

LR266
FOR DECISION
WARD(S): ALL

LICENSING AND REGULATION COMMITTEE – 11 December 2007

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2007

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR (GOVERNANCE) (AS ACTING RETURNING OFFICER) AND HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

LR245 – Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2007 (9 October 2007)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006) requires local authorities to review and agree all polling districts and polling places by 31 December 2007. Consultations were undertaken with all Members, County Councillors, Parish Councils and relevant political and community groups, including the national disability organisation SCOPE.

The Committee considered a report (LR245) at its last meeting on 9 October 2007, which set out the results of the consultations and recommended that no changes be made to any of the existing polling places (set out in Appendix A). Members accepted the recommendations, subject to monitoring the position regarding the future of the Tower Arts Centre, as that could provide an additional polling place for the St Luke Ward (see minute extract at Appendix B).

Since that meeting, a further round of consultations has taken place and a number of additional points have been raised and investigated, as discussed in this report.

On balance, it is considered that all the existing polling places should remain as proposed, acknowledging that, in a few cases, practical issues (mainly a lack of any alternative) mean that some premises do not fully meet the required standards. However, the position at all polling places will continue to be kept under review.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That, having considered the further representations received as part of the second round of consultation, the polling districts and polling places set out in Appendix A be approved and adopted.
2. That, with regard to the provision of a polling place in the northern part of St Luke Ward, the situation with regard to the availability of the Tower Arts Centre continue to be monitored, and the Returning Officer be asked to consider the creation of a polling district/place base upon these premises, should they become available.
3. That the following properties be transferred from the St Michael (YT) Polling District to the St Michael (YS) Polling District and therefore vote at the Guildhall, Winchester rather than King Harold Court, Christchurch Road, Winchester, and the appropriate Registers of Electors be amended accordingly:-

46 – 64 Canon Street (inc. St Swithun's Villas)

College Street (all residential properties)

1 -16 & 52 – 79 Kingsgate Street

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

1.1 Members are reminded that:-

- (a) the term 'polling district' describes the area created by sub-division of a ward (for the parished part of the City Council's area, these are all based on parish or parish ward boundaries).
- (b) the term 'polling place' is the building in which polling stations will be selected by the ARO, whilst the term 'polling station' can refer to either the building or the actual room used for polling within the building. For ease of reference, this report will use the term 'polling place' to mean both the building and the room, unless for reasons of clarity the latter needs to be specified.

2 Assessment of Polling Places

2.1 The Guidance contains the following key paragraphs:-

"Relevant authorities must seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

They must 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."

2.2 Appendix A lists each of the 80 polling places used for a Parliamentary election covering the Winchester District, together with details about existing and projected electorates. Each polling place is graded 1-3 in terms of its overall suitability (1 being the most satisfactory). In assessing the gradings, a predominantly practical and realistic approach has been taken to the buildings and facilities available. For the purposes of this review, the word 'disabled' has been used in the context of the practical issue of wheelchair access.

2.3 The gradings are defined as follows:-

- (a) Grade 1 – the polling place is conveniently located for the majority of electors, there is direct disabled access into the building/room used for polling, the room itself is suitable in terms of space, light etc and there are reasonable facilities for staff.
- (b) Grade 2 – the polling place is good in most respects, but one or two of the elements set out for Grade 1 are adequate, rather than good. Disabled access can be achieved, although not always with the same ease as Grade 1

polling places (e.g. disabled access may be through a side door which, in some cases, can be made the main entrance for polling day).

- (c) Grade 3 – the polling place is less than adequate in most respects and may well only be used because of a lack of alternatives. Disabled access is either very difficult or not possible without major alterations.

3 Consideration of Further Representations Received

- 3.1 **Councillor Beveridge** requested that consideration be given to residents of the Barracks and St James Lane being able to vote at the John Stripe Theatre, rather than the Guildhall as at present. In addition, he suggested that residents of part of Kingsgate Street, Canon Street and College Street be able to vote at the Guildhall, rather than King Harold Court in Christchurch Road.

- 3.2 In terms of convenience, the suggestion to move the Barracks and St James Lane residents to the John Stripe Theatre depends greatly on voters being happy to walk through West Hill Cemetery, as that is the most direct pedestrian route. The Cemetery gates are not locked until 10pm and, as most elections will take place in May, the evenings will be light. Even allowing for this, that route may not be attractive to all, especially if a General Election was called in October - and to change stations just for that election could cause confusion to voters and is best avoided whenever possible. Neither location presents a direct driving route for voters who prefer to use their car. Parking and manoeuvring space at the John Stripe is restricted, whereas parking around the Guildhall is also limited, although better in the evenings. On balance, the main concern would be the reluctance of voters to use the Cemetery route, especially on a dark evening, and therefore this suggestion is not supported.

- 3.3 For Canon Street, College Street and Kingsgate Street electors, there is a better pedestrian route through Cathedral Close, Colebrook Street and Abbey Passage to the Guildhall. The Cathedral does not lock the door on the path leading to Colebrook Street until 10pm. For those who prefer to drive, both the route and parking arrangements are far better with King Harold Court. As it appeared likely that there may be some support for this change, a postal survey was undertaken to gain the views of electors in the properties most likely to benefit from a change.

- 3.4 The result was that, of the 55 properties canvassed, 24 wanted to change and vote at the Guildhall and 5 wished to retain the status quo. The breakdown of voting is:

	Change	Remain
Canon Street (25 properties canvassed)	7	0
College Street (14 properties canvassed)	7	1
Kingsgate Street (16 properties canvassed)	10	4

No response - 26 properties.

- 3.5 Although this result does not give an absolute majority in terms of all properties, there is clear support for the change from those who responded.

- 3.6 **Councillor Verney** has commented that there are an excessive number of polling places serving the smaller communities in his Ward and they could be amalgamated to save money, with voters being directed to one central location. He suggests that the polling places at Kilmeston, Tichborne and Beauworth could be closed and all voters directed to vote at Cheriton Village Hall.

- 3.7 As explained in the previous report, it is voter convenience and not cost which is the main driver of this review exercise. Of course, trying to achieve value for money is still very important, but judging from informal conversations with parish clerks for example, it should not be underestimated how much a polling station in the village is valued by local people. Making electors travel significant distances may well provoke an adverse reaction disproportionate to the possible savings. The law requires that each parish has its own polling district and that the polling place should be within that polling district, unless it is not possible to find a suitable building. For all these reasons, it is not recommended that the suggestions in para 3.5 above be pursued.
- 3.8 **County Councillor Porter** raised the possibility of the Council using a more modern caravan or other mobile unit for Itchen Stoke; using The Cricketers public house instead of Easton Village Hall; and using the Tubbs Memorial Hall rather than St Mary's Hall at Kings Worthy. She also supported use of The Tower Arts Centre for St Luke Ward if possible or, if not, another building within the nearby Clarendon House complex.
- 3.9 Taking these comments in order, the problems with siting any kind of larger caravan or portakabin on the green at Itchen Stoke were explained in the last report. Delivery, positioning and removal would almost certainly damage the green if conditions were wet and so some reinstatement works would be required. It is also very difficult to achieve proper disabled access with anything other than a large portakabin. In addition, the Council does not have any mobile display units which it could use and, in any event, these would have similar problems with disabled access.
- 3.10 The manager at The Cricketers public house has been approached, but does not wish to offer his premises as a polling place, instead of Easton Village Hall.
- 3.11 Regarding the Tubbs Memorial Hall, this building was used once as a polling place in 1998. The facilities and disabled access are excellent, but it was not used again because of two traffic 'near misses' involving a child and an elderly person, which were blamed on the additional vehicle movements generated by voters. The Hall is accessed off Mountbatten Place, which is a fairly narrow road with local residents parking their cars all down one side, including opposite the turning into/out of the Hall car park. This makes maneuvering difficult, not least when there are cars arriving at and leaving the Hall at the same time, which would probably be the case with voters in the evening. It would be possible to lay out 'no waiting' cones for the duration of the poll along the relevant stretch of Mountbatten Way, but that would inconvenience local residents and may lead to complaints.
- 3.12 St Mary's Hall is about 100m away from the Tubbs Hall and, whilst the disabled access is not quite so good (but still adequate), the other facilities are satisfactory and there is ample parking, as it adjoins the large forecourt of the local shops. There have never been any complaints about using this Hall and it is recommended that it be retained, in view of the potential traffic hazards and inconvenience to local people which could arise from using the Tubbs Hall.
- 3.13 Regarding the Tower Arts Centre, the current situation is that a decision about the future of the building will be made by the County Council on 7 December 2007. The option of Kings School taking over the running of the building is still one of the possible outcomes and, if this proves to be the case, contact will be made with the School about possible future use of the Centre as a polling place.

- 3.14 Further along Monarch Way is the Clarendon House complex, which accommodates a number of County Council offices. The location of, and access to, these buildings does not make them an immediate choice as a polling place. In any event, the County Estates site manager considers that, for practical and security reasons, use of any of the buildings as a polling place is not appropriate and so this suggestion cannot be taken further.

4 What Happens Next?

- 4.1 It is for this Committee to determine all the above matters on behalf of the Council. The decisions will be published and the public will then have six weeks in which to make representations to the Electoral Commission. The Commission has the power to direct any Authority to accept a representation which it deems valid and the Council would need to republish the affected electoral register(s), if it resulted in a change of polling districts.
- 4.2 Although these comprehensive reviews must be undertaken every four years, an Authority can conduct a review at any time of one or more polling districts and/or polling places and make changes as appropriate. Therefore, should the need arise through, for example, a polling place no longer being available or major residential growth occurring quicker than anticipated, the Council would be able to respond without waiting until 2011. Such interim reviews will normally be carried out by the Returning Officer, who will undertake appropriate consultation with local Members, parish councils and political parties.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

An Efficient and Effective Council.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The 'average' cost of a polling place (premises hire plus staffing costs) is £595. However, cost is not the major consideration with this review and the emphasis must be placed upon providing reasonably accessible and convenient polling places for electors to vote in person. As stated earlier, the Regulations specifically require that polling places should be within the polling district, unless it is not possible to find a suitable building.

There is no statutory limit regarding either the minimum or maximum number of electors per polling place. In the City Council's area, the pattern of settlements mean that the smallest electorate for a polling place is 103 and the largest is 2,723, with the average being 1,060. Staffing levels are, of course, adjusted accordingly.

It is not possible to close a polling place and insist that all electors vote by post. It is also generally not desirable to have a combined polling place which serves two or more parishes, because it is likely to involve some electors travelling disproportionate distances to vote. Furthermore, any cost savings would be offset to some degree by the need to have additional polling staff in a combined polling place, to administer the different registers.

7 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Polling station assessment sheets 2004 -2007 completed by Presiding Officers.

Representations held on subject file.

8 APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Polling Places Assessment Grid.

Appendix B - Minute Extract (9/10/07)

Appendix A

Polling District Ref.	Ward and Polling Place	Electorate 2007	Projected Electorate 2011	Grade
	Bishops Waltham			
WE	Jubilee Hall, Little Shore Lane, Bishops Waltham	2723		1
WF	Common Room, Greens Close, Bishops Waltham	2501		2
		5224	5567	
	Boarhunt & Southwick			
WG	Boarhunt Parish Memorial Hall, Boarhunt	450		2
XW	Southwick & Widley D D Memorial Hall, Southwick	555		1
		1005	2361	
	Cheriton & Bishops Sutton			
WB	Beauworth Village Hall, Beauworth	85		2
WD	Bishops Sutton Village Hall Annex, Bishops Sutton	358		1
WH	Bramdean Village Hall, Wood Lane, Bramdean	393		2
WI	Cheriton Village Hall, The Green, Cheriton	532		2
XC	Kilmeston Village Hall, Kilmeston	208		1
XZ	The Tichborne Arms, Tichborne	129		2
		1705	1734	
	Colden Common & Twyford			
WK	The Pavilion, Recreation Ground, Colden Common	1168		2
WL	Colden Common Community Centre, St. Vigor Way	1816		1
YA	Twyford Parish Hall (Main Hall), Twyford	1182		1
		4166	4293	
	Compton & Otterbourne			
WX	Hursley Parish Hall, 50 Main Road, Hursley	663		2
XP	Otterbourne Village Hall, Cranbourne Drive,	1253		1
WM	Shawford Parish Hall, Pearson Road, Shawford	1252		1
		3168	3343	
	Denmead			
WR	War Memorial Hall, Denmead (Double Station)	3526		1
WS	Community Centre, School Lane, Denmead	1767		1
		5293	5687	
	Droxford, Soberton & Hambledon			
WT	Droxford Village Hall, The Square, Droxford	543		2
WV	Hambledon Village Hall (Ctte Room), Hambledon	788		2
XT	Soberton Village Hall, School Hill, Soberton	301		2
		1632	1675	
	Itchen Valley			
WJ	INTECH, Alresford Road	103		2
WY	Caravan Village Green, Itchen Stoke	175		3
WZ	Easton Village Hall, Chapel Lane, Easton	330		3
XA	Martyr Worthy Parish Hall, Martyr Worthy	208		2
XB	Itchen Abbas & Avington Village Hall, Itchen Abbas	547		1
XM	Swarraton & Northington Village Hall, Swarraton	200		2
		1563	1611	
	Kings Worthy			
XE	St Mary's Church Hall, Fraser Road, Kings Worthy	2056		2
XD	Jubilee Hall, London Road, Kings Worthy	1269		1
		3325	3623	

Polling District Ref	Ward and Polling Place	Electorate 2007	Projected Electorate 2011	Grade
Littleton & Harestock				
XF	March Hare Public House, Harestock	1934		2
XG	Millennium Memorial Hall, Littleton	837		1
		1934	2790	
Olivers Battery & Badger Farm				
WA	Badger Farm Community Centre, Badger Farm Road	1900		1
XO	St Mark's Church Hall, Oliver's Battery	1314		1
		3214	3224	
Owslebury & Curdridge				
WQ	Reading Rooms, Reading Room Lane, Curdridge	1104		2
WU	Durley Memorial Hall, Durley	757		2
XQ	Owslebury Parish Hall, Main Road, Owslebury	659		2
YB	Upham New Millennium Village Hall, Upham	517		1
		3037	3169	
Shedfield				
XR1	Shedfield Reading Rooms, Shirrell Heath	626		2
XR2	Methodist Church Hall, High Street, Shedfield	618		2
XS	Waltham Chase Village Hall, Waltham Chase	1857		2
		3101	3180	
Sparsholt				
WP	Crawley Village Hall, Main Road, Crawley	355		1
XX	Sparsholt Memorial Hall, Woodman Lane	792		1
WW	Jubilee Hall, London Road, Kings Worthy	392		1
		1539	1558	
St Barnabas				
YG	The Community Lounge, East Acre	1182		2
YH	St Barnabas Church Hall, Fromond Road	1895		1
YY	Wesley Methodist Church Hall, Fromond Road	1716		2
		4793	5693	
St Bartholomew				
YI	Common Room, Simonds Court	967		2
YJ, YK	Common Room, Hyde Gate	2643		2
YL	Holy Trinity Church Hall, Upper Brook Street	996		1
		4606	5184	
St John & All Saints				
YM	Common Room, Chester Court	1167		2
YN	Winnall Community Centre, Garbett Road	1546		1
YO	All Saints Church Hall, Petersfield Road	1880		2
		4593	4684	
St Luke				
YQ1	Common Room, The Valley, Stanmore	943		1
YQ2	St Luke's Church Centre, Mildmay Street	954		2
YR	Stanmore Community Centre, Somers Close	1389		1
YV	Common Room, Drummond Close, Stanmore	755		2
		4041	4891	

Polling District Ref.	Ward and Polling Place	Electorate 2007	Projected Electorate 2011	Grade
	St Michael			
YP	John Stripe Theatre, University of Winchester	1150		1
YS	Saxon Suite, Guildhall	1113		1
YT	Community Lounge, King Harold Court	838		1
YU	St Faith`s Parish Hall, Back Street, St Cross	1309		1
		4410	4782	
	St Paul			
YW	West Downs Centre, West Downs Student Village	2459		2
YX	St Paul`s Hall, St. Paul`s Hill	2020		2
		4479	4712	
	Swanmore & Newtown			
XU	The Rookesbury Hall, Church Road	1003		2
XY	Swanmore Village Hall, New Road, Swanmore	2331		1
		3334	3497	
	The Alresfords			
WC	Bighton Village Hall, Bighton	279		2
XK	Makins Court, Windsor Road	1532		1
XL	Alresford Community Centre, Alresford (Double Station)	2656		2
XN	Christy Memorial Hall, The Green	443		2
		4910	5073	
	Upper Meon Valley			
WN, WO	Meon Hall, Pound Lane	754		1
YD	West Meon Village Hall, Headon View, West Meon	614		2
YC	Warnford Village Hall, Lippen Lane, Warnford	172		2
		1540	1629	
	Whiteley			
YE	Meadowside Leisure Centre, Whiteley Village	2242	3159	1
	Wickham			
YF1	Community Centre, Wickham	1976		2
YF3	Knowle Village Hall, Greater Horseshoe Way, Knowle	852		2
YF2	Garsons Garden Centre, Fontley Road, Wickham	189		2
		3017	4219	
	Wonston & Micheldever			
XH	East Stratton Village Hall, East Stratton	275		3
XI	Community & Recreation Centre, Micheldever	203		2
XJ	Northbrook Hall, Duke Street, Micheldever	502		3
XV	South Wonston Village Hall, South Wonston	2105		1
YZ	Victoria Hall, Sutton Scotney	1102		1
		4187	4626	

APPENDIX B**LICENSING AND REGULATION COMMITTEE****9 October 2007****MINUTE EXTRACT****1. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2007**
(Report [LR245](#) refers)

The Corporate Director (Governance) explained that the above legislation required all local authorities to conduct a formal review of all polling districts and polling places by 31 December 2007, and to conduct further reviews at least every four years thereafter. He continued that, in the Winchester District, problems which had arisen in the past had been dealt with at the time, after consultation with relevant groups. Some of the changes made in recent years were outlined in the report.

Comments on the current review had been invited from relevant individuals and groups, including all Members, the seven County Councillors representing the District, parish councils and political parties. The Corporate Director (Governance) reported that particular concerns had been raised over the location of the polling places in St Luke Ward all being in the South of the Ward. Consequently, an additional polling place at the Tower Arts Centre had been investigated as it was situated at the northern end of the Ward. Unfortunately, due to the uncertainty of the future of the Centre (currently the only viable alternative for a polling place) it was agreed that the existing polling places should remain and that the situation be kept under review.

The report also identified certain polling places in the Itchen Valley and Wonston & Micheldever Wards which presented particular access difficulties. In the absence of any practical alternatives in each case, it was again agreed that they should be retained, pending any further comments in the second stage of the review process.

RESOLVED:

1. That, having considered the information and for the reasons explained in the report, the polling districts and polling places as set out in Appendix A to Report LR245 be approved for further consultation.

2. That, with regard to the provision of a polling place in the northern part of St Luke Ward, the situation with regard to the availability of the Tower Arts Centre continue to be monitored, having noted that any decision is very unlikely to be possible within the timescale of this review.