

VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2019

COMMENTS FROM THE ACTING RETURNING OFFICER

This sets out the Acting Returning Officer's (ARO) submission to the above review.

The ARO is responsible for the conduct of the elections for two Parliamentary Constituencies which cover parts of Vale of White Horse District Council – namely Oxford West and Abingdon and Wantage. The boundaries of those constituencies extend to also cover part of Oxford City and Cherwell (for Oxford West and Abingdon) and South Oxfordshire (for Wantage).

The following comments concentrate solely on the polling districts and polling places which are located within Vale of White Horse District Council.

The council undertook an interim review in 2018 in preparation for the district and parish council elections in May 2019. There have been very few adverse comments from voters, political parties or polling station staff about the polling places used. Consequently, I am content with the current designations, which on the whole have been in place for the District, County, Police and Crime Commissioner, Parliamentary and European elections in the past four years. In general terms, all the buildings used as polling stations are considered to be fit for purpose, accessible to the majority of the electorate which the venue serves, and accessible for those with a disability.

Because of recent community governance reviews the council has adjusted some parish boundaries and proposed, and received consent, to make related alterations to district ward and county division boundaries. These changes have resulted to changes to some polling districts at parish level to reflect the changes.

The table available on the [council's website](#) sets out the name of each polling district and the polling place used. It also shows where a polling place is outside a polling district. As stated, I am content with the current arrangements but do have a few observations set out below:

- Where possible I suggest that the council should identify an alternative polling place for that designated in case it is not available for a particular election.
- Attempts are made not to use schools for polling places as, understandably, head teachers and parents do not welcome either the disruption of closing the whole school for a day or the security issues if a room is used as a polling place and the remainder of the school remains open. The council designated Stockham Primary School as a polling place for polling districts SSB1 and SSB2 due to renovation works to the previous polling place at St Mary's Convent. I would urge the council to seek an alternative venue to avoid the use of Stockham Primary School. The council currently designates St Blaise CE Primary School as a polling place for polling district SJD. I would ask that

the council reviews the implications of this on the school and, if necessary, seek an alternative venue.

- I suggest no polling place is shared by two district wards, unless special circumstances apply, such as the lack of a suitable building for polling stations in the adjoining areas, to avoid potential confusion for voters. Where this is not avoidable or is considered to offer geographical convenience to voters, the use of separate rooms or a physical boundary should be considered.

I will continue to monitor developments in respect of the major residential developments in the Vale and make recommendations to change polling districts and polling places as required.

I reserve the right to make further comments after the close of the public consultation period.

Margaret Reed

Acting Returning Officer for the Oxford West and Abingdon and Wantage
Parliamentary Constituencies

6 August 2019