

REPORT TITLE: POLLING STATION REVIEW

29 JANUARY 2019

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr Godfrey, Portfolio Holder for Professional Services

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

This report sets out the outcome of a review of polling places undertaken as required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. A compulsory review of polling districts and polling places must be undertaken between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. The Council last undertook this exercise in October 2014 (Report LR436 refers)

Consultations have been undertaken with all Members, County Councillors, Parish Councils and relevant political and community groups. This report sets out the position and conclusion of that consultation.

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 C be approved and adopted.
2. That further consideration be given by the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) to the Friends Meeting House, Colebrook Street or St Lawrence Church Hall, Colebrook Street as an alternative polling place for polling district YS. Following consideration by the ARO that one of these locations be adopted for polling district YS if appropriate.

IMPLICATIONS:**1 COUNCIL STRATEGY OUTCOME**

- 1.1 The Committee should have regard to the Council's priorities as set out in its Strategy and Portfolio plans, with particular reference to 'Delivering an entrepreneurial approach to efficient public services.'

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The 'average' cost of a polling place (premises hire plus staffing costs) is £818.61. In the City Council's area, the pattern of settlements mean that the smallest electorate for polling place is 96 and the largest is 2,771 with the average being 1,051. Staffing levels are, of course, adjusted accordingly. These figures are reduced significantly if absent voters are taken into consideration with the current smallest electorate reducing to 54 and the largest to 2,290, however the figures used in this report relate to total electorate as an absent voter can, at any time, cancel their absent vote and attend their designated polling place.
- 2.2 Apart from Electoral Commission guidance, that the number of electors allocated to a polling place should not exceed 2,500, there is no statutory limit regarding either the minimum or maximum number of electors per polling place. Whilst there are polling places with a register of 2,500 + electors the number is significantly reduced by those on the register who have absent votes, as an example WE (Bishops Waltham) polling district has 2,771 registered electors however this figure is reduced to 2,290 when postal voters are removed from the figures.
- 2.3 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. It is not lawful to close a polling place and insist that all electors vote by post.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The review has been undertaken in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council's electoral service team routinely manage this work.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A number of council owned properties are used as polling places.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 Consultations have been undertaken in accordance with the Electoral Commission guidance – Elected Members, County Councillors, Parish Councils and relevant political and community groups.
- 6.2 If agreed a full communications plan will be rolled out to ensure residents are aware of their polling station for the May 2019 elections. Elected Members and Parish Councils will also be advised of any changes.

Agents will also be advised accordingly.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 None

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 Consideration of access to the polling place is a key consideration and routine inspections are undertaken taking into account access for those who may be elderly or disabled.

9. DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 None required

10. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 10.1 The review has been undertaken in accordance with national legislation and Electoral Commission guidance.

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<i>Property</i> Continued availability of council property for election purposes	Early discussion with client officers to ensure availability.	
<i>Community Support</i> That the new locations are not known by residents	Full communications plan for any changes in polling stations	The review enables the most appropriate location for polling stations to be identified
<i>Timescales</i> That polling stations are not available for the May elections	The review has been undertaken in good time to ensure all arrangements in place for the 2019 elections	
<i>Project capacity – N/A</i>		
<i>Financial / VfM N/A</i>		
<i>Legal</i> Following the conclusion of the local authority's review, certain persons have a right to make representations to	The review process has strived to meet the reasonable requirements of electors in the district and taken account of	

the Electoral Commission which has the power to direct that alterations are made to the polling places if the review is found not to meet reasonable constituency requirements	accessibility for disabled persons. Comments received have been considered and adjustments made in response	
<i>Innovation – N/A</i>		
<i>Reputation</i> That new locations are not known by residents leading to confusion on polling day	Advance communications to all residents. Clear instructions on poll cards	
<i>Other – N/A</i>		

11. SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

11.1 This review was undertaken with the following principles in mind

- (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 polling places for District Elections, 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.

11.2 The ARO is responsible for the conduct of the elections for two Parliamentary Constituencies which cover the Winchester District – namely the Winchester Constituency and the Meon Valley Constituency. The boundaries of those constituencies extend to also cover parts of the Districts of Eastleigh (for Winchester Constituency) and East Hampshire and Havant (for Meon Valley Constituency)

- 11.3 This report concentrates solely on the polling places which are located within the Winchester District. There has been no attempt to separate and examine the stations on a Constituency basis, because in the context of this review, as some stations sit outside of the Winchester City Council administrative boundary.
- 11.4 There are currently 83 polling places used for Parliamentary elections covering the Winchester district. Of those, one is a 'double station' due to the location and number of electors (All Saints Church Hall, Denmead), meaning the register is divided equally between two teams of polling staff working within the same building.

Three stations (Jubilee Hall, Kings Worthy, Itchen Abbas & Avington Village Hall and Berewood School, Kentidge Way) each serve two polling districts, because of a lack of suitable buildings for polling stations in the areas. As with Denmead two teams of polling staff operate within the same hall in each case, but work from completely separate registers in these instances.

- 11.5 At every election, all Presiding Officers complete an assessment form which asks questions about the suitability of their premises as a polling place. Polling Station Inspectors also visit each location during polling day and report back on any issues. This has helped to highlight situations where additional measures are required, from the simple provision of more direction signage to the installation of ramps, or even a change of station. There were minor issues raised at the last elections in May 2018 and these have already been taken into account.
- 11.6 Appendix B lists each of the polling places used for the last Parliamentary election together with details of the electorate at the last review and the current electorate. Each polling place is graded 1-3 in terms of overall suitability (1 being the most satisfactory). In assessing the grading's, a 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. The grading's 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.
- 11.7 Local circumstances mean that we have utilised three public houses as polling places in the District – The Ship Inn at Bishops Sutton, the Tichborne Arms, Tichborne and the March Hare at Harestock.
- Due to a change in ownership and refurbishment at the March Hare the owners have made a decision not to allow us to utilise their premises as a polling place and Henry Beaufort School has been the alternative location. This review confirms the school as one of the permanent polling places for Harestock.
- We have also used the Holiday Inn, Morn Hill, for the electorate in Chilcomb however if the proposals suggested are accepted this will move location to Cheriton Village Hall. Ballots cast at this polling station are very low in number, for the last District Election only 17 votes were cast, a slightly higher number were cast for the UK Parliamentary Election in 2017 at 47.
- 11.8 Eight buildings owned by the City Council have been used as polling places – seven are the community lounges of sheltered housing schemes for which no charge is made, however two of these locations have now been altered and are no longer suitable. This report therefore proposes that the polling place previously located at the Common Room, Drummond Close be relocated to Level 10 Church, Stanmore Lane and the polling place at The Valley, Common Room be relocated to St Luke Church Stanmore.
- The Courtyard, Guildhall, is another corporate venue and we are charged a commercial rate for hiring this facility which is considerably higher than a number of our polling places. The Courtyard has drawn comment and representation regarding the difficulty of tellers capturing elector numbers due to dual access. Whilst sympathetic to this issue, as tellers have an important role to play at elections, this is not a consideration for changing a polling location. Whilst this review should not and is not based solely on cost saving, the most important factor is geographical convenience to the voter.
- There are two alternative locations to the Guildhall, the Friends Meeting House and St Lawrence's Church Hall but further evaluation of these locations is required. The ARO will undertake this evaluation and if one of these venues proves suitable, the recommendation in this report is that a change to the polling place is made.
- Outside the Town two council sheltered housing schemes are used; one is Greens Close, Bishops Waltham and the other is Makins Court, Alresford. The proposals include moving the current polling place in Denmead from All Saints Church to the Council owned large community lounge at White Wings

House, Ashling Park Road, this provides a large location for this busy 'double' polling place, which has good access and disabled facilities.

The only other Council owned premises used for polling in the District is the Meadowside Leisure Centre at Whiteley.

- 11.9 The Council has been using school premises in recent years. The campus at Kings School is growing, we have previously used the Tower Arts venue at the school however this area has been redeveloped and is now in daily use as classrooms. Whilst we are able to continue using the school site the exact location is liable to change due to the examination timetable however we will ensure ample signage is used to direct electors to the correct location on the school site.

Due to the loss of the March Hare at Harestock we have been utilising Henry Beaufort School, again a similar issue with our exact location on campus arises and there were comments during this consultation with regard to tellers not being allowed onto the school campus. This situation is due to safeguarding issues again these comments made during the consultation period are noted.

The only other school used has been Berewood School on the Grainger site at the West of Waterlooville development.

The last review drew comments that the portakabin provided on the Taylor Wimpey side of the development was some distance away and that the newly opened school would be more suitable. 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 and cost savings are not an issue however utilising schools causes disruption to the staff, parents and pupils.

With the building continuing at West of Waterlooville we are seeking to utilise the new community building on the Grainger site when available and rooms at the private care home on the Taylor Wimpey development, whilst these arrangements may not be finalised for May 2019 this report recommends these locations as future polling places when they become available.

- 11.10 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. The responses to the consultation are contained in Appendix A. All comments have been carefully considered as set out below:

Henry Beaufort School – Whilst sympathetic to this issue, as tellers have an important role to play at elections, this is not a consideration for changing a polling location. Further discussion will be held with the Head Teacher to ensure access to the polling station is clearly marked

Drummond Close – This report recommends the relocation of the polling place to Level 10 Church.

The Valley – This report recommends that this polling place be amalgamated with the polling place at St Luke's Church Centre, Mildmay Street.

Simmonds Court - Whilst sympathetic to this issue, as tellers have an important role to play at elections, this is not a consideration for changing a polling location.

Common Room, Hyde Gate - Whilst sympathetic to this issue, as tellers have an important role to play at elections, this is not a consideration for changing a polling location.

Holiday Inn, Telegraph Hill – The request for a polling place in the hamlet of Chilcomb have been considered, however this report recommends that this polling place be amalgamated with the polling place at Cheriton Village Hall.

Stanmore Community Centre – comments noted.

St Luke's Church –comments noted.

The Pavilion, Colden Common – comment noted, should a future change be required a report will come before the Licensing and Regulation committee.

Kings Barton – there were 3 representations requesting a polling station for the emerging community at King's Barton however the present electorate figures at 145 do not currently warrant a new polling place being established.

Headbourne Worthy – request for a more convenient place for Nations Hill / Springvale Road electors to vote, as part of a wider polling district consisting of less than 600 electors the recommendation is that the current arrangements remain in place.

Itchen Valley Parish Council – comments noted.

Proposed revision of Owslebury polling district boundary – these comments have been noted, as there are implications for some registered electors this matter would be better addressed through a Community Governance Review to ensure all those affected could be consulted.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 12.1 The Council has an established suite of polling places and these have been reviewed in accordance with national legislation and electoral commission guidance. This report recommends adoption of a new suite of polling places which provide good geographical coverage of the district.

The alternative is that the council does not adopt the new list of polling places, in which case the existing polling places would have to be retained. As set out in the report some polling places have to change due to availability of the site and others are recommended for change following review.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Representations held on file and published to web.

Previous Committee Reports:-

Licensing and Regulation Committee report LR 436 of 9 October 2014.

Other Background Documents:-

Electoral Commission Guidance on Polling places Reviews located at

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/electoral-administrator/polling-place-reviews>

Current Electorate report by polling district.

UK Parliamentary Election 2017 Cost to serve analysis.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A Responses to consultation

Appendix B Polling places as at the last Parliamentary Election 2017, with assessment grid.

Appendix C Proposed polling places as a result of this review.