

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

10 September 2019

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillors May, Leader and, Denaro Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Ward(s) Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	Part of consultation
Not a Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The report sets out the results of the initial consultation, the comments of the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) and the findings of the Electoral Services team to the formal review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, as required under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, and as based on Electoral Commission Guidance (a copy of the guidance is included in appendix 3).
- 1.2 The initial consultation ran from 17 July to 28 August all submissions and summaries are recorded in the various appendices below. Polling Station Inspectors reviewed all of the current polling stations within the area at the Local and Euro Parliamentary Elections in May, officers have considered the suitability of these and any other recommendations, including verbal discussions with Elected Members and members of the public. They have also assessed any changes that maybe needed to Polling Districts. The ARO's comments are included within appendix 1.
- 1.3 The proposals below, as detailed in the attached Appendices, set out Officers' proposals arising from the Review and initial consultation. Members of the Committee are asked to consider the proposals and make recommendations for the final consultation running from 12 September to 7 October. The results of these will inform the final results of the review.
- 1.4 Once complete certain people or organisations may appeal to the Electoral Commission to have changes made if they feel the Local Authority hasn't met reasonable expectations of the electorate or taken into account the needs for accessible polling stations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 that the proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places in appendix 1 (as amended) be published for final consultation.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 Subject to the Committee's final decisions, there may be some minor financial implications for the Council which arise directly from this review, but which can 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. Extra budget would be required if Members choose to use additional temporary portable buildings.

Legal Implications

- 3.3 The Review is undertaken as required under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and Electoral Administration Act 2013, and in accordance with relevant Electoral Commission Guidance.
- 3.4
 - a) Authority to set Polling District boundaries and to designate Polling Places rests with the Council or relevant Committee (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.
- 3.5 "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

'Starting Points' for selection of Polling Places/ Stations

- 3.6 Polling Stations located within publicly funded premises (such as schools and local authority meeting rooms) are generally preferred as their availability can be

relied upon and costs are low (the ARO has statutory powers to requisition such premises, which are generally well located and accessible). However, the schools themselves and pupils' parents are often understandably reluctant to accept their use as Polling Stations because of the impact of closures on their activities or on childcare.

If schools are designated, First Schools are normally selected because of reduced impact on important examination processes for older pupils.

- 3.7 Second choice for Polling Stations would be private venues. However these have the disadvantage of being more costly, as more commercial fees may be charged. The ARO cannot guarantee their availability, as owners/managers of premises have the right to refuse hire at any time, without explanation.

- 3.8 When there are no other appropriate alternatives, portable buildings may be used for Polling Stations. However, these are significantly more expensive than other premises and may often provide inadequate accommodation and accessibility for voters with disabilities.

- 3.9 As a rough guide, an average Portable Polling Station costs around £1,500 to hire, heat & light (installation of Portable Unit plus portable toilet / provision of power/generator, but costs would increase dramatically if a supplier other than the Council's current one had to be used.)

The equivalent average cost of private premises would be between £200 - £400 and premises provided via public funding charge only for additional heat, light and caretaking and therefore only around £100 - £200 each time.

- 3.10 There are other logistical considerations relating to the siting of a portable building, the delivery and collection require a team from the Council's depot to be on site and to maintain the generator connection.

Key Issues

- A. Proposed Polling District Boundaries and Polling Places.

- 3.11 Appendix 1 to the report, together with the maps where relevant, detail Polling Districts and associated electoral areas, and the proposals arising from the consultation, together with consultee comments and responses to those comments arising from the consultation.

- 3.12 The final column in Appendix 1 details recommendations and comments from the ARO for the Committee's consideration.

- B. Polling Places beyond Polling District/Ward boundaries

3.13 In a number of cases, no suitable premises have been identified within relevant Polling Districts/Wards, and therefore proposals include Polling Places situated outside Polling District/Ward boundaries. In one very exceptional case a Polling Place is also beyond the District boundary (Wythall Walkers Heath Polling District (WWC) in Wythall West Ward and use of Broadmeadow Junior School, which is shared with Birmingham City Council).

3.14 In drawing up such proposals, priority has been given in every case to the best solution for electors.

C. Areas where more details are required

3.15 Further, more detailed explanation of proposals may be required in the following instances.

a) Catshill North and South Wards – Some electors in Catshill North have been confused by having to pass the polling station for Catshill South at the Methodist Church Hall to get to their polling station at the village hall. The proposals from consultation help dispel this confusion. Catshill South electors would go to the Catshill Social Club which is in the Ward and the Polling District. Catshill North electors would go to the Methodist Church Hall so avoiding the parking problems at the village hall.

b) Cofton Hackett – A new village hall is being built in Cofton Hackett as part of the development on the old Longbridge Site. There is considerable housing development in this Parish with over 300 dwellings proposed over the next five years. Cofton Hackett has submitted a request to use both the old and new village halls. Members need to consider whether two polling stations are required and if so where the boundary of a new polling district would run.

c) Perryfields - future developments/electorate growth at Perryfields will be substantial by the end of the 5-year term of this Review. Officers have considered some options for the future but the Sidemoor First School remains the best option once the development is complete. No change is currently recommended but officers feel this should be kept under review as the development progresses.

Customer/Equalities and Diversity Implications

3.7 The Council's Customer Care / Equalities 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 Places and Stations.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

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- 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. It is preferable where possible not to use a portable building where a generator is required.
- 4.4 In terms of Human Resources risks, the ARO must provide adequate levels and standards of staffing to secure proper polling arrangements.

5. APPENDICES

- 1 Proposals for final consultation including AROs comments
- 2 Maps
- 3 Electoral Commission Guidance

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Previously published Polling Stations Review reports / Minutes.
- Relevant Statutory provisions.

7. KEY

Bromsgrove Returning Officer, 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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