

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

19TH NOVEMBER 2007

**POLLING DISTRICT REVIEW**

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor R. D. Smith
Responsible Head of Service	Claire Felton

1. **SUMMARY**

1.1 To undertake a review of all Polling Districts and Polling Places within the District of Bromsgrove in compliance with The Review of Polling Districts & Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 That the review of polling districts and places shown at Section 5 below be approved and adopted.

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires all local authorities in England and Wales to undertake a full review of Polling Districts and Polling Places every 4 years. The legislation places a duty on the Local Authority to conduct its first complete review by the end of the year.

3.2 In undertaking the review, the Council must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances, and have regard to the needs of electors who are disabled.

3.3 The review is not concerned with alterations to Ward boundaries only the separation of existing wards into Polling Districts and the situation of polling stations.

3.4 Prior to the new arrangements being introduced, the last review was undertaken at the time of the boundary review in 2003. In addition, before the elections this year a Disability Access Audit was undertaken by SCOPE. For that reason, the general principle underpinning this review is to take account of the SCOPE audit which identified seven polling stations which present access problems and an additional complaint received after the local elections in May. The report is shown at Appendix 1.

3.5 Representations were sought from District Council Members, Parish Councillors, Parish Clerks, Age Concern Bromsgrove & District, Bromsgrove & District Access Group, Shopmobility Worcester, Wendron Day Centre, Bromsgrove and District Action Group for Older People. In addition, electors

registered in the Bromsgrove District Council area were invited to make representations to the Electoral Services Officer.

- 3.6 Details of the existing electoral arrangements were made available for inspection at The Council House, and representations of changes were requested by 10 August 2007.

#### 4. **FINDINGS**

##### Polling Districts

- 4.1 As there has been no significant building developments since the last review, it is recommended that no changes be made to the Polling Districts at this time. It is not certain when the proposed development of the Longbridge site, in the polling district of JC - Cofton Hackett, Hillside will commence, but it is anticipated that around 700 properties will be developed and that this may need to be the subject of an interim review before the next scheduled review of Polling Districts which will be in December 2011.

##### Polling Places and Stations

- 4.2 All polling places and polling stations within the District have been evaluated in terms of suitability and accessibility. The law says that facilities for voting must be reasonable and practicable. What this means in practice is a matter of judgement, but there is certainly no duty on the Council to make an unreasonably high level of provision, or to provide facilities in locations where it is impracticable to do so.
- 4.3 We should be looking to achieve improvements in accessibility for people with disabilities. It is important to obtain the views of people who have expertise in these areas, which was why SCOPE were asked to undertake an Access Audit and other local groups were asked to contribute to the review.
- 4.4 The polling stations identified within the report as unsuitable are:-
- All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove
  - Aston Fields Social Club, Stoke Road, Bromsgrove
  - Belbroughton Church Hall, Church Road, Belbroughton
  - Dodford Village Hall, Priory Road, Dodford
  - New Song Community church, Broad Street, Bromsgrove
  - Romsley and Hunnington Cricket Club, Bromsgrove Road, Romsley
  - Wake Green AFC Pavilion, Drawbridge Road, Majors Green
  - Brooklyn Citroen Garage, Birmingham Road, Bordesley, complaints were received from some electors and staff manning the polling station following the May Elections.

## Representations Received

- 4.5 Councillor C. J. Tidmarsh (Stoke Prior) commented that Stoke Prior Village Hall was satisfactory as a polling station.
- 4.6 Letter from Dodford with Grafton Parish Council, wish to retain the Village Hall as a polling station and the recently approved refurbishment plans will ensure compliance with the disability access issues raised by the SCOPE audit.
- 4.7 Email from Ruth Mullett, Clerk to Hunnington Parish Council commenting on unsuitability of the Cricket Club. The Parish Council considered the alternatives available and all were felt unsuitable. Solution would be to lay some slabs to make it more suitable for the elderly and disabled.
- 4.8 Email from Chris J. Platt offering feedback as a voter at Meadows First School, staff were good, location suitable but access was unlit and could be dangerous to the elderly later at night.
- 4.9 Email from Martin Tingle, 87 Golden Cross Lane Catshill, Bromsgrove, commenting that his polling station is convenient to him and he wishes to retain it.
- 4.10 Completed questionnaire regarding Bournheath Village Hall from Mr. B. V. Lodge and Mrs. E. Lodge of 11 Parish Hill, Bournheath, generally satisfied with the venue.
- 4.11 Letter and completed questionnaire regarding Hagley Community Centre from Mr. Richard H. Bache, 4 Oldfields, Hagley Stourbridge. Excellent facilities for polling purposes, but parking has some limitations.
- 4.12 Letter and completed questionnaire received from Councillor Mrs. C. J. Spencer regarding Mobile Unit at Green Park Road. A number of comments made about the unsuitability and these are addressed in the recommendations.
- 4.13 Email from Jeff Edwards of the Older People's Forum and poll clerk in Mobile Unit at Barnsley Hall making similar comments regarding unsuitability of Mobile Unit.
- 4.14 Councillor John Westley of Belbroughton Parish Council commenting on Belbroughton Parish Hall.
- 4.15 Councillor King of Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council, happy with the polling station provided at Lickey Parish Hall, Old Birmingham Road.

## **5. REVISIONS RECOMMENDED**

- 5.1 All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove - retain venue but ensure recommendations made in the SCOPE report adopted. If the work is not undertaken and an alternative venue cannot be found, we will have to ensure that the doors are held in the open position and assistance offered to people who may require it.
- 5.2 Aston Fields Social Club, Stoke Road - recommended alternative venue be sought. Salvation Army Hall, Carlyle Road, previously used but became unavailable to us. Enquiries have been made to the new Officers at Salvation Army Hall and they would be very happy to welcome us back. It is

recommended that we return to the use of the Salvation Army Hall as there is adequate off-street parking and suitable access is available.

- 5.3 Belbroughton Church Hall - venue stated as unsuitable but it is difficult to make any changes as it is a listed building. The Recreation Centre in Hartle Lane would be a suitable replacement venue and can be made available to us at the same cost as the Church Hall. It is recommended that we pursue the alternative venue.
- 5.4 Dodford Village Hall - retain venue as refurbishments planned will make the necessary improvements identified in the SCOPE report. In a letter received from Judy Richardson on behalf of Dodford Village Hall Committee, it was confirmed the work was scheduled to start in 2008.
- 5.5 New Song Community Church, Broad Street, Bromsgrove - no alternative venue identified. It is therefore recommended that we adopt the recommendations made in SCOPE report to overcome issues. Clearly signpost at the entrance steps at the front advising of the side entrance and, as far as is reasonable, to conduct polling as close as possible to the stage as this area has the shallowest gradient.
- 5.6 Romsley and Hunnington Cricket Club, Bromsgrove Road, Romsley, no suitable alternative available. Investigate the improvements, in conjunction with the Cricket Club, suggested within the SCOPE report to lay paving stones and, subject to agreement and cost, make the necessary improvements.
- 5.7 Wake Green AFC, Drawbridge Road, Majors Green. Alternative venue, Shirley Community Church, investigated and, although good alternative, it is not available to us. It is recommended that we retain venue but keep it under review as side ramp considered dangerous and this should be brought to the attention of the owners.
- 5.8 Citroen Garage, Birmingham Road, Bordesley - complaints were received at the local elections in May 2007 regarding the lack of parking facilities at the site and dangerous access onto a busy road. An alternative venue was investigated, The Travel Lodge, Redditch. They can provide an excellent stand alone facility with easy, safe parking and good access. They are happy to accommodate us, at a reasonable rate of £125.00 for the day. The Travel Lodge is just across the road from the garage but does fall outside of our District boundary, however the legislation states that a polling place should be in the area, except where special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside the district. It is recommended that the venue is changed to the Travel Lodge.
- 5.9 Two representations were made regarding the mobile units used as polling stations. These are only used as a last resort when permanent buildings are unavailable in an area. At the last election, mobile units with integrated generators and toilet facilities were tried. These proved to be too small and we have instructed our suppliers that we wish to revert to the larger units with two doors wherever possible enabling an entrance and an exit facility.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None. The changes to the polling stations can be met from the current budget provision.

7. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 In accordance with the requirements of section 18C(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

8. **COUNCIL OBJECTIVES**

8.1 Helping to meet the needs of our customers by eliminating discrimination and promoting equality.

9. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

9.1 There are no significant risks associated with the details included in this report.

10. **CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Changes of polling stations will be identified to the elector by a special note included on their polling card.

11. **EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 By addressing the issues with regard to access to the Polling Stations the Council is improving access to all areas of the Community.

12. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Procurement Issues	None
Personnel Implications	None
Governance/Performance Management	None
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998	None
Policy	None
Environmental	None

13. **OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT**

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	Yes
Corporate Director (Services)	No
Assistant Chief Executive	No
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Yes

Head of Organisational Development & HR	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

14. **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 SCOPE Disability Access Audit of Polling Stations  
Appendix 2 Polling District and Polling Station Maps

15. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Representations from the consultation exercise.

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