

# Report to General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

**24 November 2022**

<b>Subject:</b>	Review of Polling Places and Polling Stations 2022/23
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, Surjit Tour
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Electoral Services Manager, Tracey Hurst <a href="mailto:tracey_hurst@sandwell.gov.uk">tracey_hurst@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval is given to changes to various polling places and polling stations as set out in the Appendix to this report.
- 1.2 That in connection with 1.1 above, the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to implement the changes.
- 1.3. That if, for any unforeseen reason, there should be a need to change any further polling places or polling stations prior to elections in 2023, authority be delegated to the Returning Officer to authorise any such changes, following consultation with relevant ward members.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983 states the authority must designate the polling places for the polling districts in its area. Each polling district must have a polling place and it is the duty of the Council to designate polling places and keep them under review. The Council is required, so far as is reasonable and practicable to designate polling places which are accessible to disabled electors.




The recommendations contained in this report are the consequence of the latest review.

The recommendations take into account:-

- a) The commitment made at the last review of polling stations in 2021 to seek to further reduce the number of
  - i) schools and;
  - ii) temporary huts, used as polling stations.
- b) The desire to improve voter accessibility to polling stations,
- c) The need to identify an alternative location where an existing polling station is no longer available to use.
- d) Recognition of the on-going need for flexibility in determining the sites of polling stations, particularly given the uncertainties and challenges that events, such as the impact of Covid-19, puts on the planning of elections.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<b>Strong resilient communities</b>
	<p>The recommendations detailed in this report enable voters to engage in the democratic process by being able to vote, in person, at an appropriate polling station, on the day of an election.</p>
	<p>Electors will continue to have the right to apply to vote by post or by proxy, should they wish to do so.</p>

### 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Paragraph 25 of Schedule 1 to the RPA 1983 states that the Returning Officer must provide a sufficient number of polling stations, shall allocate electors to those polling stations, and those polling stations shall be in the polling place for that district.



- 4.2 The appendix to this report details proposals to relocate a number of polling places to other venues in the respective ward. In total, five wards are affected by these proposals, 19 wards are unaffected.
- 4.3 The RPA 1983 also requires local authorities to, periodically, conduct and complete a review of polling districts and polling places. The next compulsory review of all polling places must be completed between October 2023 and January 2025.

## 5 Alternative Options

In making the recommendations outlined in this report, officers have, wherever possible, considered a number of alternative sites in each of the affected polling districts and concluded that, for reasons based on availability, location, size and ease of access and cost, the locations detailed in the appendix are the most suitable in each case.

## 6 Consultation

Proposals for each of the wards affected by this report have been shared with relevant councillors. Their comments have led directly to the specific recommendations contained in the appendix.

## 7 Implications

<p><b>Resources:</b></p>	<p>Costs associated with making the proposed changes to polling places/stations will be met by the Returning Officer's budget.</p> <p>If all of the recommended changes to polling places/stations detailed in this report are approved, it is anticipated that a saving will be achieved as compared with the costs incurred for conducting the poll at the most recent borough-wide elections.</p> <p>These savings will be achieved primarily because of the proposed reduction in the number of temporary huts being used. Each temporary hut costs approximately £1,300 to hire.</p>
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	The saving excludes the “one-off” cost of notifying all households in the affected districts of a change of station.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	Please see Section 4 above
<b>Risk:</b>	<p>As a result of the recommendations contained in this report, by enabling a school to remain open, the risk to pupils’ education will be reduced.</p> <p>As was the situation in elections since 2021, the new, proposed venues will be managed and made as safe and Covid-secure as possible.</p> <p>To minimise risk of electors going to the incorrect (i.e. “old”) Polling Station, mitigations will be put in place. These are:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each household affected will receive a letter explaining the change and the details of their “new” polling station</li> <li>• Poll cards will specify details of the elector’s new polling station and highlight that there has been a change to the location.</li> <li>• The council’s website will be updated to reflect the changes.</li> <li>• Details of changes will be included in an article in the Spring 2023 edition of the Sandwell Herald.</li> </ul>
<b>Equality:</b>	<p>Details of the proposed recommendations have been shared, through Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations, with disability groups in the Borough.</p> <p>No objections to the recommendations have been received to date, but if any comments are received after this report has been produced, these observations will be shared verbally with Committee members.</p>



	An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	The recommendations contained within this report enable voters, to be able to vote, at a polling station, in person in the forthcoming elections, should they wish to do so.
<b>Social Value:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Climate Change:</b>	The recommendations detailed in this report continue to ensure that, as far as is possible, polling stations are located in the district they serve, and thus avoid the need for electors to travel excessive distances.  Voters not wishing to visit a polling station may apply for a postal or proxy vote.

## 8. Appendices

Proposed changes to polling places and polling stations 2022/23.

## 9. Background Papers

- 9.1. Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations – published by the Electoral Commission.
- 9.2. Do I need to undertake a Polling District review to change polling places for local elections in 2021? – published by the Association of Electoral Administrators
- 9.3. Letter from the Department for Education and the Cabinet office dated 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021 entitled “Use of school buildings for polls.”

