



Electoral Matters Committee

Tue 15 Feb
2022
5.00 pm

Council Chamber,
Redditch Town Hall

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

*making
a
difference*

www.redditchbc.gov.uk

**If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
Jess Bayley-Hill**

**Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH
Tel: (01527) 64252 (Ext. 3072)
e.mail: jess.bayley-hill@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk**

GUIDANCE ON FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic Redditch Borough Council will be applying social distancing arrangements for holding face-to-face meetings.

Please note that this is a public meeting and is open to the public to attend.

If you have any questions regarding the agenda or attached papers, please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.

GUIDANCE FOR ELECTED MEMBERS ATTENDING MEETINGS IN PERSON

In advance of the Committee meeting, Members are strongly encouraged to take a lateral flow test on the day of the meeting, which can be obtained from the NHS website. Should the test be positive for Covid-19 then the Member must not attend the Committee meeting, should provide their apologies to the Democratic Services team and must self-isolate in accordance with national rules.

Members and officers must wear face masks during the committee meeting, unless exempt. Face masks should only be removed temporarily if the Councillor or officer is speaking or if s/he requires a sip of water and should be reapplied as soon as possible. As Councillors may remove their masks from time to time during the meeting, seating will be placed two metres apart, in line with social distancing measures to protect meeting participants.

Hand sanitiser will be provided for Members to use throughout the meeting.

The meeting venue will be fully ventilated and Members and officers may need to consider wearing appropriate clothing in order to remain comfortable during proceedings.

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE

Members of the public are able to access the meeting in person if they wish to do so. However, due to social distancing requirements to ensure the safety of participants during the Covid-19 pandemic, there will be limited capacity and members of the public will be allowed access on a first come, first served basis. Members of the public in attendance are strongly encouraged to wear face masks, to use the hand sanitiser that will be provided and will be required to sit in a socially distanced manner at the meetings. It should be noted that members of the public who choose to attend in person do so at their own risk.

In line with Government guidelines, any member of the public who has received a positive result in a Covid-19 test on the day of a meeting must not attend in person and must self-isolate in accordance with the national rules.

Notes:

Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when Council might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded.



Electoral Matters

Tuesday, 15th February, 2022

5.00 pm

Council Chamber Town Hall

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs:

Matthew Dormer
(Chair)
Gemma Monaco
(Vice-Chair)
Aled Evans

Andrew Fry
Mike Rouse

1. Apologies for absence and named substitutes

2. Declarations of Interest

To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting (Pages 1 - 6)

4. Polling Place changes for May 2022 (Pages 7 - 16)



Electoral Matters Committee

Monday, 18th October, 2021

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Gemma Monaco (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Aled Evans, Andrew Fry and Mike Rouse

Officers:

Melissa Bassett, Kevin Dicks, Sue Hanley and Darren Whitney

Senior Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 22nd October 2019 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND PRELIMINARY STAGE BOUNDARY REVIEW FOR REDDITCH - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

The Electoral Services Manager introduced a report on the subject of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Preliminary Stage Boundary Review for Redditch. Members were advised that at this stage the focus was on the size of the Council, or the total number of Councillors that there should be at Redditch Borough Council moving forward. The Boundary Commission for England was paying for the review, so this process would be completed at no financial cost to the Council. The subsequent stage of the process would focus on the location of the wards in the

Chair

Electoral Matters Committee

Monday, 18th October, 2021

Borough and what these should be called. The Electoral Matters Committee would again be consulted as part of that process.

The Senior Electoral Services Officer subsequently presented the report in detail and in doing so highlighted the following matters for Members' consideration:

- In preparing the Council's submission, Officers had reviewed the governance arrangements in place at the Council and the existing number of Councillors and it was noted that there had been no changes made to these since 2002.
- During the review process, Members had been invited to complete a survey and the responses provided had helped to inform the content of the submission. In total, 18 Councillors had completed this survey.
- In the feedback provided in the completed copies of this survey, Members had reported that technology was increasingly important as a tool for liaising with local residents and for resolving case work.
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Council working practices, including Committee meeting arrangements, had been taken into account. It had also been highlighted within the submission that the Council's strategic purposes were in the process of being reviewed due to the impact of the pandemic.
- There was an average electoral ratio of 2,199 electors per Councillor. However, three wards varied by more than 10% from this ratio: Abbey, Church Hill and Lodge Park. West ward was also close to this point. The Boundary Commission was clear that there should not be a variance over 10% and preferred variances to be less than 5%
- Comparative data for other Councils in Worcestershire, in respect of the electoral ratio and numbers of Councillors, had been considered. Members were asked to note that the Council had the smallest number of Councillors in Worcestershire, though both Malvern Hills District Council and Wychavon District Council were in the process of undertaking a boundary review.
- Similarly, Redditch Borough Council had a lower number of Councillors compared to the authority's nearest neighbours by population and other demographic data rather than geographic location.
- Statistical information provided by Worcestershire County Council had been analysed during the review and, based on the data provided, no overall growth in the voting population in Redditch was anticipated.

Electoral Matters Committee

Monday, 18th October, 2021

- Some anticipated changes in population by ward had been identified, based on information that had been provided by the Planning Department in respect of large planning applications.
- The statistical information provided revealed that the number of young people living in the Borough was similar to the national average, though higher than the Worcestershire average.
- The proportion of residents in the Borough from black and minority ethnic communities (BAME) was also higher than the county average.
- Redditch was ranked 107 out of 317 local authority areas in England in terms of deprivation levels and weekly pay was lower than the national average.
- The Council was keen to continue to have a system of elections by thirds. The Boundary Commission had suggested that in order to continue with this system the Council should consider the introduction of three-Member wards for all wards in the Borough.
- The requirement for three-Member wards meant that the overall number of Councillors, or size of the authority, needed to be divisible by three. Two options, both divisible by three, had therefore been identified for the overall number of Councillors: 27 or 30.
- In terms of the option to have 27 Councillors, it was anticipated that there would be a sufficient number of Councillors to participate in Committee business. The Council would also secure a small financial saving from a reduction in the overall number of Councillors, as all Members were entitled to receive the basic allowance, currently set at £4,437 per annum.
- Should there be 27 Councillors in total at the Council, this would mean that the Borough would have nine wards.
- The option of 30 Councillors, by contrast, would result in an increase in expenditure on Members' allowances, due to the introduction of an additional Councillor. Furthermore, there was a risk that if there were an even number of Councillors there might be challenges at a political level in terms of the appointment of an administration to run the Council.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The population growth figures provided by Worcestershire County Council in respect of the Borough. Members expressed some surprise that no population growth was anticipated.

Electoral Matters Committee

Monday, 18th October, 2021

- The extent to which planning applications for particular wards had been taken into account, with Members noting that large planning applications were anticipated for Church Hill and West wards which did not appear to be reflected in the figures. Officers explained that the Boundary Commission's criteria in respect of the planning applications that could be taken into account as part of this process were quite strict, though officers undertook to check the figures before the report was considered at a meeting of Council.
- The number of Councillors who had responded to the Member survey. The Chair expressed some disappointment that only 18 out of 29 Councillors had responded to this survey and Members requested that the survey be circulated again prior to the Council meeting.
- The typographical error in the report which referred to Worcestershire County Council as Worcestershire City Council. Members commented that Worcestershire County Council provided services to the whole of the county not just Worcester.
- The impact that Covid-19 had had on Councillors' work and the uncertainty that Members had about what the new normal would look like for Councillors' work once the pandemic ended.
- The next stage of the process, whereby wards would be reviewed and the possible changes that might be made. Officers suggested that Members needed to remain open minded and to consider the proposals that were brought forward on their own merits rather than through reference back to the existing wards.
- The potential for local districts to be kept in the same wards when wards were reviewed.
- The support that Councillors could provide to each other should all wards be represented by three Councillors.
- The need to attract candidates from a range of backgrounds, including people with work commitments and young families, to serve as elected Members. It was suggested that three-Member wards would potentially help to attract candidates as they would be able to share the workload with their colleagues.
- The software that would be used in the next stage to identify the location of the wards. Officers explained that this software was in the process of being installed.

The Committee concluded by discussing the total number of Councillors that would ideally serve on the Council in future. Members agreed that three-Member wards would be preferable. It was noted that the Council had always had 29 Councillors and

Electoral Matters Committee

Monday, 18th October, 2021

either 27 or 30 Councillors was a similar figure to this. However, there was general consensus that an odd number of Councillors would be preferable in order to provide some certainty in terms of identifying the majority political group at any one time. Concerns were also raised about the difficult position of the Mayor, and choice of who should serve as Mayor, should there be an even number of Councillors with an equal number representing opposing political groups. For these reasons, the Committee agreed to recommend that there should be a total of 27 Councillors.

RECOMMENDED that

subject to the amendments detailed in the preamble above, Council put forward the Council Size Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, including a proposal for there to be a total of 27 Councillors at Redditch Borough Council.

The Meeting commenced at 2.06 pm
and closed at 2.43 pm

This page is intentionally left blank

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE
2022**

15 February

Polling Place Changes for May 2022

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor M Rouse Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Report Author	Job Title: Darren Whitney Contact email: darren.whitney@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 881650
Wards Affected	Winyates Ward
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	Yes
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	N/A
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 the Committee makes either “The Space” Unit or the old Winyates locality Office the polling place for WIA for May 2022;

1.2 the Committee makes “The Link” Office the polling place for WIB for May 2022;

1.3 voters attending the station on 5 May be asked their preference for future polling.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The report sets out alternatives for two polling places, both Schools, that have requested that a different polling place is used for future elections commencing in May 2022.

2.2 A review should follow the stages produced in the Electoral Commission guidance however due to time scales there is not time to complete all of the stages.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are some minor financial implications for the Council which arise from this report but will be contained within existing budgets.

**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE
2022**15 February

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 a) Authority to set Polling District boundaries and to designate polling places rests with the Council (Statutory elements of the Council's Constitution under the Local Government Act 2000). Redditch Borough Council has delegated full relevant powers to this Electoral Matters Committee.

b) Decisions about the situation of Polling Stations within designated Polling Places are for the (Acting) Returning Officer. Arrangements must comply with relevant provisions of the Representation of the People Acts and Regulations and the Equality Act 2010.

- 4.2 "Relevant authorities" (such as Redditch Borough Council) must

"a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances"; and

"b) seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled and, when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons. If it is necessary to use a place where the access is not ideal, then every reasonable adjustment must be undertaken to provide access for all electors."

5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

- 5.1 None as this report deals with statutory functions.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.2 It is preferable that choice of Polling Station location can help minimise unnecessary additional journeys by motorised vehicles.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 Accessibility for members of minority or disadvantaged groups is a key issue in the selection of suitable Polling Stations.

**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE
2022**15 February

Operational Implications

- 6.2 Several sites were suggested to review by officers and staff from the current polling places. These sites being “The Link” Office, “The Space” Unit and the old Winyates Locality Office all of which are situated at the Winyates Centre; in addition the Arrow Valley Visitor Centre had also been suggested.

- 6.3 Officers visited the above sites on 18 January and made the following observations:

“The Link” Office could be used for a polling place with a single polling station.

“The Space” Unit would make a good polling place which could comfortably accommodate two polling stations. There is a very specific risk, see 7.4 below, associated with “The Space” Unit which could affect a decision regarding it’s use as a polling place.

The old Winyates Locality Office access is inferior to the “The Space” Unit and the entrance is quite small but would still be able to accommodate two polling stations. It was noted that there is also a first floor room that could be used as a polling station, however there would be access issues in using this as a polling station.

The Arrow Valley Visitor Centre as a suggested venue was dismissed as a potential polling place as it is a long way from the residential areas of the polling district (see Appendix 2) and would be difficult to get to without a vehicle. On foot after dark would be especially challenging.

- 6.4 For Polling District WIA (Appendix 1) it is suggested “The Space” Unit be used providing the risk in 7.4 could be overcome. Otherwise the old Winyates Locality Office could be used for the polling place incorporating the two polling stations.
- 6.5 For Polling District WIB (Appendix 2) a change from Arrow Valley School to “The Link” Office would work as a polling place. It is just outside of the polling district but is near the residential area and well used by residents of WIB.
- 6.6 For both polling districts if a change is made it is suggested electors voting in person on 5 May be asked for their future preference of polling place by the Presiding Officer in the polling station.

**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE
2022**15 February

- 6.7 If a snap Westminster Parliamentary Election were to be called the polling places, due to increased turnout, would need to be reinstated at the two schools.
- 6.8 The (Acting) Returning Officer must make a submission regarding current and any proposed polling stations. She has raised her concerns in respect of the risk detailed in 7.4 and this must be resolved and remediated in advance of notification as a polling place. Whilst noting that the schools are exceptionally keen for an alternative location, change cannot be at the detriment of electors if the alternatives are not completely adequate and would strongly suggest that voter preference is the basis for polling places in these polling districts in future years.
- 6.9 The following comments were received from a Ward Member: "I don't have any issues with the proposed units at Winyates centre. I see more positives than negatives, especially if it helps schools to remain open. I hope we can find the source of the leak at the space centre and resolve it quickly. My only concern will be people going to the old polling stations as a matter of habit, so good comms and perhaps a bold notice on the polling cards to inform people before they set off from home."

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Normally any changes agreed must be likely to be sustainable for a reasonable number of years, as frequent changes of Polling Station are not helpful for electors and undermine their knowledge of, and confidence in, electoral systems. However as Redditch Borough Council is going through a ward boundary review a full polling places review will need to be held before the implementation of the results of the ward boundary review.
- 7.2 Choice of Polling Place / Polling Station should not give rise to significant grounds of complaint which might put election results at risk of challenge.
- 7.3 The (Acting) Returning Officer must provide adequate levels and standards of staffing to secure proper polling arrangements.
- 7.4 There is a specific risk at "The Space" Unit where a leak in the roof has caused some ceiling damage. Damage could be repaired in time for May 2022 elections although it is not certain if the source of the leak will be discovered by then.

**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE
2022**

15 February

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Polling District WIA

Appendix 2 – Polling District WIB

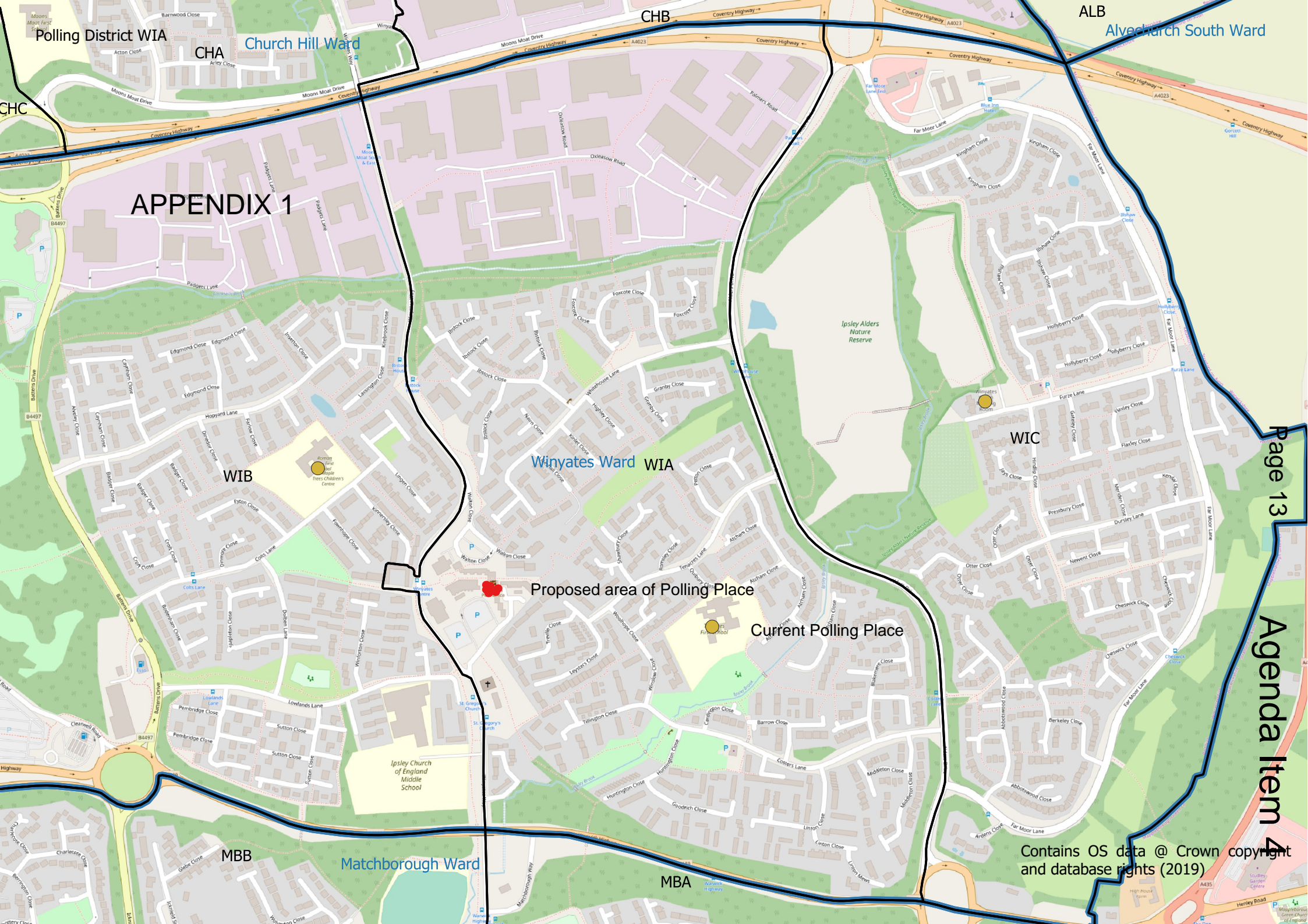
Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Electoral
Commission Guidance.

**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE
2022**

15 February

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder		
Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal Democratic & Property Services	02.02.2022
Financial Services		
Legal Services	Clare Flanagan, Principal Solicitor	02.02.2022



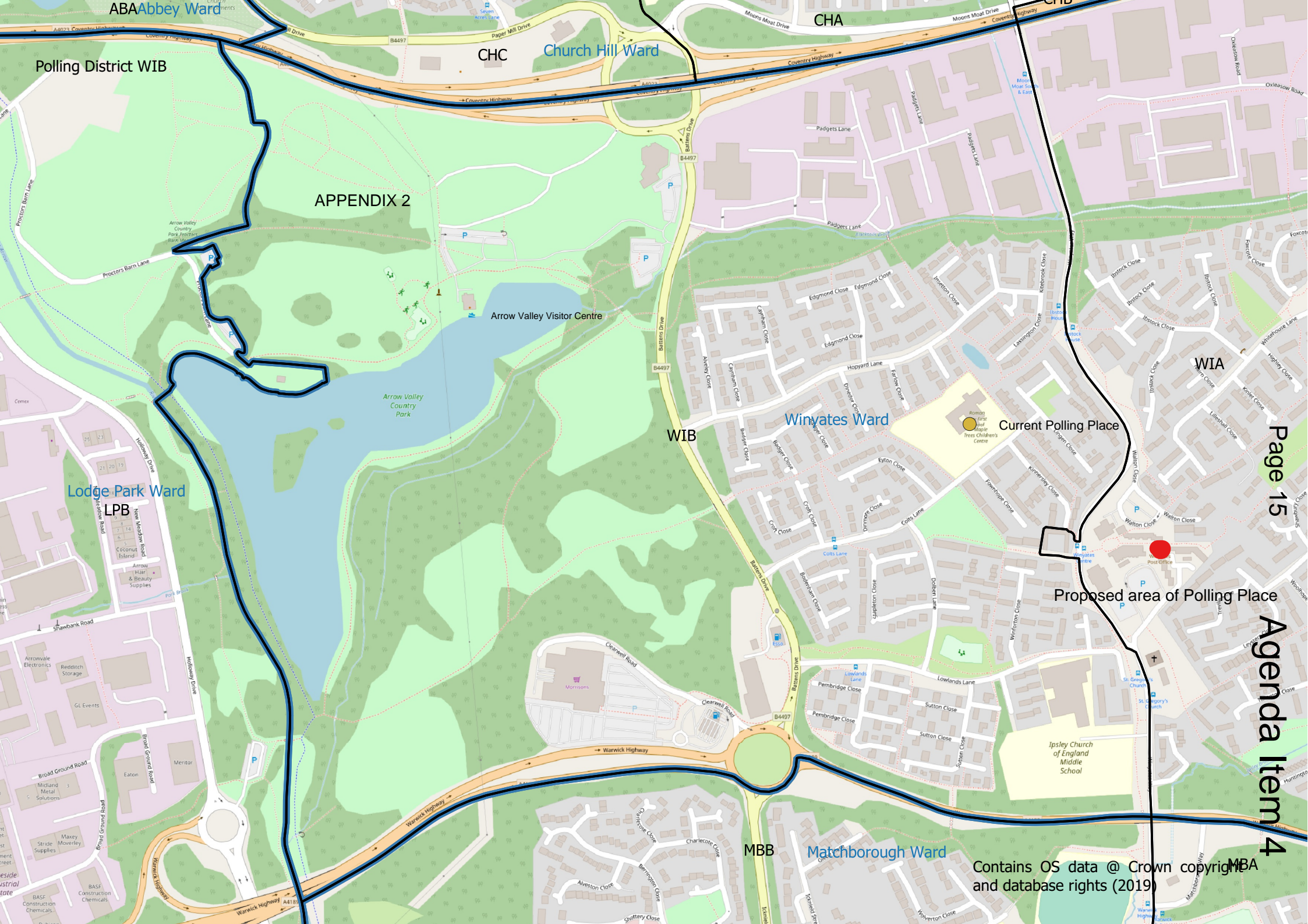
APPENDIX 1

Proposed area of Polling Place

Current Polling Place

Contains OS data @ Crown copyright and database rights (2019)

This page is intentionally left blank



APPENDIX 2

Arrow Valley Visitor Centre

Arrow Valley Country Park

Lodge Park Ward

LPB

Winyates Ward

Current Polling Place

Proposed area of Polling Place

Matchborough Ward

MBB

Contains OS data @ Crown copyright
and database rights (2019)

This page is intentionally left blank