

LICENSING AND REGULATION COMMITTEE

10 November 2011

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2011

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

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

To comply with the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, every council in England and Wales must undertake a review of all of the polling districts and polling places in its area by 31 December 2011. The Council last undertook this exercise in October – December 2007 (Reports LR245 and LR266 refer).

Consultations have been undertaken with all Members, County Councillors, Parish Councils and relevant political and community groups. This report sets out the position at the conclusion of that consultation and notes that responses suggest general satisfaction with the polling districts and polling places used.

On balance, therefore, it is considered that all the existing polling places should remain as proposed, acknowledging that, in a few cases, practical issues (mainly arising from large-scale development) mean that some polling districts may require additional polling places. However, the position at all polling places will continue to be kept under review.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That, having considered the information and for the reasons explained in this report, the polling districts and polling places set out in Appendix A be approved and adopted.
- 2 That, with regard to the provision of additional polling place(s) in the Boarhunt & Southwick and Denmead Wards, the situation with regard to the development of West of Waterlooville continue to be monitored and, whilst no changes are recommended as part of this review, it be noted that proposals are likely to be put in place by the Acting Returning Officer before the May 2012 district elections.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

1.1 Members are reminded that:-

- (a) although the title of the Regulations refers to Parliamentary Elections, it is clearly good practice and more efficient to use this exercise to also review the District Election situation, as the criteria for polling districts/stations is the same. Therefore, assessments have been made on that wider basis.
- (b) the review is conducted with each district council assessing the polling districts/places which come within its administrative area, regardless of any overlapping Parliamentary constituency boundaries.
- (c) 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).
- (d) the term 'polling place' is the building in which polling stations will be selected by the Acting Returning Officer (ARO), whilst the term 'polling station' can refer to either the building or the actual room used for polling within the building.
- (e) with this review, the location of polling districts/places is the responsibility of the Council and the location of polling stations within the polling place is the responsibility of the ARO. This is a technical separation and, in the City Council's case, the person with overall responsibility for electoral services and the current ARO is the same individual (Stephen Whetnall). This 'twin hatted' role is a familiar situation for many district councils and does not affect the validity of the review. However, the ARO is expected to comment upon the Council's proposals in the consultation on the polling districts/places.

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. Convenient disabled access is either very difficult or not possible without major alterations.

2.4 In the parished areas in recent years, a number of the village halls which are used for polling places have been refurbished (some completely rebuilt) and so provide very good facilities. Permanent ramps have been constructed at some non-modernised halls, sometimes utilising a side door, because the steps and/or gradient at the front of the building cannot be changed at economic cost. The Council does provide temporary ramps, but as SCOPE point out, without proper assessment these ramps can be difficult to negotiate or even dangerous for wheelchair users. Therefore, only one is currently used - at Colden Common Pavilion.

- 2.5 In summary, there are only a very few buildings we use which fail to meet reasonable standards, but because they are the only publicly available premises which could sensibly serve the local electorate as a polling place, it is not proposed that they should be changed.
- 2.6 Public houses are sometimes suggested as alternatives and, whilst these are often well situated and can offer reasonable access, landlords generally do not welcome the disruption. Also, hire fees can be far more expensive than halls, because loss of trade is usually taken into the fee calculation. Three public houses are used as polling places in the District – the March Hare at Harestock, the Ship Inn at Bishops Sutton and the Tichborne Arms.
- 2.7 Another suggestion sometimes made is the use of portakabin type temporary buildings. These are rarely a practical alternative, because to achieve proper disabled access they need to be sizeable, which presents problems in finding a suitable location, plus the cost of hire is significant, as it will normally include a generator, chemical toilet and furniture (totalling over £1,000).
- 2.8 In the Winchester Town area, the standard of polling places is generally good and eight buildings owned by the City Council are used - seven are the community lounges of sheltered housing schemes and one is the Courtyard, Guildhall. Outside the Town, two Council sheltered housing schemes are used; one is Greens Close, Bishops Waltham and the other is Makins Court, Alresford, where the last refurbishment also resulted in excellent facilities for a polling place. The only other Council owned premises used for polling in the District is the Meadowside Leisure Centre.
- 2.9 The Council currently does not need to use schools for polling places. All attempts are made to maintain this situation as, understandably, Head Teachers and parents do not welcome either the disruption of closing the whole school for a day, or the security issues which arise if one building/classroom is used for polling and the remainder of the school remains open. Whilst the Council could requisition schools for polling purposes and would not have to pay a hire fee, it is required to meet the costs of the caretaker, together with any additional security provisions which would no doubt be insisted upon by the Head Teacher if the school remained open. This means that there are unlikely to be any major cost savings when compared to using a village hall for example.
- 2.10 At every election, Presiding Officers complete an assessment form which asks questions about the suitability of the premises as a polling place. Polling place Inspectors also visit each location during polling day and, inter alia, report back on premises suitability. This has helped to highlight situations where additional measures are required, from the simple provision of more direction signs to the installation of ramps, or even a change of station. There were a few minor comments from the last elections on 5 May 2011 and these have already been taken into account.

2.11 All Members, Parish Councils, County Councillors, political associations and relevant community groups were invited to comment on the suitability of the polling places we use. Responses received were as follows:-

- (a) Cllr Coates – feels that the timescales for the major development in West of Waterlooville, Whiteley and Winchester are unrealistic and will not be completed within the period envisaged by this review. Happy with polling arrangements for Soberton, but raised concerns which the local population have about the Parish Council area being warded.
- (b) County Cllr Allgood – suggested that thought be given to the electoral arrangements for the West of Waterlooville development area. Currently they are expected to travel to Denmead to vote, but suggested a new polling district be created with their own polling station.
- (c) Cllr Read – raised similar concerns to Cllr Allgood above regarding West of Waterlooville.
- (d) Denmead Parish Council – raised concerns that without a local facility on the new development, electors would not be able to travel to Denmead to vote. They request that electoral arrangements, such as portakabin, be put in place.
- (e) Cllr Love - happy with St Paul's Church Hall and West Downs Student Village as polling stations.
- (f) Cllr Hiscock – happy with polling arrangements for St Bartholomew Ward and no need to change.
- (g) Cllr Henry - happy with polling arrangements for Colden Common & Twyford Ward.
- (h) Durley Parish Council – happy with Durley Memorial Hall as a polling station.
- (i) Bishops Waltham Parish Council – happy with the current arrangements for the Parish.
- (j) Bighton Parish Council – happy with Bighton Village Hall as a polling station.

2.12 With regard to the last sentence of comment (a), this probably refers to the warding undertaken in connection with the 2002 district ward boundary revision. To achieve broad electoral equality, it was necessary to divide Soberton Parish and create within it a Soberton Ward and a Soberton Heath & Newtown Ward, in order that the latter could become part of the new Swanmore & Newtown district council Ward. Soberton (parish) Ward remained within Droxford, Soberton and Hambledon district council Ward. Although the change was not popular with some local people at the time, we

are not aware that it has caused any practical governance problems over the past nine years.

- 2.13 In any event, the current review is not the right exercise to reconsider this matter and it would need to await the next review of district council electoral arrangements, likely to be around 2014, if Members wished to consider changing the size of the Council etc.
- 2.14 Therefore, the only other specific concern raised relates to Denmead and Boarhunt & Southwick Wards, which are considered below:-
- (a) the West of Waterlooville development will affect the Denmead and Boarhunt & Southwick Wards, where 350 and 2,150 dwellings respectively will be built over the next three years. Some of the new dwellings in Denmead are occupied already and are situated about a mile from the existing War Memorial Hall polling place. As the occupation of the new dwellings continues in both Parishes, it will create a community which requires a polling place in its own right, but split to allow voting for candidates in both Wards/Parishes. As an alternative site within the new community is not yet available, no proposal is made as part of the Review but the situation will be monitored and changes may be made before the May 2012 district elections.
- (b) in the foreseeable future, ward and parish boundaries in this area may be subject to a separate Electoral Review.

3 Polling Districts

- 3.1 Apart from the points raised above, no representations have been received to change the area covered by any polling district and none are proposed by the officers, as the existing basis is considered satisfactory.

4 Electorate Projections for 2015

- 4.1 Appendix A (column 4) sets out the projected electorate in 2015 for each Ward. The figures have been supplied by the Strategic Planning Team and taken from national and county sources. It was not possible to break down the figures further into polling districts.
- 4.2 In those Wards which show a relatively significant increase (principally Denmead and Boarhunt & Southwick), reviews can be undertaken at the appropriate time and either existing polling places changed to a 'double station', or additional polling places created.
- 4.3 Guidance from the Electoral Commission states that, after deducting the number of postal voters, no polling place should have more than 2,500 electors allocated to it. All of the Council's polling places currently fall within this guidance.

- 4.4 In some areas, a small decrease in electorate is estimated for 2015. This is because the projections are from the Hampshire County Council Small Area Population Forecasts, which is based on the 2001 Census information. This is not considered to be a significant factor in this exercise, due to the minor nature of the variations, but should be noted nevertheless.
- 4.5 With regard to future reviews, the Regulations require a Member level review to be carried out every four years, but the ARO is able to conduct a review at any time if for example, as anticipated in para 4.2 above, electorates begin to increase as part of major residential development in a ward.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

5 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 5.1 The Committee will have regard to the Council's priorities as set out in its Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Business Plan, with particular reference to 'An Efficient and Effective Council'.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 6.1 The 'average' cost of a polling place (premises hire plus staffing costs) is £600. 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. In fact, the Regulations specifically require that polling places should be within the polling district, unless it is not possible to find a suitable building.
- 6.2 Apart from the Electoral Commission guidance referred to above, 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 2,892, with the average being 1,098. Staffing levels are, of course, adjusted accordingly.
- 6.3 It is not possible to close a polling place and insist that all electors vote by post. It is also not possible to have a combined polling place which serves two or more parishes, because each polling district must have its own polling place, unless there are no suitable premises available. 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 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 7.1 None, provided Government legislation and Electoral Commission guidance is followed and applied in a practical manner, based on local experience.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Representations held on subject file.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Polling Places Assessment Grid

Appendix B – Map of West of Waterloo in relation to existing District Council wards

Appendix A**Polling Places Assessment Grid**

Polling District Ref.	Ward and Polling Place	Electorate 2011	Projected Electorate 2015	Grade
	Bishops Waltham			
WE	Jubilee Hall, Little Shore Lane, Bishops Waltham	2805		1
WF	Common Room, Greens Close, Bishops Waltham	2675		2
		5480	5662	
	Boarhunt & Southwick			
WG	Boarhunt Parish Memorial Hall, Boarhunt	463		2
XW	Southwick & Widley D D Memorial Hall, Southwick	585		1
		1048	2557	
	Cheriton & Bishops Sutton			
WB	Beauworth Village Hall, Beauworth	82		2
WD	The Ship Inn, Main Road, Bishops Sutton	374		2
WH	Bramdean Village Hall, Wood Lane, Bramdean	469		2
WI	Cheriton Village Hall, The Green, Cheriton	526		2
XC	Kilmeston Village Hall, Kilmeston	221		1
XZ	The Tichborne Arms, Tichborne	144		2
		1816	1773	
	Colden Common & Twyford			
WK	The Pavilion, Recreation Ground, Colden Common	1287		2
WL	Colden Common Community Centre, St. Vigor Way	1835		1
YA	Twyford Parish Hall (Main Hall), Twyford	1249		2
		4371	4317	
	Compton & Otterbourne			
WX	Hursley Parish Hall, 50 Main Road, Hursley	696		2
XP	Otterbourne Village Hall, Cranbourne Drive,	1288		1
WM	Shawford Parish Hall, Pearson Road, Shawford	1385		1
		3369	3380	
	Denmead			
WR	War Memorial Hall, Denmead (Double Station)	3725		1
WS	Community Centre, School Lane, Denmead	1743		1
		5468	5727	
	Droxford, Soberton & Hambledon			
WT	Droxford Village Hall, The Square, Droxford	558		2
WV	Hambleton Village Hall (Ctte Room), Hambleton is this not now the Methodist Hall??	823		2
XT	Soberton Village Hall, School Hill, Soberton	318		2
		1699	1752	

Polling District Ref.	Ward and Polling Place	Electorate 2011	Projected Electorate 2015	Grade
Itchen Valley				
WJ	The Holiday Inn Hotel Winchester, Telegraph Way, Morn Hill	103		2
WY	Caravan Village Green, Itchen Stoke	180		3
WZ	Easton Village Hall, Chapel Lane, Easton	343		1
XA	Martyr Worthy Parish Hall, Martyr Worthy	212		2
XB	Itchen Abbas & Avington Village Hall, Itchen Abbas	528		1
XM	Swarraton & Northington Village Hall, Swarraton	199		2
		1565	1565	
Kings Worthy				
XE	St Mary's Church Hall, Fraser Road, Kings Worthy	2096		2
XD	Jubilee Hall, London Road, Kings Worthy	1353		1
		3449	3751	
Littleton & Harestock				
XF	March Hare Public House, Harestock	2019		2
XG	Millennium Memorial Hall, Littleton	899		1
		2918	3097	
Olivers Battery & Badger Farm				
WA	Badger Farm Community Centre, Badger Farm Road	1971		1
XO	St Mark's Church Hall, Oliver's Battery	1334		1
		3305	3397	
Owslebury & Curdrige				
WQ	Reading Rooms, Reading Room Lane, Curdrige	1147		2
WU	Durley Memorial Hall, Durley	810		2
XQ	Owslebury Parish Hall, Main Road, Owslebury	673		2
YB	Upham New Millennium Village Hall, Upham	557		1
		3187	3096	
Shedfield				
XR1	Shedfield Reading Rooms, Shirrell Heath	635		2
XR2	Methodist Church Hall, High Street, Shedfield	624		2
XS	Waltham Chase Village Hall, Waltham Chase	1910		2
		3169	3168	
Sparsholt				
WP	Crawley Village Hall, Main Road, Crawley	351		1
XX	Sparsholt Memorial Hall, Woodman Lane	945		1
WW	Jubilee Hall, London Road, Kings Worthy	408		1
		1704	1806	

Polling District Ref.	Ward and Polling Place	Electorate 2011	Projected Electorate 2015	Grade
St Barnabas				
YG	The Community Lounge, East Acre	1208		2
YH	St Barnabas Church Hall, Fromond Road	1978		1
YY	Wesley Methodist Church Hall, Fromond Road	1796		2
		4982	4894	
St Bartholomew				
YI	Common Room, Simonds Court	996		2
YJ, YK	Common Room, Hyde Gate	2892		2
YL	Holy Trinity Church Hall, Upper Brook Street	1075		1
		4963	5820	
St John & All Saints				
YM	Common Room, Chester Court	1116		2
YN	Winnall Community Centre, Garbett Road	1652		1
YO	All Saints Church Hall, Petersfield Road	1891		2
		4659	4592	
St Luke				
YQ1	Common Room, The Valley, Stanmore	818		2
YQ2	St Luke's Church Centre, Mildmay Street	688		2
YQ3	Tower Arts Centre, Romsey Road	476		2
YR	Stanmore Community Centre, Somers Close	1376		1
YV	Common Room, Drummond Close, Stanmore	844		2
		4202	4179	
St Michael				
YP	Room 1, St Edburga, University of Winchester, Sparkford Road	1573		2
YS	The Courtyard, Guildhall	1351		1
YT	Community Lounge, King Harold Court	868		1
YU	St Faith's Parish Hall, Back Street, St Cross	1383		1
		5175	5107	
St Paul				
YW	Room 3, West Downs Centre, West Downs Student Village	2538		2
YX	St Paul's Hall, St. Paul's Hill	2168		2
		4706	5469	
Swanmore & Newtown				
XU	The Rookesbury Hall, Church Road	1019		2
XY	Swanmore Village Hall, New Road, Swanmore	2423		1
		3442	3369	
The Alresfords				
WC	Bighton Village Hall, Bighton	273		2
XK	Makins Court, Windsor Road	1671		1
XL	Alresford Community Centre, Alresford	2746		2
XN	Christy Memorial Hall, The Green	471		2
		5161	5144	

Polling District Ref.	Ward and Polling Place	Electorate 2011	Projected Electorate 2015	Grade
	Upper Meon Valley			
WN, WO	Meon Hall, Pound Lane	772		1
YD	West Meon Village Hall, Headon View, West Meon	612		2
YC	Warnford Village Hall, Lippen Lane, Warnford	178		2
		1562	1713	
	Whiteley			
YE	Meadowside Leisure Centre, Whiteley Village	2328	2501	1
	Wickham			
YF1	Community Centre, Wickham	2032		2
YF3	Knowle Village Hall, Greater Horseshoe Way, Knowle	1148		2
YF2	Silversprings Garden Centre, Fontley Road, Wickham	164		2
		3344	3507	
	Wonston & Micheldever			
XH	East Stratton Village Hall, East Stratton	270		1
XI	Community & Recreation Centre, Micheldever	273		2
XJ	Northbrook Hall, Duke Street, Micheldever	520		2
XV	South Wonston Village Hall, South Wonston	2191		1
YZ	Victoria Hall, Sutton Scotney	1141		1
		4395	4341	