OF WYRE FOREST

Executive Summary

1. This consultation paper sets out proposals for some changes to the pattern of polling places in the district of Wyre Forest. There are two buildings currently being used as polling places which will cease to be available in the short to medium-term as a result of redevelopment plans. It also sets out a minor change to the boundary between two polling districts. The proposed changes are summarised in the chart below. The full proposals are set out in **Appendix A**. The proposed changes would be implemented from May 2017 onwards.
2. Your responses are sought by **5pm on Thursday 27 October 2016** – the details of where to send your comments are in paragraph 19.

Table 1 - Polling Places Review

| Name of Ward | Polling Districts | Current Polling Place | Proposed Polling Place |
|---------------------|-------------------|---|---|
| Offmore & Comberton | OFC-3 OFC-4 | Offmore Community Centre, Gray Close, Offmore, Kidderminster DY10 3YE | Offmore Evangelical Church Gray Close, Offmore, Kidderminster, DY10 3YE |
| Mitton | MI-SN2 | Stourport High School Sixth Form Centre, Coniston Crescent, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8AX | Stourport High School and Sixth Form College, Minster Road, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8AX |

Table 2 - Polling Districts Review

| Name of Ward | Affected Electors | Current Polling District and Polling Place | Proposed Polling District and Polling Place |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
| Offmore & Comberton | Electors living at No's 46, 48, 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62 & 64 Queen Elizabeth Road, Kidderminster | OFC-3 Offmore Community Centre, Gray Close, Offmore, Kidderminster DY10 3YE | OFC-1 St Chads Church Hall, Burcher Green, Comberton, Kidderminster DY10 3AY |
| | Electors living at No's 14, 16, 18, & 20 Byron Close, Kidderminster | OFC-1 St Chads Church Hall, Burcher Green, Comberton, Kidderminster DY10 3AY | OFC-3 Offmore Evangelical Church Gray Close, Offmore, Kidderminster, DY10 3YE (subject to the proposal in Table 1 being agreed) |

Background

3. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The last such review in Wyre Forest was undertaken in October 2014 and the results were agreed by Council on 10 December 2014. Copies of the report and the decision can be found at www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/meetings/main.htm. A further review was undertaken in September last year for the Kidderminster Foreign Parish area of the Wribbenhall & Arley ward only. Copies of this report and the decision taken at Council on 9 December 2015 can be found at www.wyreforest.gov.uk/council/meetings/main.htm.
4. A review of the polling places and polling districts offers an opportunity to take account of known future changes, for example, where buildings that will cease to be capable of being used as polling stations in the near future and more suitable buildings that are, or are due to, become available. The Council has also decided that the review should allow for minor adjustments to polling district boundaries within the same ward to be identified.
5. The proposals made in this review involve changes to the two Polling places which are located in the Offmore & Comberton and Mitton wards respectively as well as a Polling District change to a limited number of properties based in the Offmore & Comberton ward, as set out in **Appendix A**. This review is undertaken under section 18C(5) of the Representation of People Act 1983 which allows the Council to carry out at any time a review of a particular polling place or polling district. **While the pattern of provision will never be ideal to suit all electors, the proposals try to maximise convenience by using the best locations.**

Definition of terms

6. A 'polling district' is a geographical subdivision of an electoral area such as a District Ward within which a polling place is designated.
7. A 'polling place' is defined as the building or area in which a polling station will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer.
8. A 'polling station' is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the (Acting) Returning Officer for the election.

Requirements of the review

9. It is a requirement of the review to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances.
10. It is necessary to ensure that, as far as reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place to have regards to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
11. Polling places should be within the polling district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside the polling district.

12. The (Acting) Returning Officer is required to decide how many polling stations are needed for each polling place and to allocate electors to the polling stations in such a manner as he thinks most convenient (Rule 25 Schedule 1 RPA 1983).
13. In conducting the review the Council must:
- Publish a notice that the review is being held.
 - Consult the (Acting) Returning Officer.
 - The (Acting) Returning Officer must make representation to the authority and must include information as to the location of polling stations (existing or proposed) within the polling places.
 - The Council must publish the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations within 30 calendar days of receipt.
 - The Council must seek representation from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Ensure that any elector in the area may make representations.
 - Representations may be made by any person in connection with the review including proposals for specified alternative polling places.
 - Publish the findings of the review including reasons.
14. On completion of the review, the Council must give reasons for its decisions and publish:
- All correspondence sent to the (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review.
 - All representations made by electors and other persons and bodies, including those with expertise in relation to premises and facilities for disabled persons.
 - Details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the Wyre Forest area as a result of the review.

Comments received and issues emerging since May 2016

15. Following the elections in May 2016 and the Referendum in June 2016 a 'wash up' debrief meeting was held with agents and candidates on 30 June. The only issues raised which were specific to Polling Places and Polling Districts were as follows:

16. Re-development plans for buildings currently designated as polling stations

Given the proposed re-development plans for two buildings which are currently designated as Polling Places, namely Offmore Community Centre and Stourport High School Sixth Form Centre, the review proposes the designation of alternative venues for replacing the current polling places from the elections in May 2017. Further details on the proposed buildings are set out in **Appendix A**.

17. Polling District Boundary Anomaly - Offmore & Comberton

The Polling Places and Polling Districts Review in 2014 identified there would be no change to the polling districts for voters in the old OF-A and OF-B polling districts, which are now OFC-1 and OFC-3 respectively. However, following the completion of the Review it became apparent that ten properties in Queen Elizabeth Road and four properties in Byron Close which are located on the polling district boundary had historically been mapped incorrectly as a Geographical Information System had not been used in the past. This was therefore corrected and, since May 2015, the affected electors have been allocated to a different polling district and polling place to the one identified in the Review in 2014. The consequence of the correct mapping is that the voters from the affected properties no longer go to the most conveniently located polling place. Further details on how it is proposed to change the arrangements and revert to those which applied prior to 2015 are set out in **Appendix A**.

The review and where to send your comments

18. **Appendix A** contains the proposals for changes that are now being proposed in this review. Comments are sought from local electors and interested organisations about these proposals.
19. **Comments should be emailed to electoral@wyreforestdc.gov.uk or made in writing to the below address to arrive no later than 5pm on Thursday 27 October 2016.**

By post to:

Mr Ian Miller

Electoral Registration Officer

Wyre Forest District Council

Wyre Forest House

Finepoint Way

Kidderminster

Worcestershire

DY11 7WF

20. Final recommendations, taking into account the (Acting) Returning Officer's comments and representations made during the consultation period, will be made in a report to Full Council on Wednesday 14 December 2016. Council will be asked to consider and approve the recommendations.

6 September 2016

POLLING PLACES REVIEW

| Name of Ward | Polling Districts | Current Polling Place | Proposed Polling Place | Reasons |
|---------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Offmore & Comberton | OFC-3 OFC-4 | Offmore Community Centre, Gray Close, Offmore, Kidderminster DY10 3YE | Offmore Evangelical Church Gray Close, Offmore Kidderminster, DY10 3YE | <p>The current Polling Place (Offmore Community Centre) is due to be re-developed. After visiting both the Offmore Evangelical Church and the Scout Hut in Byron Close which are both located in the Offmore and Comberton Ward, the proposal is to designate Offmore Evangelical Church. Its facilities are considered to be ideal to accommodate a double polling station for a total electorate of 3,993. There is also a purpose built disabled ramp entrance. The building is located less than 100 yards from the current polling place, which will minimise disruption and confusion for the voters in this area. At present it is not known whether the car park which adjoins the Evangelical Church will be re-developed as part of the plans for Offmore Community Centre. However there is plenty of nearby on street parking if the current car park became unavailable for use.</p> <p>The Scout Hut in Byron Close is very spacious and has suitable facilities for use as a double polling station. However access to the Hut is concealed at the end of Byron Close so robust signage would be needed to signpost clearly residents who may not be aware where the building is located and also a sign would be needed advising drivers entering and exiting the small car park which adjoins the Hut to take care due to the concealed entrance. The shingle stone on the car park may cause a wheelchair user some discomfort or difficulty to travel over in order to gain access to the polling place unless they are accompanied by a companion. The distance between the Scout Hut</p> |

| Name of Ward | Polling Districts | Current Polling Place | Proposed Polling Place | Reasons |
|--------------|-------------------|--|---|--|
| | | | | and the current polling place (Offmore Community Centre) is 0.23 miles which is a 5 to 8 minute walk. It is therefore felt that, for the reasons set out above, the Offmore Evangelical Church has more suitable facilities. |
| Mitton | MI-SN2 | Stourport High School Sixth Form Centre, Coniston Crescent, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8AX | Stourport High School and Sixth Form College, Minster Road, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 8AX | <p>The current Polling Place (Stourport High School Sixth Form Centre) is being re-developed over the coming months and it is currently not known whether a suitable facility for a polling station will be part of the development. Therefore the proposal is to designate the whole school complex rather than a specific building (as is the case currently) to provide greater flexibility for the returning officer to use the most appropriate facilities at the school.</p> <p>For the EU Referendum in June, the Sixth Form Centre wasn't available due to exams being held. The LQ Arena which is another facility within the complex of Stourport High School was used instead, and offered good access and parking.</p> |

POLLING DISTRICTS REVIEW

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| Offmore & Comberton | Electors living at No's 46, 48, 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62 & 64 Queen Elizabeth Road, Kidderminster | OFC-3 Offmore Community Centre, Gray Close, Offmore, Kidderminster DY10 3YE | OFC-1 St Chads Church Hall, Burcher Green, Comberton, Kidderminster DY10 3AY | The proposal is to add the ten affected properties in Queen Elizabeth Road to the OFC-1 polling district (previously OF-A). This will mean the electors living at these properties will go back to voting at St Chads Church Hall on the Comberton estate, which from a geographic perspective is more convenient (251 metres closer than current polling place). The Polling District boundary will be adjusted accordingly. |

| Name of Ward | Affected Electors | Current Polling District and Polling Place | Proposed Polling District and Polling Place | Reasons |
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| Offmore & Comberton | Electors living at No's 14, 16, 18, & 20 Byron Close, Kidderminster | OFC-1 St Chads Church Hall, Burcher Green, Comberton, Kidderminster DY10 3AY | OFC-3 Offmore Evangelical Church Gray Close, Offmore, Kidderminster, DY10 3YE (subject to the proposal in Table 1 being agreed) | The proposal is to add the four affected properties in Byron Close to OFC-3 polling district (previously OF-B). Electors living at these properties will return to voting at the Offmore polling station which, subject to the proposal in Table 1 of this paper being agreed, will be Offmore Evangelical Church. From a geographic perspective, the proposed polling place will be 7 metres closer for these electors than the distance they travel currently to St Chads Church Hall. The Polling District boundary will be adjusted accordingly. |

End of Consultation Document