

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, 10TH SEPTEMBER 2019, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors M. Glass (Chairman), S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming and M. Middleton

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

7/19 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. C. R. Mallett and S. G. Hession.

8/19 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

9/19 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the electoral Matters Committee held on 15th July 2019 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 15th July 2019 be approved as a correct record.

10/19 **REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2019**

The Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and explained that 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 based on the Electoral Commission Guidance as detailed at Appendix 3 to the report.

Members were further informed that the initial consultation had run from 17th July to 28th August 2019, all submissions and summaries had been recorded in Appendix 1 to the report.

Polling Station Inspectors had reviewed all of the current polling stations within the area during the Local and Euro Parliamentary Elections in

May 2019; officers had considered the suitability of these and any other recommendations, which included verbal discussions with Elected Members and members of the public. Officers had also assessed any changes that may be needed to Polling Districts and the Acting Returning Officer's (ARO's) comments, all of which had been included in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee was asked to consider the proposals made and to make any recommendations for the final consultation which would run from 12th September to 7th October 2019.

The Electoral Services Manager drew Members' attention to paragraphs 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 in the report, which detailed the 'Starting Points' for the selection of Polling Places / Stations.

Members were further informed that any changes agreed must be likely to be sustainable for a reasonable number of years, as frequent changes of Polling Stations were not helpful for electors and undermined their knowledge of, and confidence in, electoral systems.

In terms of environmental risks, it was of course preferable that choice of Polling Station location could help minimise unnecessary additional journeys by motorised vehicles. It was preferable where possible not to use a portable building where a generator was required.

Members then considered each Ward and the changes / comments received, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report; with the following being agreed by all Members of the Committee:

**Avoncroft AVB** – Members supported the Electoral Officers change submission and the ARO's comments to move away from using a portable building at Morrison's and agreed with using Stoke Prior Village Hall as a shared Polling Station (with **Avoncroft AVA**). Members however did raise some concerns with regard to the size of the car park at the village hall.

**Barnt Green & Hopwood BHA** – Members were informed that access to Hopwood Village Hall was poor for disabled / elderly residents as there was no clear step free footpath. The costs associated with using the suggested new venue, namely the Westmead Hotel, remained approximately the same. Members therefore supported the Electoral Services and ARO's comments to move the Polling Station to the Westmead Hotel which had better access.

**Catshill North CAN** – Members were informed that access to the entrance of Catshill Village Hall (in order to access the rear car park) was difficult. There was very little difference in location if the Polling Station was moved to Catshill Methodist Centre. Therefore Members supported the Electoral Officers change submission and the ARO's comments and agreed with moving the Polling Station to Catshill

Methodist Church, provided that **Catshill South CAS** Polling Station was moved to Catshill Social Club.

**Catshill South CAS** – Members were informed that moving the Polling Station to Catshill Social Club would stop any confusion, as mentioned by the local Councillor, and that the move would make it clearer for the electorate. Catshill Social Club was within the polling district. Members therefore supported the Electoral Officers change submission, the comments received from the district Councillor and the ARO's comments; and agreed with the move, pending permission being sought from Catshill Social Club Committee.

**Cofton COA** – Members noted the change submission from Cofton Hackett Parish Council to move the Polling Station to the new Cofton Village Hall as an additional Polling Station. However, after considering the comments received from Electoral Services and the ARO, the Committee agreed with 'no change'. Officers needed to establish how many properties were being built on this site before considering a new polling district. Also the new village hall was not ready, so not yet open. Officers agreed to keep the progress of the new village hall under review and assess the needs of Cofton Hackett at a later date.

**Hollywood HWA** – Members were informed that a district Councillor had suggested moving the Polling Station to the Hub at Woodrush. In May 2017 a Polling Station Questionnaire indicated that electors were happy with Park Hall. Members noted the findings of the May 2017 Polling Station Questionnaire and the ARO's comments that no change was required and that it was commented that there was sufficient parking at Park Hall. Therefore the Committee agreed with no change.

**Lowes Hill LWA** – Officers clarified that there would be no access impact should the Polling Station be moved from the portable building to the changing rooms at Barnsley Hall Road. Members therefore supported the Electoral Officers change submission and the ARO's comments that the Polling Station be moved to the changing rooms, as a trial, with a view to reverting back to a portable building should the changing rooms be found to be unsuitable.

**Perryfields PFB** – The Committee agreed with the Electoral Services and ARO's comments that currently no change was required. Officers would keep up to date with the progress of the new development at Perryfields and review the Polling Station location once the development was complete.

**Rock Hill RHA** - Electoral Officers were looking, in general, at moving away from using portable buildings, so had suggested moving the Polling Station from the portable building at Morrisons to Bromsgrove and District Indoor Bowls Club Limited (foyer or canteen area). The indoor bowls centre was a much better space. Members were informed that electors would have to access the bowls club via the road to the car park. It was noted that the car park was large and well lit and there was

a separate entrance to the canteen. Officers would have to contact the bowls centre Board for a quotation and to seek approval, but no problems were envisaged. Members therefore supported the Electoral Officers change submission and the ARO's comments and agreed with moving the Polling Station to Bromsgrove and District Indoor Bowls Club Limited (canteen area); pending permission and a quotation being sought from the bowls centre Board.

**Rock Hill RHB** – Members were informed that the current Polling Station, the Court Leet public house, was not always available due to the nature of the business. Electoral Officers had suggested moving to St. Andrews Church Hall as the distances for the electorate were not that different and electors would not have to cross a busy road. Members therefore supported the Electoral Officers change submission and the ARO's comments and agreed that the Polling Station be moved to St Andrews Church Hall.

**Rubery North RNA** - Members were further informed that, as detailed in the report, if schools were designated as polling stations; First Schools were normally selected because of reduced impact on important examination processes for older pupils. However, concerns had been raised by the current venue, Holywell Primary School, that there was some disruption to children and parents.

Taking the comments received from Holywell Primary School into account and looking at other available venues, Rubery Leisure Centre had been suggested as a suitable Polling Station. Officers informed the Committee that Rubery Leisure Centre was not in the polling district, as was the school; however, Rubery Leisure Centre was a good venue with adequate lighting outside. There was limited pedestrian access via a small footpath, but electors would not have to cross a busy road. The leisure centre was well lit but was accessed via a lane and officers were unsure as to the lighting on the lane. Rubery Social Club (which had been suggested as a venue for **Rubery RSA**), was also considered by the Committee as this was nearer for electors. Members therefore agreed with moving the Polling Station to Rubery Social Club.

**Rubery South RSA** – Members were informed that moving from the Memorial Club was a change submission from Electoral Officers following complaints received from a district Councillor in the past, with regard to entry problems there. Electoral Services had therefore viewed and were suggesting moving the Polling Station to Rubery Social Club. The club had good access points and plenty of space, however, parking was limited. Officers were informed that the newly elected Ward Councillor had liaised with electors and that after speaking with them he would suggest keeping the Polling Station at the Memorial Club. Having considered all of the information received from officers and information on behalf of the Ward Councillor, Members agreed that the Polling Station be kept at the Memorial Club.

**Slideslow SSA and SSB** – Members were reminded that, as stated earlier, if schools were designated as polling stations; First Schools were normally selected because of reduced impact on important examination processes for older pupils.

However, concerns had been raised by the current venue, Finstall First School, that there was some disruption to children and parents and that they would like to see the Polling Station moved. Alternative venues were looked at which included St. Godwolds Church Hall and Finstall Village Hall. St. Godwolds Church Hall was already used as a Polling Station and would not accommodate another Polling District. Finstall Village Hall would be adequate for current usage but would not accommodate any extra electors. Members therefore supported the Electoral Services and ARO's comments and agreed that Finstall First School, Polling Station continued to be used whilst officers scoped the possibility of using Aston Fields Middle School and if the school could accommodate two Polling Stations.

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** – Members were informed that the current venue Wythall Village Hall had presented some parking problems. The district Councillor had suggested and was happy to support a move to Park Hall to alleviate the parking problems experienced at Wythall Village Hall. Officers highlighted that there were only 303 electors who were widely spaced in a rural area. Park Hall was closer for those electorates with adequate parking facilities. Members therefore supported the district councillor, Electoral Services and ARO's comments and agreed with moving the Polling Station to Park Hall.

Following on from the discussion and taking into account the amendments as detailed in the preamble above it was

**RESOLVED** that

- a) Appendix 1 to the report be updated with the amendments as detailed in the preamble above, and
- b) that the proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Places in Appendix 1 (as amended) be published for final consultation.

The meeting closed at 6.44 p.m.

Chairman