

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

27TH FEBRUARY 2020, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors M. Glass (Chairman), R. J. Deeming, L. C. R. Mallett and M. Middleton

Officers: Mrs. C. Felton, Mr D. Whitney and Ms. A. Scarce

15/19 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Colella and Councillor R. Hunter. Councillor J. King was expected as substitute for Councillor Hunter, but unfortunately was delayed and not able to attend.

16/19 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

17/19 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 24th October 2019 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 24th October 2019 be approved as a correct record.

18/19 **POLLING PLACES REPORT**

The Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and explained that the review which had been undertaken in 2019 had been interrupted by the calling of a General Election in December and since then a number of requests had been received in respect of changes to polling places. These were considered individual and the ensuing discussions detailed below:

Polling District SSA/SSB currently Finstall First School

It was noted that the Head Teacher from Finstall First School was present in the public gallery and was invited to join Members at the table during the discussion.

The Electoral Services Manager reminded Members that there had been a request from the School in recent years to no longer be used as a polling place. Prior to the General Election the Head Teacher had been

asked by the Chair of the School Governors to look at this matter again. For obvious reasons this had not been possible due to the General Election being called, but the matter was now being considered. The Electoral Services Manager explained that there had been a number of suggestions which had been considered, including the Rugby Club, which had proved to be unsuitable and St Godwald's Church Hall. Whilst the back room at the Church Hall was small, it could be used in conjunction with the main room. However, the parking was not particularly good. A statement from the Head Teacher had been provided to all Members of the Committee.

Following presentation of this section of the report Members discussed a number of areas in more detail:

- The proximity of St Godwald's Church Hall to the polling district. It was confirmed that it was further than the School and that the Rugby Club was even further.
- St Godwald's were willing to accommodate the May 2020 election, which was in respect of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).
- It was suggested that as the May election would not necessarily see a large turnout, there would be an opportunity to see what the impact of holding it there would be and whether it was a viable option going forward.

The Electoral Services Manager advised that there were three options available to Members:

1. No change.
2. Do a short consultation to gauge people's views on the alternatives. However, it was noted that this would only be for 2 weeks, which was a very short time.
3. Use St Godwald's Church Hall for the May 2020 PCC election as a trial, canvass the views of those attending with a short questionnaire to see whether it was suitable and for the Committee to meet later in the year to make a decision.

Members asked a number of further questions before making a decision:

- Whether Aston Fields Social Club had been considered – it was confirmed that the parking was limited, and it was further away. New Road Methodist Hall was also suggested as an alternative and it was agreed that this would be something to consider in the future.
- Whether any feedback had been received from the Ward Councillor, it was confirmed that they had noted that the School wanted the polling place moved but had made no further comment.
- St Godwald's Church Hall was on the border of the polling district and wherever possible it should be within the polling district.

When invited to speak the Head Teacher asked what funding was available to cover the cost of hiring alternative accommodation. It was explained that the Cabinet Office provided funding for the PCC, with the Council making a re-charge. It was accepted that the Cabinet Office were keen for schools to be used as they were the most cost-effective option, however it was appreciated that there was a conflict between the two Government departments. The Head Teacher appreciated that it was difficult to find somewhere suitable within the Ward that was a good location and suggested that the School would be happy to be used occasionally for elections where a greater turnout was expected.

RESOLVED that St Godwald's Church Hall be used as a polling place for the May 2020 Police and Crime Commissioner's election and attendees be canvassed for their views as to its suitability, with a review taking place later in the year.

Polling District BHA currently the Westmead Hotel

The Committee was reminded that the use of the Westmead Hotel had been agreed in 2019 due to access issues at the Village Hall. Members of the Hopwood Village Hall Committee were asking that the Committee review its decision as building works had resolved this issue. However, it was noted that this work would not commence until 16th March, which was short notice for the May 2020 elections.

Feedback from those attending the Westmead Hotel at the last election had been positive and it was therefore suggested that the Westmead Hotel be used for May 2020 and a further review of the Village Hall take place once the building works had been completed.

Members questioned whether there was a difference in the cost of the two venues and it was confirmed that the Westmead Hotel had agreed to charge the same rate as the Village Hall when initially approached. It was noted that the Village Hall were keen for it to be used in order for local residents to see what facilities it had to offer to the local community. Members acknowledged this and agreed that the Westmead Hotel be used for this election and the use of the Village Hall to be reconsidered when the building works had been completed.

RESOLVED that the Westmead Hotel be used as a polling place for the May 2020 Police and Crime Commissioner's election with a review taking place in respect of using the Village Hall following completion of the disability access works.

Polling District BRD currently Clent Parish Hall

The Electoral Services Manager advised that this was a more urgent matter as the Trustees of Clent Parish Hall had advised that they no longer wished to be used as a polling place. He had asked if they would reconsider and offered to review the price paid, but the Trustees were more concerned about the disruption and inconvenience to its regular

uses and would not reconsider. The District and County Councillors had been consulted, but a response had not been received. The only remaining option was therefore Clent Primary School, who were unhappy with this, but understood the situation.

Members discussed whether in the long term there were any other options that could be considered, and the Electoral Services Manager confirmed that there was the Clent Community Club which could be explored in the future.

RESOLVED that Clent Primary School be used as a polling place.

19/19

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

It was confirmed that at this present time there was no need for a further meeting to be arranged.

The meeting closed at 6.18 p.m.

Chairman