

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES



Report of Director of Transformation and Resources

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Key Decision? **NO**

Local Ward Members All Members

REGULATORY AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At its meeting in October, Committee endorsed the start of a review of the polling places and polling districts of Lichfield District.
- 1.2 The Council is required to complete a review of all parliamentary polling districts and polling places at least every five years.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 The review is the function of the Council and not the Electoral Registration Officer or (Acting) Returning Officer.
- 1.5 This review must be completed before 31 January 2020.
- 1.6 The Review is conducted in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 and guidance issued by the Electoral Commission.
- 1.7 Consultation started on 4 October and concluded on 15 November 2019. 204 representations were received and are assessed in this report.
- 1.8 This report also details proposed recommendations to be submitted to Council on 10 December 2019 to approve the polling places for 2020 and beyond.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee recommends to Council on the 10 December 2019 the following changes to its polling places:

- 2.1 Move the polling place from the Co-op Superstore car park to Boley Park Community Centre and environs.
- 2.2 Move the polling place from The Willows Primary School to Curborough Community Centre subject to approval by the Centre.
- 2.3 Move the polling place at St Micheal's Primary School to the three primary schools – St Michael's, Five Spires Academy and St Joseph's – and define the polling places as Cherry Orchard schools.
- 2.4 Move the polling place at SS Peter's and Paul's Primary School and incorporate within the polling place at Chadsmead Primary Academy.

- 2.5 Move the polling place at Bexmore Drive, Streethay to Streethay Primary Academy.
- 2.6 Move the polling place at the Longwood Public House, Fazeley and incorporate within the polling place at Fazeley Town Hall.
- 2.7 Move the polling place at The Highwayman Public House, Shenstone Wood End and incorporate within the polling place at Shenstone Village Hall.
- 2.8 Consider further the following additional proposals:
- The moving of the polling place at Robinson Road, Burntwood to either Redwood Park Community Centre or to other polling places in the ward.
 - The moving of the polling place at St Joseph's and St Theresa's School to the Old Mining College.
 - The moving of the polling place at Oakdene Road Island to the Area Youth Centre, Cherry Close and to the Springfield Academy,
 - The moving of the polling place at Holly Grove Primary School to St John's Community Church,
 - The moving of the polling place at Chase Terrace Primary School to Burntwood Library.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council is obliged to review the Polling Districts and Polling Places that it uses to support the running of parliamentary elections. Such a review considers the number of voters in a polling district and the suitability of the polling places which are used to provide polling stations.
- 3.2 Whilst the Review needs to be undertaken for parliamentary reasons, in practice, the Council uses the same polling districts and polling places for other elections including national referenda, local government, PCC and neighbourhood plan referenda.
- 3.3 Such a Review is a formal process and its recommendations are considered and approved by Council but, of course, more informal reviews are undertaken by the Returning Officer's team ahead of each election to ensure that polling places remain suitable.
- 3.4 Definition of terms:-
- **Parliamentary constituencies:** these cannot be changed by the review. The division of these constituencies into polling districts and places is the subject of the review.
 - **Polling district:** the geographical area created by the sub-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 located.
 - **Polling station:** the room, part of a room, or building where the poll takes place.
- 3.5 The boundaries of polling districts and the location of polling places are for the Council to determine and the locations of the polling stations are the responsibility of the Returning Officer.
- 3.6 The Review allows the Council to identify optimum polling districts and polling places. There is no requirement to change any existing arrangements however any change or decision to make no change must be justified.

Criteria for Polling Places

3.7 Polling Places contain one or more polling stations and the following criteria are used when identifying a Polling Place:

- Must be available for elections between 6.30am and 10.30pm and that the council has priority for bookings for elections.
- Each polling station to have no more than 1600 voters. So a polling district with, say, 1800 voters, would need a polling place that could accommodate 2 polling stations.
- Proximity to voters
- Accessible for all, including those with mobility or sensory difficulties
- Safe, warm and well-lit
- Cost
- Schools only to be used when there are no suitable community venues
- Mobile polling stations to be used if there are no suitable community venues or schools.

Key Issues

3.8 The council identified a number of specific issues for consultation.

3.9 These issues included:

Alrewas – the Council currently uses Alrewas Methodist Church and moved there when the Village Hall was being refurbished. The Review should identify the preferred location for a polling place now that the refurbishment of the Village Hall is complete.

Elmhurst / Shenstone Wood End – these polling districts have a very low number of voters. The review should look at whether these districts could be combined into other districts on the grounds of value for money.

Chase Terrace – since the last review, St John’s Church Rooms have become unavailable. In consequence, voters in one polling district have a polling place in another district.

Streethay – the polling station is currently provided in a mobile facility at Bexmore Drive. But in recent years, there has been significant development in Streethay including the building of Streethay Primary Academy.

The use of Primary Schools –at every election, the Council receives complaints from parents whose child’s school is closed. The council recognises the disruption to parents and to pupils when a school is closed because of an election, although it is the decision of the Head to close a school. In some cases, there may be actions that can be taken that mean that the school could remain open and a polling station operate.

In consequence, the council will seek to use alternative community venues where they exist and where they are suitable. The council will not choose to use a mobile polling station where a school exists because a mobile polling station is not as accessible for those with certain disabilities.

The Impact of the General Election

3.10 A general election has been called since the consultation started. In preparing for the election, there have been a number of changes made to the way that we are providing polling stations.

3.11 For instance, we have allowed the number of voters registered to each polling station to increase to 1600. This means that we have been able to reduce the number of polling stations in one location.

3.12 This might mean that there may be more capacity to accommodate more polling stations in community venues thereby reducing demand on schools or mobile units.

- 3.13 Examples include reducing the need for mobile units at Boley Park (these stations have been combined with those in the nearby community centre) and Chase Terrace Technology College (we have combined two stations into one).
- 3.14 We have also reduced the number of polling stations in St Johns Community Church, Holy Cross Church, Boney Hay Primary School, The Willows Primary School, Scotch Orchard Primary School and Armitage with Handsacre Village Hall.
- 3.15 By accepting that a polling station can accommodate up to 1600 (and maybe more) gives greater flexibility to use fewer venues.

The Consultation

- 3.16 The consultation was complemented by statements from the two Acting Returning Officers
- 3.17 Consultation was conducted online. The council received 201 responses via the online form, and 2 more detailed responses via email.
- 3.18 Representations were received from the following organisations:
- Charnwood Primary Academy
 - Longdon Parish Council
 - Kings Bromley Parish Council
 - Willows Primary School
 - Chadsmead Primary Academy
 - Shenstone Parish Council
- 3.19 The remaining consultees were individuals, predominately parents of pupils at schools that are used as polling stations.
- 3.20 The key issues to emerge are as follows:
- Avoid using schools.
 - Move the polling place from The Willows Primary School to Curborough Community Centre
 - Move the polling place from St Michael's School, Lichfield, to a community venue, or at the very least, share the polling station duties with the other two schools in the neighbourhood.
 - Move the polling station in Streethay from a mobile unit at Bexmore Drive to Streethay Primary School.
 - Move the polling station at Shenstone Wood End to Shenstone Village Hall
 - Move the polling station at the Longwood Public House, Fazeley to Fazeley Town Hall
 - Move the mobile unit at Robinson Road, Burntwood to Redwood Park Community Centre
 - Move the polling station from Chadsmead
 - Move the polling station from Scotch Orchard Primary School.
 - Move the polling station from Charnwood Primary School
 - Move the polling station from SS Peter's and Paul's School
 - Move the polling station from Longdon Primary School
 - There were no comments received regarding Alrewas polling stations.

Comments on Proposals

Lichfield and Streethay

- 3.21 To move the polling station from a **mobile unit at the Co-op Superstore** into Boley Park Community Centre for the purposes of improving accessibility. This has been done for the general election and affects 494 voters.
- 3.22 To move the polling station at **Willows Primary School** to Curborough Community Centre. The Willows Primary School provides a polling station for 1486 voters in the ward of Curborough. The Community Centre has previously been used as a polling station, within the polling district and is adjacent to the school. This proposal should be recommended to Council subject to confirmation that the operators of the centre are willing to accept the request.
- 3.23 To move the polling station at **St Michael's Primary School** to a community venue or at least share it with the two other schools in Cherry Orchard, Lichfield. The school provides a polling station for 1102 voters in the St John's ward. This station is on the very edge of its polling district which extends to King Edward VI School in the south. There are no suitable community venues in this district but there are two other primary schools – Five Spires Academy and St Joseph's Catholic School – adjacent. It is recognised that it is unfair to the pupils and parents of just one school to be impacted by an election. It is proposed therefore to recommend to Council that the polling place be identified as the three schools (to be known as Cherry Orchard schools) and the polling station be confirmed ahead of each election. It is envisaged that each school will be chosen in turn to accommodate a polling station.
- 3.24 To move the polling station from **SS Peter's and Paul's Primary School** to Chadsmead Primary Academy to minimise disruption to pupils. Both schools provide polling stations serving the Chadsmead ward. Chadsmead has 1963 voters whilst St Peter's and St Paul's serves 488. It makes sense to ask one school to accommodate a larger number of polling stations than to use both schools. It is proposed to recommend to Full Council that the polling place be moved to Shenstone Village Hall.
- 3.25 To move the polling station from a mobile unit at **Bexmore Drive, Streethay** to Streethay Primary School. In recent years the population has grown, and will continue to grow, in Streethay particularly to the west of the Burton Road. At the start of the review, the polling station served 909 voters in the Whittington and Streethay ward. For the general election, the station has 997 voters. Access is not good as there is no hard standing between the highway and the polling station. There are no alternative community venues in the district and the school has indicated it will be willing to accommodate a polling station. It is proposed to recommend to Full Council that the polling place be moved to Streethay Primary School.
- 3.26 Of the other Lichfield primary schools - Scotch Orchard (1500 voters) and Charnwood (1890 voters) – there does not appear to be any alternative suitable venues.

Burntwood and Hammerwich

- 3.27 **Mobile unit at Robinson Road, Burntwood.** This station serves 1119 in the Boney Hay and Central ward. Redwood Park Community Centre may provide a better option but more investigations should be undertaken to assess whether this polling station – and others – could be moved to Redwood Park Community Centre or whether the voters in this area could be moved to one of the three other polling places in this ward – Chase Terrace Primary School, Boney Hay Primary School or Chase Terrace Technology College.
- 3.28 To consider moving the polling stations at **St Joseph's and St Theresa's School** (1833 voters) to The Old Mining College (573). Both sites are in Chasetown ward. The school currently hosts two polling stations but for the purposes of minimising disruption to pupils it is suggested more work is done to explore whether The Old Mining College could accommodate additional voters.
- 3.29 To move the polling station from a **mobile unit at Oakdene Road** to the former Area Youth Centre at Cherry Close for Chasetown ward residents (351 voters) and to Springhill Academy for Summerfield

and All Saints ward residents (459 residents) in order to improve accessibility. Cherry Close and the Academy are currently used by 556 voters and 1130 residents respectively.

- 3.30 To consider moving the polling stations at **Holly Grove Primary School** to St Johns Community Church in order to minimise disruption to pupils. Both sites are in Chase Terrace ward. Holly Grove provides a polling station for 1475 residents and St Johns Community Church, 2278.
- 3.31 To consider moving the polling stations at **Chase Terrace Primary School** to Burntwood Library in order to minimise disruption to pupils. The polling stations at the school accommodate 1115 voters and the library is close-by has a community room that might be suitable.
- 3.32 No other community venues have been identified to remove the need for the other school venues.

Elsewhere in Lichfield District

- 3.33 To move the polling station from a mobile unit at the **Longwood Public House, Fazeley** to Fazeley Town Hall for the purposes of improving accessibility for those with disabilities. The town hall is approximately 800m from the Longwood but a few voters will find it closer to them. The unit provides a station for 944 voters in the Fazeley ward. Fazeley Town Hall currently provides a polling station for 822 voters. It is proposed to recommend to Full Council that the polling place be moved to Fazeley Town Hall.
- 3.34 To move the polling station from a mobile unit at the **Highwayman Public House, Shenstone Wood End** to Shenstone Village Hall for the purposes of improving accessibility for both those with disabilities and for voters. The mobile unit serves 172 voters in Bourne Vale ward. This polling station served more until recently when electoral boundaries were redrawn. In consequence, voters in Shenstone Wood End now vote in Little Aston whilst this station serves residents living along the main road to Shenstone and in Little Hay. This is a polling station with one of the smallest voter registers in the District. It is proposed to recommend to Full Council that the polling place be moved to Shenstone Village Hall.
- 3.35 There have been no alternative community venues identified to remove the need for schools.

Alternative Options	The review can be undertaken in a myriad of different ways.
Consultation	203 responses were received during the consultation period. There were additional discussions with the two Acting Returning Officers and with potential venues.
Financial Implications	Reducing the number of polling stations – and in particular, mobile polling stations will reduce the cost of running elections.
Contribution to the Delivery of the Strategic Plan	To enable the democratic process whereby voters elect those councillors that will drive through changes to improve the quality of life for everyone.
Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications	The aim of the review is to seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting, including having regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
Crime & Safety Issues	Not applicable to this report
GDPR/Privacy Impact Assessment	Not required for this report.

	Risk Description	How We Manage It	Severity of Risk (RYG)
A	Proposed polling stations are not able to accommodate increased voter numbers	We will assess performance of the larger polling stations at the general election and review accordingly	Yellow

Background documents

Guidance notes from Commission

Webpages as published

Consultation responses

Relevant web links

lichfielddc.gov.uk/pollingdistrictsreview