

REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF REGULATORY AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report back to Members on the comments received from the review of polling districts and polling places and to seek agreement on the proposals in order to make final recommendations to put forward to Council.

2. SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A review was recently undertaken and three responses were received (**attached at Appendix A for information**).
- 2.2 When undertaking a review the Council is required to give due regard to the following considerations:-
- It must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
 - It must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled
 - Where possible the polling place should be in its own polling district. Special circumstances apply which allow for the polling place to be outside the district where there is no suitable polling place in the district and in these circumstances regard should be had to the convenience of electors
 - Where possible each parish (and each parish ward) should be a separate polling district
 - Where boundaries for different elections are no longer co-terminous the areas no longer co-terminous must be made into separate polling districts. Eg the new District Council wards may no longer be the same as the County Divisions.
 - Also, until the new boundaries are fully in force, the register will need to be constructed in a way that is capable of reflecting the current and the new boundaries. Again, this can be achieved by making any parts of existing electoral areas that will be split when the new boundaries come into effect into separate polling districts.
- 2.3 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. This includes academies and free schools.

- 2.4 The Acting Returning Officer (ARO) and her electoral services team have put together more information for Members to consider before they make their final recommendations.
- 2.5 Due to the tight timescales since the close of the public consultation on 2nd January and the deadline for the printing and distribution of this report, a narrative is included in paragraph 4 below and maps to reflect the 11 proposals will be provided as soon as possible.

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 and PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

- 4.1 **Lichfield Constituency - Ward No.01 (Alrewas & Fradley)**

Parish of Alrewas - (Polling District AA)

Alrewas Village Hall is about to be refurbished and extended and is not likely to be available for the May 2015 elections. Access issues due to steep steps have previously been raised with this premise and in October 2013 the electoral services team visited the Alrewas Methodist Hall in Post Office Road to assess its suitability as an alternative.

Although there is a single step into the Methodist Hall a ramp can be provided, otherwise there is alternative access along the side of the building which avoids the step altogether. There is on-street parking available in Post Office Road for this premise.

Alrewas Methodist Church Hall Committee have approved the use of the Methodist Hall as an alternative polling station and confirmed its availability and the ARO supports this change of polling place.

- 4.2 **Lichfield Constituency - Ward No.02 (Armitage with Handsacre)**

Parish of Armitage with Handsacre - (Polling Districts BA and BB)

Due to the ongoing housing development at Hawkesyard it is proposed to redraw the polling district boundaries between BA and BB (moving the dividing line west) and identify a new premise for the residents of BA to vote at.

Currently both BA and BB vote at Armitage with Handsacre Village Hall on Shropshire Brook Road but this premise already has 4 busy polling stations with little capacity for an increase in voters.

Options include looking at sending the voters within a newly draw polling boundary from BA to either Croft Primary School, St Thomas's Priory Golf Club, Hawkesyard or the Youth Centre.

The proposal is to define the whole of polling district BA as a polling place so that premises can be identified and accessed for their suitability and availability by the Returning Officer and her team.

4.3 **Lichfield Constituency - Ward No.03 (Boley Park)**

Parish of Lichfield (Pentire Road Ward) - (Polling Districts RB1)

This new polling district has been created due to the Ward boundary changes which sees these properties move from St John's Ward into Boley Park Ward. It also forms part of a new parish ward of the City of Lichfield and it is proposed for them to vote separately at a Mobile polling station on the Co-op Superstore car park.

4.4 **Lichfield Constituency – Ward No.04 (Boney Hay & Central)**

Parish of Burntwood (Boney Hay and Central Ward) - (Polling District CC, CJ1 part, CJ2 and CF)

Due to the recent ward boundary changes Melford Rise and Melford Grange move from Ward No. 7 (Chase Terrace) and it is proposed to add them to polling district CC voting at Boney Hay Primary School.

Again due to the boundary changes Spencer Drive and Park Road together with part of Rugeley Road (currently part of polling district CJ1) move from Ward No. 7 (Chase Terrace), and it is proposed to add them to polling district CF (along with CJ2 which also moves from Chase Terrace Ward) voting at the Nursery Block, Chase Terrace Primary School.

4.5 **Tamworth Constituency – Ward No.05 (Bourne Vale)**

Parish of Shenstone (Shenstone Wood End Ward) - (Polling District UB1 and UC)

Proposed to merge UB1 and UC into one polling district (these properties have moved from Shenstone Ward due to the recent boundary changes). As both are now part of the same parish ward propose voters go to Mobile Polling Station at Toby Carvery (where UC currently vote at).

4.6 **Lichfield Constituency – Ward No.06 (Chadsmead)**

Parish of Lichfield (Garrick Road Ward) - (Polling District RG1)

This polling district comprises of a new parish ward and has to be separate. It is also in a different County division compared to the rest of this Ward.

Due to concerns with capacity at Chadsmead Primary Nursery Block it is proposed to move back to using the main school hall in order to accommodate an additional polling station. Failing that we will have to identify a new polling place at either the Friary Leisure Centre or the Cricket and Hockey club off Eastern Avenue.

4.7 **Lichfield Constituency – Ward No.07 Chasetown**

Parish of Burntwood (Chasetown Ward) – Polling District CL

Due to uncertainty over the availability of Burntwood Youth Centre, which we understood from the County Council would remain their responsibility until 31st March 2015 and then possibly be transferred to a charity organisation, it is proposed to find an alternative venue for the forthcoming elections. The Returning Officer's team are currently looking at alternatives. Therefore the proposal is for the whole polling district CL (together with adjoining CP) to be specified as the polling place so that suitable premises can be identified and accessed for their suitability and availability by the Returning Officer.

4.8 **Lichfield Constituency – Ward No.10 (Curborough)**

Parish of Lichfield (Curborough Ward) - (Polling District RH1)

Formerly part of polling district RK, that has transferred from Chadsmead Ward, it is proposed to merge RH1 with the existing RH polling district with voting at the Willows Primary School. Alternatively, and subject to suitability and availability, Curborough Community Centre, Reynolds Close could be used in place of the Willows School.

The Labour Group's submission suggests that RH1 could be split, with part transferred into RH (voting at the Willows) and part into RJ (voting at Charnwood Primary School). There is more capacity at the Willows School than Charnwood to accommodate an increase in voters, therefore the preferred option is as outlined in the paragraph above.

4.9 **Tamworth Constituency – Ward No.15 (Little Aston & Stonnall)**

Parish of Shenstone (Little Aston & Stonnall Ward) - (Polling District UA and UC1)

Propose to merge UC1 with UA, voting at Little Aston Village Hall.

4.10 **Lichfield Constituency – Ward No.19 (St. John's)**

Parish of Lichfield (St. John's Ward) - (Polling District RP and RR1)

Propose to redraw polling district boundary to ensure whole of King Edwards School and it's playing field are part of RP (rather than in RR) and re-merge RR1 into RP (where it was originally). No change to polling station currently at St Michaels on Cherry Orchard.

4.11 **Lichfield Constituency – Ward No.20 (Stowe)**

Parish of Lichfield (Burton Old Road Ward) - (Polling District RD and RD1)

Propose to merge RD with RD1 and send to 7th Lichfield Scout Hut HQ at Ash Grove for voting purposes (as currently used by RD voters).

4.12 **Lichfield Constituency – Ward No.21 (Summerfield & All Saints)**

Parish of Burntwood (Summerfield and All Saints Ward) - (Polling District CB1)

Propose to merge with CB1 with CA and send to Burntwood Methodist Church for voting purposes (as currently used by CA voters).

4.13 Maps showing the proposals are attached.

4.14 Following agreement and implementation of the above proposals it will be necessary to re-letter some of the polling district descriptions.

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 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 None identified.

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 as outlined in paragraph 4 be implemented, and to
- b. 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 27 January 2014 for ratification.

Appendices

Appendix A - copies of all responses to consultation received from

1. Cllr Mynott, Lichfield District Council Labour Group
2. Cllr Mrs Stanhope
3. Samantha LaPlanche, Clerk for Armitage with Handsacre Parish Council