

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

17 March 2016

Polling Place Alterations 2016

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Margaret Sherrey
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal & Democratic Services
Wards Affected	Sanders Park, Drakes Cross, Hollywood and Wythall West
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 need to be made to Polling Places in advance of the 5 May Elections. These are changes to the agreed Polling Districts and Polling Places review made in 2014.
- 1.2 The recommendations below set out Officers' proposals arising from investigations and Members comments.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 that the polling place for the electors in Polling District SAC be moved to New Song Community Church and reviewed once the retirement village is completed;
- 2.2 that the polling places for electors in Polling Districts DRA, HWA and WTC be moved to Woodrush Academy Community Hub and reviewed after the 5 May poll;
- 2.3 that the review to be carried out and agreed by the (Acting) Returning Officer and Ward Members; and
- 2.4 that the decisions of the Committee take effect immediately.

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.

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- 3.2 If a portable building is used costs increase significantly, an average portable polling station costs around £1,500 to hire.

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 A full boundary review for Bromsgrove was carried out in 2014.

This report considers two areas where there are potential problems with polling places:

- a) The Masonic Hall, Churchfields – Sanders Park Ward
- b) The Woodrush Youth Centre – Drakes Cross Ward and St Mary's Wythall Parish Church Hall (Coppice Primary Academy) – Hollywood and Wythall East Wards

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A. The Masonic Hall, Churchfields

- 3.6 Officers have been notified that the Masonic Hall in Churchfields is due to be demolished before the elections due to be held in May 2016.
- 3.7 Officers have visited the nearby New Song Community Church as a possible solution. The Community Church is already used as a polling station and could accommodate the 558 electors that currently attend the Masonic Hall.
- 3.8 Members have been consulted and the following comment was received: "Using New Song is a temporary solution for Sanders Park Ward. It is not too far to walk if you are fit, but may be a problem for the more elderly residents that are in the Churchfields area. Other arrangements may have to be made in future when the retirement village is built and it might be good if a room there could be considered or a cabin placed on the site."
- 3.9 It is proposed that the Polling Place for electors of Polling District SAC be the New Song Community Church, with a view to review once the retirement village is completed. This could be delegated to the (Acting) Returning Officer and Ward Member to complete.

B. The Woodrush Youth Centre – Drakes Cross Ward and St Mary's Wythall Parish Church Hall (Coppice Primary Academy) – Hollywood and Wythall East Wards

- 3.10 In the 2014 review a number of electors were moved from Park Hall polling place to The Woodrush Youth Centre on Shawhurst Lane; the main rationale for this was that the Woodrush Youth Centre was closer to where most of the electors lived.
- 3.11 The Woodrush Youth Centre has now moved to the newly built Woodrush Academy Community Hub (the Hub). The Hub is on the other side of the Academy and shares an entrance and some car parking facilities with St Mary's Wythall Parish Church Hall (St Mary's).
- 3.12 Concerns have been raised that the car parking facilities will not be able to cope with electors going to the Hub and St Mary's.
- 3.13 The Elections Office has also received communication that St Mary's will not be available for the EU Referendum on 23 June.

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- 3.14 Members have been consulted and the following comments have been received: "I really do think consideration should be given to reinstating Park Hall as a polling station to serve the relevant electors in Drakes Cross and Wythall West wards."
- 3.15 It is proposed that the polling place for DRA Polling District of Drakes Cross Ward, WTC Polling District of Wythall East Ward and HWA Polling District of Hollywood Ward be The Hub for the Election on 5 May and the situation monitored by the Presiding Officers attending.
- 3.16 It is further proposed that if there are problems on 5 May that the (Acting) Returning Officer in conjunction with Ward Members considers Park Hall as a Polling Place.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.17 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 Choice of Polling Place / Polling Station should not give rise to significant grounds of complaint which might put election results at risk of challenge.
- 4.2 Changes need to be agreed at the meeting as Poll Cards are being distributed on 24 March 2016.

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.

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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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