

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

23 February 2024

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**Polling Places Alterations 2024**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillors May, Leader, and Hotham, Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Report Author	Job Title: Electoral Services Manager, Darren Whitney Contact email: darren.whitney@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 881650
Wards Affected	Aston Fields, Catshill North, Cofton, Lickey Hills
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	N/A
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

**1. RESOLUTIONS**

- 1.1 **that if the Committee decide to change a polling place within the report a short consultation takes place; and**
- 1.2 **that the changes take effect for polls from 2 May 2024.**

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The report sets out where changes to polling places may need to be considered in advance of the May Elections 2024.
- 2.2 As a result of the statutory polling places review held last year and some requests from polling places the Committee are asked to consider a number of changes to polling places before the May elections.
- 2.3 There are three polling places to consider which relate to polling districts ASA/ASB, CAN and COB/LHA which are set out below section 6 below.

**3. 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.
- 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 which will be met by existing budgets.
- 3.3 There are no scheduled local elections in 2024 so costs for Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May will be attributable to Central Government.

**4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 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, the Equality Act 2010 and the Elections Act 2022.
- 4.2 "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."
- 4.3 The Elections Act 2022 has placed new considerations for Local Authorities in regard to polling places. Key considerations are accessibility and checking voter's ID to ensure polling stations have suitable space to allow polling station staff to check documents and

provide a privacy screen or separate area for confidential conversations.

**5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS**

**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

- 5.1 This report deals with statutory functions but relates to the strategic purpose of an effective and sustainable council.

**Climate Change Implications**

- 5.2 It is preferable that choice of polling place location can help minimise unnecessary additional journeys by motorised vehicles.
- 5.3 Emissions and carbon footprint should be reduced as far as possible.

**6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 Accessibility for members of minority or disadvantaged groups is a key issue in the selection of suitable Polling Stations. The (Acting) Returning Officer will have a general responsibility to provide equipment to support people with a range of disabilities in the polling station.

**Operational Implications**

- 6.2 Polling District **ASA (Aston Fields North), ASB (Aston Fields South)** – At the meeting of this Committee on 7 December 2023 it was resolved to continue the use of St Godwold’s Church Hall as the polling place, although it was noted that officers were investigating the use of the Salvation Army Hall on Carlyle Road. Officers have now visited the hall and confirm it suitable as a venue. The owners are agreeable to it being used as a polling station in the future.
- 6.3 Polling District **CAN (Woodrow)** – All of the suitable rooms at Catshill Methodist Church have been booked for May and the owners are not willing to move these bookings. Officers have approached Catshill Village Hall who are keen to accommodate polling. The Village Hall is a good venue which has been used in the past for polling. The one drawback is that it has limited parking, however parking is available on the opposite side of the road.

6.4 Polling Districts **COB/LHA (Lickey/Licky Monument)** – The current polling place of the Trinity Centre (Lickey Parish Hall) serves polling districts in both Cofton and Lickey Hills District Wards. Due to a nursery held within the hall the Centre does not want polling to take place there. Officers are still in discussions with the Centre but wanted to raise the issue with the Committee. It should be noted that the Centre is a long standing polling place and electors are very familiar with it.

6.5 There are a number of options for consideration:

The first, Holy Trinity Church, which was suggested by the Centre as an alternative. This is located on the opposite side of the road to the Centre. Officers have visited the church and although the church is a reasonable space for polling, access and parking are problematic especially at night. A full health and safety audit has not yet taken place. Additional payments would be required for heating and lighting for the church making it a relatively expensive venue.

The second and third options are currently being investigated by officers. These are both further up Rose Hill from the Trinity Centre. One is making use of the NASUWT Education Centre and the other is The Old Rose and Crown Hotel.

There is a fourth option of using the Lickey Hills Primary School as this sits within polling district COB and is closest to polling district LHA.

6.6 In terms of the use of schools for polling: Government Departments have always advocated, via legislation and guidance, the use of schools as polling stations and this has been further emphasised in recent draft guidance to Returning Officers (ROs) released on 31 October in a section on public buildings that:

“Schools which receive public funding are included in this and should also be made available to ROs free of charge. However, we also appreciate that over recent years schools have been more reluctant to offer rooms to ROs for the purposes of running polls.

If the polling day is known well in advance of the election, schools can decide in liaison with the local authority to set those days as inset days to avoid disruption.”

However, in this instance consideration would need to be given regarding the timescales involved for the use of Lickey Hills Primary School.

- 6.7 There is not a great amount of time to hold a review for these requests as poll cards for the PCC election on 2 May are due to be sent out on 25 March. It is therefore proposed that each request is considered and the Committee decide whether a consultation is required.

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 Choice of Polling Place / Polling Station should not give rise to significant grounds of complaint which might put election results at risk of challenge.

**8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Relevant statutory provisions

**9. REPORT SIGN OFF**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name and Job Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Hotham	14 February 2024
Head of Service	Claire Felton	13 February 2024
Financial Services		
Legal Services		