

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 consultations, 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 were recorded and published on the Council website and at the Council offices. Polling Station Inspectors had already reviewed all of the current polling stations within the area at the Local and Euro Parliamentary Elections in May, officers, including the ARO have considered the suitability of these and any other recommendations, including verbal discussions with Elected Members and members of the public. They also assessed any changes that maybe needed to Polling Districts.
- 1.3 The results of the consultation and the recommendations of officers and the ARO were considered by the committee at its meeting held on 10 September. These formed the final recommendations for consultation before the Committee concludes the review and sets the new Polling Districts and Places. These recommendations with an option for more suggestions were opened for consultation on 12 September and closed on 7 October. Members of the Committee are asked to consider any further proposals and finalise the review.
- 1.4 A full review document will be published at the end of November giving all the polling districts and places agreed by the committee. This will also record any further and outstanding work required on polling districts and places. Any changes made will be incorporated into the revised electoral register which will be published on 1 December 2019.
- 1.5 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 final proposals in respect of Polling Places, as contained in Appendix 1 (as amended), be approved; and**
- 2.2 that the decisions of the Committee in respect of 2.1 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.**

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

Key Issues

A. Proposed Polling District Boundaries and Polling Places.

3.6 Appendix 1 to the report details 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 recommendations of the last meeting of this Committee.

B. Issues arising from consultation on recommendations

- 3.7 Polling District COA Cofton Hackett – The Parish Council sent a submission informing the Committee that the new Parish Village Hall is now open. Members will need to decide if to move polling from the old to the new village hall.
- 3.8 Polling District RSA Rubery South – A District Councillor (not Ward Member) would like RSA reviewed again with a view to move to Rubery Social Club due to the current polling station having *“to be forced to give access that enable people to vote without having to go through people drinking alcohol (the last two elections)”*.
- 3.9 Polling Districts SSA and SSB Slideslow North and Slideslow South – Officers were asked to review Aston Fields Middle School as an option. The school was not interested in hosting, however Rigby Hall Special School would be willing to act as a polling place. Officers are confirm this could be used as a polling place, however it is outside of both polling districts.
- 3.10 Polling District WWA Headley Heath – Several concerns have been raised in regard to moving the polling place for electors from Wythall Village Hall to Park Hall.
- a) It has been raised that the current polling place is in the Ward whereas the proposed one is outside it. This is true, however guidance only refers to the wherever possible the polling place should be in the polling district. Neither the suggested or current polling place is in the polling district.
 - b) There were concerns that people that normally walk to the polling place would no longer be able to do so. WWA is a very rural polling district and it is unlikely that many electors currently walk to the village hall. 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.

In terms of electors in WWA officers considered two properties one in the centre of the polling district and one towards the south of the polling district. The first 'Gay Hill Farm' would take 35 minutes to walk the 1.9 miles to the village hall and 25 mins to walk the 1.4 miles to Park Hall. The second, 'Highfield Farm' would take 21 minutes to walk the 1.1 miles to the village hall and 11 mins to walk the 0.6 miles to Park Hall.

- c) Submissions suggest the Committee running Park Hall were thinking of charging for parking. If this were to happen both polling districts DRA and HWA would also be affected.

Customer/Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.11 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

- 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 Recommendations for final consultation including submissions made
- 2 Map of polling place option for polling districts SSA and SSB.
- 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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