

REPORT OF SARAH PEARCE, LICENSING AND ELECTORAL SERVICES MANAGER

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report back to Members on the feasibility of the proposed changes to polling arrangements, following comments received from the review of polling districts and polling places.

2. SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A review was undertaken last year and several proposals for change were put forward to Members at their meeting on 23rd November 2011 (attached at Appendix A for information).
- 2.2 It was agreed that it would be useful for the Acting Returning Officer and her team to put together more information for Members to consider before they make their final recommendations.
- 2.3 The alternative premises were visited to assess whether their facilities were suitable, which involved checking access arrangements for all electors and assessing how many polling stations could potentially be accommodated.
- 2.4 Enquiries were also made via the booking clerks or relevant persons to ascertain their availability.

3. DEFINITION OF TERMS

- 3.1 **Polling district:** the area created by the division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors.

Polling place: the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.

Polling station: the room or building where the poll takes place.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 **Tamworth Constituency - Ward No. 23 Mease and Tame**

Parish of Elford - (Polling District JA)

Elford Village Hall could accommodate 1 polling station and become the new designated polling place, as an alternative to the Howard C.P. School.

4.2 There would however be an additional cost for hire of the Village Hall as there was previously no charge for the school.

4.3 The map at Appendix B shows the location of the polling stations - current and proposed - and would affect the 506 electors residing in the parish.

4.4 **Lichfield Constituency - Ward No. 18 Leomansley**

Parish of Lichfield (Leomansley Ward) - (Polling Districts RM & RN)

Darwin Park Community Hall could potentially accommodate 2-3 polling stations. This could result in reducing Martin Heath Hall and Staffordshire University campus by 1 polling station each, by redistributing electors who currently vote there to an alternative station at the Community Hall.

4.5 However the overall cost for hire of premises would increase as Martin Heath Hall and the University campus will continue to be used.

4.6 If Members are minded to accept this proposal then the polling district boundaries for the Leomansley Ward will need to be substantially revised. Therefore it would be proposed to do this prior to publication of the new register and would be effective for the forthcoming Police and Crime Commissioner elections scheduled for 15th November 2012.

4.7 Any new buildings or polling districts created will need to be designated as the new polling places.

4.8 The map at Appendix C shows the location of Darwin Park Community Hall in relation to the properties on Darwin Park likely to be affected and where they currently vote.

4.9 **Lichfield Constituency – Ward No. 7 Chase Terrace**

Parish of Burntwood (Chase Terrace Ward part) - (Polling District CJ)

The Head teacher at Chase Terrace Primary School is strongly against the proposal to move the polling station from St John's Community Church into the School, and is so minded to formally request that we remove the polling station currently sited there for polling district CF (Ward No. 6 Central). This is due to disruption caused for pupils and parents when the school is used for polling.

4.10 No additional costs would be incurred for use of the school. Although the number of polling stations could be increased and could increase staffing and equipment costs (unless the Acting Returning Officer combines it with the current polling station).

4.11 Chase Terrace Primary School would need to be designated as the new polling place and would fall wholly outside of its polling district and Ward.

4.12 The map at Appendix D shows the location of the current and proposed polling stations, in addition to the existing Ward boundaries.

5. ELECTORAL COMMISSION GUIDANCE

- 5.1 The Electoral Commission has produced guidance to assist authorities when reviewing polling districts and places:-
- 5.1.1 Each parish is to be a separate polling district.
- 5.1.2 The following should be considered as part of the assessment of the suitability of polling district boundaries:
- Boundaries: Are they well defined? For example, do they follow the natural boundaries of the area? If not, is it clear which properties belong in the polling district?
 - Location: Are there suitable transport links within the polling district, and how do they relate to the areas of the district that are most highly populated? Are there any obstacles to voters crossing the current polling district and reaching the polling place e.g., steep hills, impassable major roads, railway lines, rivers?
- 5.1.3 There are a number of factors that must be considered when reviewing existing polling places or when assessing new polling places, including:
- The location: Is it reasonably accessible within the polling district? Does it avoid barriers for the voter such as steep hills, major roads, rivers, etc.? Are there any convenient transport links?
 - Size: Can it accommodate more than one polling station if required? If multiple polling stations are required, is the polling place ample enough to accommodate all voters going into and out of the polling stations, even where there is a high turnout?
 - Suitability: Is the building readily available in the event of any unscheduled elections? Is there any possibility that the building may be demolished as part of a new development? Is the building accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place?
- 5.2 Where, because of local circumstances, a polling place has been selected that is not fully accessible, then reasonable adjustments must be undertaken to provide access for all electors. Alternatively, the local authority should consider whether it would be appropriate to designate a polling place that falls wholly or partly outside the polling district.
- 5.3 It should be noted that for the purpose of taking the poll In England and Wales, the (Acting) Returning Officer is entitled to use free of charge schools maintained or assisted by a local authority as well as those schools that receive grants made out of moneys provided by Parliament.
- 5.4 At the recent combined national referendum and local elections the Chief Counting Officer made a direction that no polling station should have more than 2500 electors allocated to it.
- 5.5 When making a decision, all factors will need to be considered and the authority will need to be able to demonstrate their reasoning behind the decision.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 It is recommended that alterations to polling districts be timed to coincide with the annual publication of the revised Register of Electors. This would usually be on 1st December each year, although a decision is awaited from the Government to allow earlier publication in view of the scheduled Police and Crime Commission elections to be held on 15th November 2012.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 7.1 Following the conclusion of the local authority's review specified interested parties have a right to make representations to the Electoral Commission to reconsider any polling districts and polling places.
- 7.2 If, on receipt of such representations, the Commission finds that a local authority's review did not:
- meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or a body of them, or
 - take sufficient account of the accessibility for disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place

then it may direct the authority to make any alterations to the polling places that the Commission thinks necessary and, if the alterations are not made within two months, may make the alterations itself.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 To seek Members agreement whether or not:-
- a. To recommend the proposals be implemented, or to
 - b. Make no changes, and
 - c. Give their reasoning behind any decision.

The remaining polling districts and polling places would be those currently in use.

- 8.2 Any changes agreed will then go forward to Full Council at the meeting on 21st February 2012 for final approval.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS RECEIVED

Respondent	In respect of	Comments
Ms N.A. Dawes, Acting Returning Officer for the Lichfield Constituency	<i>Lichfield Constituency</i>	In support of keeping the existing arrangements as they work satisfactorily. Recommends that changes should be kept to a minimum where possible, to alleviate electors confusion on polling day, although appreciates the need to consider all representations.
Cllr. Mrs. M. Stanhope	Alrewas Village Hall; Fradley Village Hall and Mobile at Worthington Road, Fradley <i>(Lichfield Constituency / Alrewas and Fradley Ward)</i>	The present polling station arrangements meet with approval.
Cllr. Mrs. E. Perkins and Elford Parish Council	The Howard C.P. School, The Square, Elford <i>(Tamworth Constituency / Mease and Tame Ward)</i>	Proposing the use of Elford Village Hall as a polling place instead of the School, in order to minimise disruption to the children's learning and inconvenience suffered by parents and teachers. For the reasons as given above and citing that the Village Hall has excellent facilities and is centrally located.
Lichfield and Tamworth Liberal Democrats	Polling District boundary for Leomansley Ward <i>(Lichfield Constituency / Leomansley Ward)</i>	Propose that polling district boundaries for Leomansley ward be revised so that all of Darwin Park - inside of but excluding Walsall Road/Friary Road (and Cul de Sacs off like Friary Gardens/Lanthorne Place/Victoria Gardens) becomes a new polling district with Darwin Park Community Hall as the new polling place.
Burntwood Town Council	St. John's Church, High Street, Chase Terrace <i>(Lichfield Constituency / Chase Terrace Ward)</i>	Propose that residents in and around Joseph Dewsbury Close / Rugeley Road up to Spencer Drive, go to Chase Terrace Primary School rather than the Church. As the School is in Burntwood Central Ward this will mean designating it as the new polling place.