

Polling Places - Local Elections 2023

Report of the Deputy Returning Officer

Date: 1 March 2023



Agenda Item: 4
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Key Decision? NO
Local Ward All wards
Members

**REGULATORY &
LICENSING
COMMITTEE**

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 A polling district is an area whose electorate are all invited to vote at the same polling place. A polling place is a location in which one or more polling stations are provided to allow the electorate to vote. A polling station is the room, or part of a room, where voting takes place.
- 1.2 This review has been conducted on behalf of the Returning Officer in anticipation of the 2023 full District and Parish elections to ensure sufficient suitable locations are available given the recent dramatic changes brought about by Covid 19 and the voter ID checks, and accessibility requirements under the Elections Act 2022.
- 1.3 This report outlines the polling stations likely to be introduced at these elections, should sufficient nominations be received for each polling district for a ballot to be required.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the polling stations proposed at Appendix A for use by the Returning Officer in the 2023 District and Parish elections.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council is required to complete a review of all parliamentary polling districts and polling places in the district at least every five years, the last being completed in November 2019. Since then, we have also seen emergency locations introduced because of the Covid 19 Pandemic in preference to schools and other locations set aside as vaccination sites. A full review is not due to be considered before November 2024, however given the pressure on certain locations and the new requirements it was felt appropriate to bring these locations forward for consideration.
- 3.2 Under the Elections Act 2022 all electors seeking to cast their vote in a polling station must now present approved photo ID to prove their identity and be provided with a ballot paper. The current regulations do not yet impact on postal voters. For any registered elector who does not have a suitable form of photographic ID they can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate free of charge before 25 April.
- 3.3 Public Campaigns have been launched by the government regarding the new requirements and LDC has a targeted communications campaign in the run up to the election to ensure all voters are aware

of the need to present photographic ID and have a suitable form provided in time if they do not.

- 3.4 This means that polling stations may have increasing pressures this year due to the volume of electors who may arrive without suitable forms of ID who require additional assistance from polling staff on the day. Additional space must be provided for the checks to be carried out and private areas to check ID or for the removal of headwear etc. to confirm identity.
- 3.5 In addition, the returning officer and election team have additional duties to ensure we provide suitable support for all electors to cast their vote, be those additional physical measures to read the ballot papers, hold the pencil to cast their vote or personal support to assist them in moving through a station. To assist this the DRO is seeking engagement with disabled voters and groups to understand local needs and barriers to voting at a polling station.
- 3.6 In any event this means that the current stations in use have been assessed to consider these new requirements and this has resulted in some locations being unsuitable. A list of all proposed stations is attached at appendix A. Those highlighted in yellow are new stations, proposed as alternatives to avoid school closures wherever possible due to the disruption of the additional Bank Holiday for the King's Coronation. Schools are listed in green text and seats which were uncontested in the last all-out local elections are in red text.
- 3.7 As part of the election planning process all possible venues have been sent notification of the election dates with appeals for availability. Some of these requests have already resulted in refusals or requests for us to seek alternative venues. Members can be further apprised on the progress of this during the committee.

Alternative Options	The polling locations have been identified over several years and will continue to be assessed to mitigate the risks associated with running elections and meet the needs of all voters.
Consultation	All current polling locations listed have been contacted to assess availability for the May 2023 elections. Details of current and proposed sites used as alternatives in previous elections have also been publicized and any responses captured.
Financial Implications	School locations are free to hire and under SCC guidance issued to headteachers must be made available if no other suitable venue exists. Most other locations attract a hire and cleaning fee which is paid for from the District election's budget and where parish ballots are held, from the relevant Parish Council budget.
Approved by Section 151 Officer	Yes
Legal Implications	The Council is required to complete a review of all parliamentary polling districts and polling places in the district in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 and guidance issued by the Electoral Commission. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Insert legal implications in bullet point format. Ensure that these have been discussed in advance with a suitably qualified legal officer. 2. Detail any rules of procedure actions undertaken in developing the recommendations for the report.
Approved by Monitoring Officer	Yes

Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	Suitable polling places ensure maximum participation in the democratic election process.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	All Polling places must be accessible to those wishing to vote. New guidance issued as part of the Election Act 2022 requires councils to consider a wider range of support to improve the voter experience. Inspections of all polling locations is undertaken to ensure these meet local needs. The DRO is also engaging with local disability groups to further develop this practice in advance of the elections in May.
EIA logged by Equalities Officer	Yes EIA first draft completed and submitted – to be updated throughout planning and consultation process

Crime & Safety Issues	Not relevant to location, though Police SPOC is notified and asked to visit all locations on the polling day.
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Environmental Impact (including Climate Change and Biodiversity).	Local facilities that can be accessed without the need for cars are selected wherever possible to encourage people to walk to vote. However, parking should be available for disabled voters to access sites wherever possible.
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GDPR / Privacy Impact Assessment	Polling regulations control the data used during polling very tightly, a separate assessment is not required based on location.
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	Risk Description & Risk Owner	Original Score (RYG)	How We Manage It	Current Score (RYG)
A	That suitable sites are not available in key locations	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	Continually identify suitable sites to use and respond to notification of sites no longer suitable. Where necessary seek a site for a mobile location as a last resort.	Likelihood Green (tolerable) and Impact Assessment. Green (tolerable)
B	That sites used are disruptive to local communities and school's activities	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	Seek alternative sites wherever possible	Likelihood Green (tolerable) and Impact Assessment. Green (tolerable)
C	That facilities do not meet the new requirements introduced by the Elections Act.	Likelihood Yellow (material) and Impact Assessment. Yellow (material)	Undertake regular inspections and seek feedback from users on equipment and processes that may assist them further.	Likelihood Green (tolerable) and Impact Assessment. Green (tolerable)
D				
E				

	Background documents
	Relevant web links

Any previous reports or decisions linked to this item

Relevant web links

Any links for background information which may be useful to understand the context of the report