

REPORT TITLE: MID REVIEW UPDATE TO POLLING PLACES

23 FEBRUARY 2021

REPORT OF ACTING RETURNING OFFICER

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

A full review of polling districts and polling places was undertaken between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2019 as part of the statutory review and reported to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee on 29 January 2019.

Due to changes in availability of polling places, a mid review update is necessary. Although the Acting Returning Officer can make changes to polling places on a temporary basis to enable the efficient running of the poll any permanent change must be agreed by Licensing and Regulatory Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the following permanent changes to polling places are agreed
 - Denmead ward: WR1: relocate to Church Hall, All Saints Church, Hambledon Road
 - Southwick and Wickham ward: YF2: relocate to Solent Nurseries, Fontley Road
 - Southwick and Wickham ward: XW3: new polling place Newlands Community Hall
 - Upper Meon Valley ward: WJ: relocate to Cemetery Lodge, Magdalen Hill
 - St Barnabas ward: XF: relocate to Wesley Methodist Church, Fromond Road
 - St Bartholomew ward: Y1 and Y11: relocate to Winchester Rugby and Football Club
 - St Bartholomew ward: YJ, YJ1, YK: relocate to The Winchester Hotel, Worthy Lane

- St Bartholomew ward: YM: relocate to Winnall Community Centre, Garbett Road
 - St Michael ward: YS: relocate to St Lawrence Parish Room, Colebrook Street
 - St Paul ward: YW2: relocate to University of Winchester, Business School
2. The list of polling places for the Winchester district as set out in Appendix C are noted which includes a number of temporary changes for 2021 due to unavailability of accommodation due the pandemic.
 3. It is noted that the Acting Returning Officer will make temporary arrangements to provide polling places for the 2021 polls due to changes in polling place availability due to the COVID19 pandemic

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

Democratically elected councillors are central to the decision making framework of the council. The election of councillors directly supports the 'your council, your voice' priority.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant financial implications from the change in polling places. Although there would be a reduction in cost associated with the move from the Guildhall there are increased costs associated with moving to commercial locations compared to, say, use of the council's sheltered scheme lounges.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the council to keep under review polling districts and polling places. Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission: Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations states that if a polling station becomes unavailable then the Returning Officer should consider whether another polling station is available within that area and such action does not require a formal review.

3.2 The council's constitution, Part 3.4 paragraph 5(2) appoints the Chief Executive as the Council's Returning Officer, responsible for the functions, staff and budget for elections and registration, and as such may confirm the polling places for the Winchester district. Any proposals for change are considered by the Licencing and Regulation Committee.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The council's electoral services team routinely manage this work. There is considerable additional workload in sourcing temporary polling stations, including provision of portacabins.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Changes to the use of some of the council's sheltered accommodation schemes has required a permanent change in some polling places

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 The proposed list of polling places was sent to all members on 19th January and comments sought. The proposed list was also sent to party Agents for comment and to Parish Clerks with a change in polling station. Responses were received from fifteen responders including elected members, a parish council, and a residents association.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 We are required to provide a polling place within the ward for the purposes of election and ideally situate the polling place where it is easy to travel to. Polling places can be busy throughout the day and especially after working hours so sufficient parking is a consideration. Therefore polling places in 'walking distance' or on public transport routes are to be welcomed but can be difficult to find, not only in the rural area of the district

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

- 8.1 Access to a polling station is a key consideration and routine inspections are undertaken taking into account access for those who may fall within s149 of the Equality Act 2010 such as the elderly or disabled.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 None associated with the polling places although all personal data relating to electors is held on secure servers or under the control of the Presiding Officer at the polling station.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 10.1 It is essential that a range of polling places are established for the purposes of an election. Failure to provide sufficient polling places in the appropriate electoral location would constitute a breach of election requirements.
- 10.2 It has been necessary to make temporary changes to a number of polling places for the 2021 polls to ensure COVID secure operations can be put in place. The health, safety and welfare of staff, electorate and candidates are of primary importance during the operation of the election process.

- 10.3 A considerable number of staff are required to work during the election period and recruitment has been slower this year than usual due to concerns regarding the pandemic. Therefore, requests for additional polling stations over the number usually provided cannot be accommodated.
- 10.4 It may also be necessary to merge registers if staffing numbers are not sufficient and this action will be taken by the ARO if required.

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 11.1 This report sets out the proposed changes to polling places for the Winchester district. An interim review has been necessary due to changes in availability of polling places. Any change in polling place must be carefully and regularly communicated in order that the electorate are clear where and how they may cast their vote.

There are some particular proposals in the report that merit highlighting

- a) The loss of lounges at sheltered schemes has led to a number of changes in St Bartholomew ward, St Barnabas ward and Denmead ward.
- b) Schools are generally unavailable in 2021 due to the priority commitments of schooling critical worker and vulnerable children leading to changes in St Barnabas ward and St Paul ward along with a temporary move in Southwick and Widley ward.

12 PROPOSED PERMANENT CHANGES TO POLLING PLACES

The **proposed permanent changes** to polling places which were subject to consultation are set out in Appendix B along with the rationale for change. The proposed changes are set out below along with a summary of comments received by the ARO followed by the proposed decision.

12.1 **WR1: Denmead Ward**

From Communal Lounge White Wings to Church Hall, All Saints Church

Consultation comments – All favourable

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.2 **YF2: Southwick and Wickham Ward**

From Knowle Village Hall to Solent Nurseries

Consultation comments – all favourable

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.3 XW3: Southwick and Wickham Ward

To Newlands Community Hall (due to boundary change)

Consultation comments – all favourable

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.4 WJ: Upper Meon Valley Ward

From Cheriton Village Hall to Cemetery Lodge

Consultation comments – points of clarification sought by ward member and parish council but all favourable

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.5 XF St Barnabas ward

From Henry Beaufort School to Wesley Methodist Church

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.6 Y1 and Y11: St Bartholomew

From Common Room, Simonds Court to Winchester Rugby and Football Club

Consultation comments - none

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.7 YJ, YJ1, YK: St Bartholomew

From Common Room, Hyde Gate to The Winchester Hotel

Consultation comments - none

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.8 YM: St Bartholomew

From Common Room, Chester Court to Winnall Community Centre

Consultation comments - none

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.9 YS: St Michael ward

From The Guildhall to St Lawrence Parish Room

Consultation comments – points of clarification sought by ward member and potential for lighting to be provided

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place

12.10 **YW2: St Paul ward**

From Kings School, Romsey Road to Room 9 University of Winchester

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision: **proceed** to permanent change of polling place.

12.11 ***Issues raised during the consultation***

There is an issue to highlight raised during the consultation with respect to proposed permanent changes

a) **The Worthys ward**

A request was received from two ward members, the parish council and the residents' association to create an additional polling station in The Worthys ward to accommodate residents of Kings Barton who choose to cast their vote in person and currently travel to Jubilee Hall in Kings Worthy. Local representatives cite the difficult walking route, lack of public transport and a lack of a post box on site to support their request.

This request was made in 2019 and declined due to the small numbers of electorate at Kings Barton at that time and the lack of permanent building to accommodate a polling station. However, it was always intended that a polling station could be provided in the community hall which is yet to be built.

There are now over 800 electors in King Barton and it was suggested that the primary school could provide a polling station until the community hall was in place. However, the school is unavailable for this election due to the complexities of providing COVID secure education accommodation for critical worker and vulnerable children.

The local ward members, parish council and residents' association strongly request a more local polling station for Kings Barton electorate but regretfully this cannot be accommodated for 2021.

Therefore,

- polling station WW and XD will remain at Jubilee Village Hall for the 2021 election.

13 PROPOSED TEMPORARY CHANGES TO POLLING PLACES

The **proposed temporary changes** to polling places are set out in Appendix B along with the rationale for change. They proposed changes are set out below along with a summary of comments received by the ARO and proposed decision.

13.1 **WD Alresford and Itchen Valley**

From The Ship Inn to St Nicholas Church Hall OR Bishops Sutton Village Hall

Consultation comments –

St Nicholas Church Hall

This hall is available but does not have toilet facilities. The Ship Inn, although unable to act as the polling station for 2021 is able to offer use of toilet facilities for polling staff.

Bishops Sutton Village Hall

Concern was raised by a ward member regarding the temporary move to Bishops Sutton Village Hall due to disruption to the local play group. There is limited community space available in this locality and the playgroup have indicated that due to the pandemic and the support provided to local parents they would be unable to relocate or cancel a session.

Proposed decision: **change of polling place** to St Nicholas Church Hall **for 2021 only**

13.2 **YG: St Barnabas ward**

From Community Lounge, Eastacre to Winchester Racquets and Fitness

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision: **change of polling place** to Winchester Racquets and Fitness **for 2021 only**

13.3 **YY: St Barnabas ward**

Notification of use of an additional room within the existing polling place at Wesley Methodist Church

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision: **proceed** to use of additional room **for 2021 only**

13.4 Issues raised during the consultation

There are a number of particular issues to highlight raised during the consultation with respect to proposed temporary changes

a) ***Southwick and Widley and Denmead wards***

The ward members in Southwick and Wickham and Denmead made a proposal with respect to polling places WR2/XW2 (Denmead ward) currently located at Berewood School and whether these stations could be located with XW3 (Southwick and Wickham ward) at Newlands Community Hall to avoid disruption to schooling.

The school is unavailable for this election due to the complexities of providing COVID secure education accommodation for critical worker and vulnerable children. Although it is preferable for the polling place to be located in the relevant ward, with these extenuating circumstances, the polling station will be located in the best possible location to secure effective polling.

The parish clerk for Newlands has advised that roofing works are now scheduled for the community centre therefore making the community centre unavailable as the polling station for this election only

The only possible option to provide polling stations for these communities is to use portacabins. This is not ideal for electorate or polling staff and full COVID secure precautions will be put in place. The portacabins will be sited on the Newlands Community Centre car park for this election only. The car park being located directly opposite Berewood School and next to the Community Centre retains the location known by the electorate.

Therefore,

- XW3 will be located at a portacabin in the Newlands Community Centre car park.
- WR2 and XW2 will be located at a portacabin in the Newlands Community Centre car park

b) ***Colden Common & Twyford Ward***

A matter was raised by ward members in respect of polling place WK located at the Pavilion (Colden Common & Twyford ward) in that roofing works were to be undertaken during 2021 by the Parish. An alternative proposal of the Holy Trinity Church Halls was put forward by ward members but this is considered to be too far from the existing polling station. However, there is sufficient space at the Community Centre to accommodate a double station

Therefore,

- WK will be located at Colden common Community Centre for the 2021 election only as a double station with WL.

c) ***Badger Farm and Oliver's Battery***

Although not raised in the consultation, St Marks Church has advised that the Hall is unavailable due to building works. Ward members have been briefed on the alternative arrangements proposed and offer no objection.

Therefore,

- XO will be located at Badger Farm Community Centre, Badger Farm Road for the 2021 election only.

14 **NEXT STEPS**

- 14.1 Following consideration by the committee, the necessary letter of thanks will be sent to existing polling places which are no longer available. All new polling places will be contacted to finalise arrangements.
- 14.2 Electors will be notified by letter of the change in polling place and the new list of polling places published on the council website.

15 **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

- 15.1 The pandemic has required a review of polling stations due to unavailability of some locations and the election team regularly review availability. Changes are minimised in order to ensure the electorate are familiar with their 'regular polling station'.
- 15.2 Alternatives proposed polling places were sourced as temporary alternatives for the UK Parliamentary General Election due to established polling places having Christmas commitments. These polling places were found to be good alternatives and have some advantages over existing polling places, therefore the recommended option is to change the polling places.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

LR516 - Licensing and Regulation Committee 29 January 2019

Other Background Documents:-

None.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Polling Places Winchester district March 2020 (consultation draft)

Appendix B: Proposed Changes to Polling Places (consultation draft)

Appendix C: Proposed list of Polling Places 2021 (final post consultation)