



## **BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY 27TH FEBRUARY 2020**  
**AT 6.00 P.M.**

### **PARKSIDE COMMITTEE - PARKSIDE**

**MEMBERS:** Councillors M. Glass (Chairman), R. J. Hunter (Vice-Chairman), S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming, S. G. Hession, L. C. R. Mallett and M. Middleton

### **AGENDA**

1. To receive apologies for absence and notification of 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. To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 24th October 2019 (Pages 1 - 4)
4. Polling Places Report (Pages 5 - 10)
5. Date of the Next Meeting of the Committee
6. To consider any other business, details of which have been notified to the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services prior to the commencement of the meeting and which the Chairman considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting

K. DICKS  
Chief Executive

Parkside  
Market Street  
BROMSGROVE  
Worcestershire  
B61 8DA

19th February 2020



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**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY, 24TH OCTOBER 2019, AT 5:58 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors M. Glass (Chairman), R. J. Hunter (Vice-Chairman),  
S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming, S. G. Hession and M. Middleton

Officers: Mr D. Whitney, Ms. M. Bassett and Mrs. P. Ross

11/19 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF  
SUBSTITUTES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L. C. R. Mallett.

12/19 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S. G. Hession declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Agenda Item 4 - Polling Places Review (Minute No. 14/19, stating that, she was a Trustee of Wythall Community Association.

13/19 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 10th September 2019 were submitted.

Councillor M. Middleton asked for it to be noted that, during the meeting, Members considered all proposals for each Ward and that the ones listed warranted further discussion, and that if no changes were proposed, then no changes were agreed by the Committee.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to the comments as detailed in the pre-ambble above, the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 10th September be approved as a correct record.

14/19 **POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2019**

The Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and reported that at the meeting held on 10th September 2019, Committee Members had considered, for all Wards, the results and the recommendations of officers and the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) to the initial consultation conducted.

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Following on from that meeting and taking into account the decisions as agreed by the Committee, the final recommendations were opened for further consultation from 12th September to 7th October.

The Electoral Services Manager drew Members' attention to page 9 of the main agenda report, which detailed the issues arising from the consultation on recommendations from 12th September to 7th October. Members were further informed that there had been some minor changes since the agenda had been published, for which he would provide a verbal update.

Information on the following Wards was considered:

**Cofton COA** – The Parish Council had sent in a submission to inform the Committee that the new Parish Village Hall was now open. The Committee agreed with no change, as the existing village hall was pivotal to the community. Officers agreed to see how the new housing development progressed, in order to review and assess the future needs of Cofton Hackett. Therefore the Committee agreed with no change.

**Rubery North RNA** - Members were further informed that the District Councillor had supported the Polling Station being moved to Rubery Social Club. Therefore the Committee agreed that the Polling Station be moved to Rubery Social Club.

**Rubery South RSA** – Members were informed that a District Councillor had requested that this be reviewed with a view to moving the Polling Station to Rubery Social Club. Members considered the verbal update provided on behalf of the Ward Councillor that, all of the residents he had liaised with were quite happy with the current Polling Station at the Memorial Club and that parking was easier at the Memorial Club. Therefore Members agreed that the Polling Station be kept at the Memorial Club.

**Slideslow SSA and SSB** – The Electoral Services Manager reported that Aston Fields Middle school had stated that they were not interested in the school being used as a Polling Station. Members were further informed that following publication of the Electoral Matters Committee agenda, information had been received from the Head Teacher at Rigby Hall Special School stating that the offer to use the school as a Polling Station had been withdrawn.

In response to questions from Members with regard to possible alternative venues, the Electoral Services Manager and the Senior Electoral Services Officer explained that:

Portable buildings – these could be used for Polling Stations; however, these were significantly more expensive and often provided inadequate accommodation and accessibility for voters with disabilities.

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Schools - Officers did not insist that schools used as Polling Stations had to close. It was at the discretion of the schools Head Teacher / Chair of Governors and their safeguarding policies.

As detailed at the meeting held on 10th September 2019, St. Godwalds Church Hall was already used as a Polling Station and would not accommodate another Polling District.

The Electoral Services Manager asked the Committee to note that, a further consultation would have to be conducted should the Committee decide on another alternative venue to Finstall First school and that any meaningful consultation would take a period of 3 to 4 weeks.

Members were minded to support the views of the schools; however, having taken all of the information into account, the Committee agreed that Finstall First School, Polling Station should continue to be used.

Officers were asked to consider other venues such as Aston Fields Sports and Social Club which could be the basis of a further review by the Committee.

Members were reminded that, First Schools were normally selected as Polling Stations because of reduced impact on important examination processes for older pupils.

**Wythall West WWA** – Concerns had been raised in regard to moving the Polling Station to Park Hall. The Chairman of Wythall Residents Association had commented that the current Polling Station was within the ward and that it was important that a Polling Station should be located in the ward; voters that lived in South Wythall knew the venue well. He had also expressed his concerns about car park charges at Park Hall.

Councillor Hession also raised concerns with regard to car parking charges at Park Hall and asked if Park Hall could be approached to confirm that there would be no car parking charges on polling days.

The Electoral Services Manager reported that, as detailed in the report, those making submissions may have been confused and thought that the whole of Wythall West Ward electors moving to Park Hall as the majority of those in polling district WWB would certainly be able to walk to the village hall. Most electors in WWA did not live within easy walking distance of the current Polling Station.

With regard to car parking charges, if Park Hall were considering charging for parking, this would also affect polling districts DRA and HWA.

Having raised their concerns with regard to car parking charges at Park Hall, Members agreed that the Polling Station be moved to Park Hall; on the proviso that confirmation was received from Park Hall to confirm that

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there would be no car parking charges on polling days. Should car parking changes be introduced at Park Hall, than Officers be tasked to review the situation along with polling districts DRA and HWA which would also be affected.

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the final proposals in respect of Polling Places, as contained in Appendix 1 to the report (as amended), and taking into account the Committee's comments, as detailed in the preamble above, be approved; and
- b) the decisions of the Committee in respect of a) above take effect from the date of poll any election/referendum held or on of publication of the revised Register of Electors on 1st December 2019 whichever is sooner.

The meeting closed at 6.27 p.m.

Chairman



### **Polling Place Alterations 2020**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillors K May, Leader and, G Denaro Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Service - Legal, Democratic & Property Services
Wards Affected	Barnt Green & Hopwood, Belbroughton & Romsley, Slideslow,
Ward Councillor Consulted	Yes
Non-Key Decision	(Electoral Matters Committee has full devolved powers)

#### **1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 The report sets out where changes to polling places may need to be considered in advance of the May Elections 2020.
- 1.2 A review should follow the stages produced in the Electoral Commission guidance however due to time scales there would only be time to conduct one round of consultations.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 **that if the Committee decide to consider the change of a polling place for Polling Districts SSA/SSB and BHA a consultation takes place from 28 February until 19 March 2020;**
- 2.2 **that a consultation takes place from 28 February until 19 March 2020 on a new polling place for Polling District BRD.**

#### **3. KEY ISSUES**

##### **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.
- 3.2 Depending on the outcome of the review there may be additional costs or savings regarding polling stations that are to be used in future elections.

#### Legal Implications

- 3.3 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). Bromsgrove District 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.
- 3.4 "Relevant authorities" (such as Bromsgrove District 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."

#### Service / Operational Implications

- 3.5 As a result of the polling places review held last year and the General Election held 12 December 2019 officers have received a number of requests to change some polling places within the District.
- 3.6 There is not a great amount of time to hold a full review for these requests as poll cards for the PCC election on 7 May are due to be sent out on 25 March. It is therefore proposed that each request is considered and consulted on for a few weeks and Members make a final decision at a further meeting.
- 3.7 There are three polling places to consider which are set out below. In addition there was one complaint from an elector regarding Stoke Prior Village Hall. As there were no other complaints it is thought that this should not be reviewed at the current time.

- 3.8 **Polling District SSA/SSB currently Finstall First School:** Members of the Committee have asked for this polling place to be kept under review.

Officers met with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors before the General Election who asked for the polling place to be reviewed again. The school has made a couple of suggestions:

- a) The Bromsgrove Rugby Club on Finstall Road. This is not in the polling district and electors have to cross the railway to get to the building.
- b) St Godwalds Church Hall. Again this is not in the polling district. Officers are going to visit this again to assess if both rooms of the Church Hall could be used. It should be noted that if this is chosen the combined electorate is over 5,000 attending that hall.

District and County Councillors have been asked for their views regarding this polling place.

- 3.9 **Polling District BHA currently the Westmead Hotel:** The Committee decided to move the polling place from Hopwood Village Hall to Westmead Hotel as part of the 2019 review. The main reason for the move was the access issues the village hall had.

Members of the Hopwood Village Hall Committee have approached officers and their District Councillor asking that the Committee review their decision as building works have now resolved the main issue. Members of the Village Hall Committee also pointed out that it is a community venue and polling gave people the opportunity to view the hall and make them aware that it can be booked for functions.

The District Councillor supports the return of the polling place to the village hall.

It should be noted that many electors, polling staff and the polling station inspector found the hotel to be a very good venue for polling. In addition the Westmead Hotel has been booked for 7 May elections and the Council may incur a cost if the booking is cancelled.

- 3.10 **Polling District BRD currently Clent Parish Hall:** Officers have received a communication from the Trustees of Clent Parish Hall that they no longer want the hall used as a polling place as it disrupts the regular users.

Officers would like to find a suitable polling place for the Committee without having to use Clent Primary School but if no other venue is available there are statutory powers to requisition a room in the school

for the purpose of polling. With this in mind officers have written to the Headteacher pointing this out and asking for help to find an alternative venue.

District and County Councillors have been asked if they know of any premises within the polling district that could act as host for a polling place.

- 3.11 The (Acting) Returning Officer must make a submission regarding current and any proposed polling stations.

#### **Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 3.12 The Council's policies directly cross-relate, particularly in relation to Access issues. Accessibility for members of minority or disadvantaged groups is a key issue in the selection of suitable Polling Stations.

#### **4. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 Choice of Polling Place / Polling Station should not give rise to significant grounds of complaint which might put election results at risk of challenge.
- 4.3 In terms of Environmental risks, it is of course preferable that choice of Polling Station location can help minimise unnecessary additional journeys by motorised vehicles.
- 4.4 In terms of Human Resources risks, the (Acting) Returning Officer must provide adequate levels and standards of staffing to secure proper polling arrangements.

#### **5. APPENDICES**

None

#### **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Electoral Commission Guidance.

#### 7. KEY

Bromsgrove Returning Officer, Mr Kevin Dicks, is designated (Acting) Returning Officer for Parliamentary Elections.

This is because formally the Returning Officer for a County Constituency such as Bromsgrove is the High Sheriff for that County, which is a purely honorific title/role.

#### AUTHOR OF REPORT

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