

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: Constitutional and Nomination Committee – 12 March 2021

Subject: Proposed Redesignation of Polling Places for 6 May 2021 Elections

Report of: The Chief Executive

Summary

To propose changes to the current scheme of polling places for the following wards: Crumpsall (1CRG), Harpurhey (1HAG), Clayton & Openshaw (polling district 2COF), Piccadilly (polling districts 2PYB, 2PYC/2PYE), Whalley Range (polling district 3WRD), Baguley (polling districts 5BAB and 5BAF), Brooklands/Northenden (polling districts 5BKF/5NOA), Sharston (5SHB) and Woodhouse Park (polling district 5WPA).

Recommendations

1. To approve the proposed changes to the current scheme as set out in Sections 4 to 8.
2. To recommend that the changes to the polling places are adopted in relation to both parliamentary and local government elections.
3. To note that an update on the current position regarding outstanding re-designations for polling places referred to in this report, but not resolved at time of publication, will be brought to the meeting for the Committee's consideration.
4. To recommend that any emerging polling place re-designations required ahead of 6 May 2021 elections, which cannot be reported to the Committee on 12 March 2021, are agreed using the delegated authority of the Chief Executive, which allows her to make, where necessary, alterations to the designation of any polling place prior to the next full review in consultation with ward councillors, group leaders and the Chair of Constitutional and Nomination Committee.

Wards Affected:

Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Clayton & Openshaw, Piccadilly, Whalley Range, Baguley, Brooklands, Northenden, Sharston and Woodhouse Park.

Alignment to the Our Manchester Strategy Outcomes (if applicable)

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The Our Manchester Strategy sets out the vision for the city to 2025. Local elections provide the opportunity for eligible Manchester residents to elect Councillors to represent them and therefore to influence how the strategy is delivered. The Council's scheme of polling districts and polling places is a key part of the city's governance arrangements. Changes of the scheme are required to enable electors to participate in 6 May 2021 Local and Greater Manchester Combined Authority Mayoral Elections.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

It is anticipated that the costs of the proposed changes to polling place arrangements will be neutral, given the costs of the new polling place designations will not be greater than the costs of existing arrangements.

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

Appendices:

None

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The current scheme of polling districts and polling places was agreed by Council on 27 November 2019, following the conclusion of a statutory review of polling districts and polling places. This scheme came into effect when the electoral register was re-published on 1 February 2020 (its implementation delayed from 1 December 2019 by the Parliamentary General Election of 12 December 2019). However, the Local and Greater Manchester Combined Authority Mayoral Elections, scheduled to take place on 7 May 2020, which would have then used this scheme, were postponed until 6 May 2021, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.
- 1.2 As part of preparations for the elections now taking place on 6 May 2021, work has been undertaken by officers to ensure that polling places are available for use. However, the wider circumstances relating to the ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic and national restrictions currently in place, mean that a number of premises currently designated as polling places are unavailable for use at this time.
- 1.3 In a wider sense, preparations for the use of all polling places for these elections is complicated by the requirement to undertake extensive risk assessments for all premises as well plan for and deploy Covid related safety arrangements in every polling station across the city.

2. The designation of polling districts, polling places and polling stations

- 2.1 The designation of the city's polling districts and polling places within them is the responsibility of the Council and the relevant functions are delegated to the Constitutional and Nomination Committee in the Scheme of Delegation. This includes the Council's duties under the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide constituencies into polling districts and the power to divide wards into polling districts at local elections. The Electoral Commission advises that polling districts for UK parliamentary and local government elections should always be the same. It therefore follows that any review of parliamentary polling arrangements should be conducted simultaneously with one of local government arrangements.
- 2.2 On occasion, it may be necessary to change the designation of a polling place outside the statutory review process or meeting of the Constitutional and Nomination Committee. This usually occurs as a result of premises being closed or unexpectedly becoming unavailable, often at short notice, or if an unscheduled poll takes place. Authority is delegated to the Chief Executive to make, where necessary, alterations to the designation of any polling place in such circumstances, in consultation with group leaders, ward Councillors and the Chair of Constitutional and Nomination Committee, as agreed by Council at its 27 November 2019 meeting.
- 2.3 The allocation of polling stations within polling places is not a Council function and is the responsibility of the Returning Officer.

3. Context and Polling Place visits

- 3.1 Officers have undertaken work to identify alternatives for those polling places unavailable, including identifying and assessing alternatives which may exist. However, given the current circumstances, there are not extensive alternative options available, as well as limitations on the number of polling places which can be identified and risk assessed within the timeframe available.
- 3.2 When assessing the suitability of polling places an assessment of the following issues has been taken into account:
- the proximity of the polling place to populated areas and relevant electors
 - accessibility
 - signage
 - the management and configuration of the polling station, taking into account Covid safety requirements
 - the capacity of polling places to accommodate more than one polling station if necessary, taking into account Covid safety requirements
 - the number of electors within the district
- 3.3 The Committee is asked to consider the following proposals for the polling place re-designations as set out in sections 4 to 8 below.

4. Blackley and Broughton Constituency

- 4.1 Changes are required for two polling places (in 1CRG and 1HAG polling districts) in the Crumpsall and Harpurhey wards, within the Blackley and Broughton Constituency.

4.1.1 Crumpsall Ward – 1CRG

It is proposed that voters in 1CRG vote at Cravenwood Academy, which is the existing polling place for neighbouring 1CRF. There is space to accommodate these polling stations within this polling place.

The designated polling place for 1CRG, GMT Whitehouse Club has now closed and potential replacements are currently not open due to the current national restrictions in place. These will be further investigated in the future.

4.1.2 Harpurhey Ward – 1HAG

A suitable alternative for Manchester Youth Zone, the designated polling place in 1HAG is in the process of being arranged and an update will be brought to the Committee meeting.

Manchester Youth Zone is currently only open on a restricted basis and plans for its full re-opening cannot be confirmed at the moment, given they relate to future stages of restrictions relaxation. It is anticipated that Manchester Youth Zone can be re-designated as the polling place for 1HAG in the future.

5. Manchester Central Constituency

- 5.1 Changes are required for three polling places (in 2COF, 2PYB and 2PYC/2PYE polling districts) in Clayton & Openshaw and Piccadilly wards, within the Manchester Central Constituency.

5.1.1 Clayton & Openshaw Ward – 2COF

It is proposed that voters in 2COF vote at Seymour Road Academy, which is the existing polling place for neighbouring 2COG. There is space to accommodate these polling stations within this polling place.

The designated polling place for 2COF, Clayton Methodist Hall is currently undertaking building work and as such is unavailable for this year's polls. It is anticipated that it can be re-designated as the polling place for 2COF once this work has been completed.

5.1.2 Piccadilly – 2PYB

It is proposed that voters in 2PYB vote at Central Library, which is the existing polling place for neighbouring 2DGC. There is space to accommodate these polling stations within this polling place.

The designated polling place for 2PYB, Manchester College, Shena Simon Campus does currently not have the space to accommodate a polling place because this is being used as a covid testing site for staff and students at the college. There are no other rooms on the site available which would meet both safeguarding and covid requirements. It is anticipated this can be re-designated as the polling place for 2PYB in the future.

5.1.3 Piccadilly – 2PYC/2PYE

It is proposed that voters in 2PYC/2PYE vote at Central Hall, which is the existing polling place for 2PYA and 2PYD. There is space to accommodate these polling stations within this polling place.

The designated polling place for 2PYC/2PYE, AC by Marriott Hotel Manchester City Centre is currently not operating due to national restrictions. It is anticipated that this can be re-designated as the polling place for 2PYC/2PYE in the future.

6. Manchester Gorton Constituency

- 6.1 Changes are proposed for one polling place (in 3WRD polling district) in Whalley Range ward, within the Manchester Gorton Constituency.

6.1.1 Whalley Range – 3WRD

It is proposed that voters in 3WRD vote at St Margaret's C of E Primary School which the existing polling place for neighbouring 3WRB. There is space to accommodate these polling stations within this polling place. The designated polling place for 3WRD, English Martyr's Parish Centre has been permanently closed. It has not been possible to identify a suitable alternative in the area at the current time, with some possible alternatives currently closed. These will be further investigated in the future.

7. **Manchester Withington Constituency**

- 7.1 No changes are currently proposed for any polling places in Manchester Withington Constituency.

8. **Wythenshawe and Sale East Constituency**

- 8.1 Changes are required for five polling places (in 5BAB, 5BAF, 5BKF/5NOA, 5SHB, 5WPA) in Baguley, Northenden (also serving Brooklands), Sharston and Woodhouse Park wards within the Wythenshawe and Sale East Constituency.

8.1.1 Baguley – 5BAF

It is proposed that voters in 5BAF vote at Newell Green Primary School which is the existing polling place for neighbouring 5BAE. There is space to accommodate these polling stations within this polling place.

The designated polling place for 5BAF, Word of Life Community Church is now owned by the Church of England but is currently vacant and requires extensive repairs to its roof. It is anticipated that this can be re-designated as the polling place for 5BAF in the future.

8.1.2 Baguley – 5BAB

A suitable alternative for Sacred Heart Primary School, the designated polling place for 5BAB is in the process of being identified and an update will be brought to the Committee meeting.

It has not been possible to secure the use of Sacred Heart Primary School for these elections, as it's use as a polling place has proved incompatible with on-site safeguarding and covid safety requirements.

8.1.3 Northenden – 5NOA / Brooklands - 5BKE

Suitable alternatives for Rackhouse Primary School, the designated polling place for both 5NOA and 5BKE are in the process of being identified and an update will be brought to the Committee meeting. Solutions are focusing on identifying a polling place for 5NOA and a polling place for 5BKE.

8.1.4 Sharston – 5SHB

It is proposed that voters in 5SHB vote at Brownley Green Baptist Church which is the existing polling place for neighbouring 5SHG. There is space to accommodate these polling stations within this polling place.

The designated polling place for 5SHB, Wythenshawe Campus Manchester College does not currently not have the space to accommodate a polling place because it is a covid testing site for staff and students at the college. There are no other rooms on the site available which would meet the both safeguarding and covid requirements. It is anticipated this can be re-designated as the polling place for 5SHB in the future.

8.1.5 Woodhouse Park – 5WPA

It is proposed that voters in 5WPA vote at St Mark's which is the existing polling place for neighbouring 5WPC. There is space to accommodate these polling stations within this polling place.

The designated polling place for 5WPA, Woodhouse Park Lifestyle Centre is currently a covid vaccination centre and cannot therefore be used. It is anticipated this can be re-designated as the polling place for 5WPA in the future.

9. Polling districts where polling places are still to be confirmed.

9.1 An update will be brought to the Committee meeting for those polling places included in the report, where alternatives are in the process of being identified and agreed.

9.2 It should also be noted that a series of visits to polling places, including a number of schools, to assess their suitability and usability given wider covid related considerations are taking place before the 12 March 2021 meeting. For this reason and given the dynamic nature of the situation, an update of the latest position will be brought to the Committee meeting in relation to these polling places if any of them need to be re-designated.

9.3 Timescales for the confirmation of arrangements are limited because of the need to provide confirmed polling station details for the production of poll cards on 15 March 2021.

10. Communication to electors

10.1 Polling station details are on poll cards which will be sent out to electors during the first week of April 2021. This will note where it is a change of polling station. A postcard raising awareness of the election is about to arrive on electors' doorsteps. This brings to their attention the importance of checking their polling station details for these elections on their poll card or using the polling station finder on the Council's website. In addition, on polling day, signs directing electors to their new polling place will be attached to the previously used premises, where this is possible. This approach has been successfully used for a number of years.

11. Recommendations

11.1 Recommendations to the Committee appear at the front of this report.