

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

27 February 2020

Polling Place Alterations 2020

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillors K May, Leader and, G Denaro Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Service - Legal, Democratic & Property Services
Wards Affected	Barnt Green & Hopwood, Belbroughton & Romsley, Slideslow,
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 to polling places may need to be considered in advance of the May Elections 2020.
- 1.2 A review should follow the stages produced in the Electoral Commission guidance however due to time scales there would only be time to conduct one round of consultations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **that if the Committee decide to consider the change of a polling place for Polling Districts SSA/SSB and BHA a consultation takes place from 28 February until 19 March 2020;**
- 2.2 **that a consultation takes place from 28 February until 19 March 2020 on a new polling place for Polling District BRD.**

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.
- 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.

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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 As a result of the polling places review held last year and the General Election held 12 December 2019 officers have received a number of requests to change some polling places within the District.
- 3.6 There is not a great amount of time to hold a full review for these requests as poll cards for the PCC election on 7 May are due to be sent out on 25 March. It is therefore proposed that each request is considered and consulted on for a few weeks and Members make a final decision at a further meeting.
- 3.7 There are three polling places to consider which are set out below. In addition there was one complaint from an elector regarding Stoke Prior Village Hall. As there were no other complaints it is thought that this should not be reviewed at the current time.

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- 3.8 **Polling District SSA/SSB currently Finstall First School:** Members of the Committee have asked for this polling place to be kept under review.

Officers met with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors before the General Election who asked for the polling place to be reviewed again. The school has made a couple of suggestions:

- a) The Bromsgrove Rugby Club on Finstall Road. This is not in the polling district and electors have to cross the railway to get to the building.
- b) St Godwalds Church Hall. Again this is not in the polling district. Officers are going to visit this again to assess if both rooms of the Church Hall could be used. It should be noted that if this is chosen the combined electorate is over 5,000 attending that hall.

District and County Councillors have been asked for their views regarding this polling place.

- 3.9 **Polling District BHA currently the Westmead Hotel:** The Committee decided to move the polling place from Hopwood Village Hall to Westmead Hotel as part of the 2019 review. The main reason for the move was the access issues the village hall had.

Members of the Hopwood Village Hall Committee have approached officers and their District Councillor asking that the Committee review their decision as building works have now resolved the main issue. Members of the Village Hall Committee also pointed out that it is a community venue and polling gave people the opportunity to view the hall and make them aware that it can be booked for functions.

The District Councillor supports the return of the polling place to the village hall.

It should be noted that many electors, polling staff and the polling station inspector found the hotel to be a very good venue for polling. In addition the Westmead Hotel has been booked for 7 May elections and the Council may incur a cost if the booking is cancelled.

- 3.10 **Polling District BRD currently Clent Parish Hall:** Officers have received a communication from the Trustees of Clent Parish Hall that they no longer want the hall used as a polling place as it disrupts the regular users.

Officers would like to find a suitable polling place for the Committee without having to use Clent Primary School but if no other venue is available there are statutory powers to requisition a room in the school

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for the purpose of polling. With this in mind officers have written to the Headteacher pointing this out and asking for help to find an alternative venue.

District and County Councillors have been asked if they know of any premises within the polling district that could act as host for a polling place.

- 3.11 The (Acting) Returning Officer must make a submission regarding current and any proposed polling stations.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.12 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 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.
- 4.4 In terms of Human Resources risks, the (Acting) Returning Officer must provide adequate levels and standards of staffing to secure proper polling arrangements.

5. APPENDICES

None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Electoral Commission Guidance.

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7. KEY

Bromsgrove Returning Officer, Mr 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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