

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Report of Cllr B Yeates, Chairman of Regulatory and Licensing Committee

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Agenda Item: 14

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Key Decision? **NO**

Local Ward Members All Members

Lichfield
district council
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COUNCIL

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Regulatory and Licensing Committee has been supporting the review of the district's polling places and polling districts. The Council is required to complete such a review at least every five years and by no later than 31 January 2020.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 The Review is conducted in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 and guidance issued by the Electoral Commission.
- 1.4 Consultation started on 4 October and concluded on 15 November 2019. 203 representations were received.
- 1.5 The Regulatory and Licensing Committee considered the findings of the review at its meeting on the 26 November 2019 and is proposing a series of recommendations to Council as to the polling places in the district for 2020 and beyond.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Council approves the following changes to its polling places:

In Burntwood

- 2.1 Move the polling place from St Joseph's and St Theresa's Primary School to The Old Mining College Centre.
- 2.2 Move the polling place from a mobile unit at the Oakdene Road Island and incorporate within the polling places at Burntwood Area Youth Centre for voters in polling district CM and at Springhill Academy for polling district CS2.
- 2.3 Move the polling place from Fulfen Primary School to Burntwood Memorial Institute.
- 2.4 Move the polling place at Holly Grove Primary School to St John's Community Church.

In Lichfield

- 2.5 Move the polling place from the Co-op Superstore car park to Boley Park Community Centre.
- 2.6 Move the polling place from The Willows Primary School to Curborough Community Centre.

- 2.7 Move the polling place at St Michael's Primary School to the three primary schools – St Michael's Primary School, Five Spires Academy and St Joseph's Primary School – and define the polling place as 'Cherry Orchard schools'.
- 2.8 Move the polling place at St Peter's and St Paul's Primary School and incorporate within the polling place at Chadsmead Primary Academy.

In Villages

- 2.9 Move the polling place at Bexmore Drive, Streethay to Streethay Primary Academy.
- 2.10 Move the polling place at the Longwood Public House, Fazeley and incorporate within the polling place at Fazeley Town Hall.
- 2.11 Move the polling place at The Highwayman Public House, Shenstone Wood End and incorporate within the polling place at Shenstone Village Hall.

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 whilst the specific 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.

Criteria for Polling Places

- 3.7 Polling Places contain one or more polling stations and the following criteria are used when assessing the suitability of 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:

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 seeks 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 Consultation

3.10 The consultation was complemented by statements from the two Acting Returning Officers.

3.11 Consultation was conducted online. The council received 201 responses via the online form, and 2 more detailed responses via email.

3.12 Representations were received from 3 schools and 3 parish councils.

3.13 The remaining consultees were individuals, predominately parents of pupils at schools that are used as polling stations. The use of schools was the main issue to be raised.

The Proposals

Lichfield

3.14 To move the polling station from a **mobile unit at the Co-op Superstore** to Boley Park Community Centre for the purposes of improving accessibility. This has been done for the general election and affects 494 voters.

3.15 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.

3.16 To rotate the polling station at **St Michael’s Primary School** with the other two primary 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. 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 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.

3.17 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.

- 3.18 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

- 3.19 To move the polling place 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 moving the polling stations to The Old Mining College.
- 3.20 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.
- 3.21 To move the polling station at **Holly Grove Primary School** to St John's 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 John's Community Church, 2278.
- 3.22 To move the polling stations at **Fulfen Primary School** to the Burntwood Memorial Institute in order to minimise disruption to pupils. This would affect 2151 voters.
- 3.23 The committee considered Redwood Park pavilion as an alternative to the **mobile unit at Robinson Road, Burntwood** but this was discounted because of access and safety concerns. This station serves 1119 voters in the Boney Hay and Central ward. The Committee has asked officers to consider in future reviews 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.
- 3.24 The committee also considered moving the polling stations at **Chase Terrace Primary School** to Burntwood Library in order to minimise disruption to pupils but this was discounted because of concerns around parking, distance from voters and because the school is able to accommodate a polling station without closing.
- 3.25 The committee also considering moving the polling station at **Springhill Primary School** to the scout hut on Elder Lane. This proposal is not being recommended to Council because the scout hut is not convenient to residents and because of concerns regarding access and safety.
- 3.26 No other community venues have been identified to remove the need for the other school venues.

Elsewhere in Lichfield District

- 3.27 To move the polling station from a mobile unit at **Bexmore Drive, Streethay** to Streethay Primary School to improve access for voters, particularly for those with disabilities. 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 polling district and the school has indicated it will be willing to accommodate a polling station.
- 3.28 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 public house but some 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.
- 3.29 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 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.

3.30 There have been no alternative community venues identified to remove the need for schools.

Alternative Options	There are a myriad of different options for the way that polling places are identified.
Consultation	203 responses were received during the consultation period. There were additional discussions with the two Acting Returning Officers and with potential venues. The Regulatory and Licensing Committee have agreed these recommendations.
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

<p>Background documents</p> <p>Guidance notes from Commission</p> <p>Webpages as published</p> <p>Consultation responses</p> <p>List of polling places</p>

<p>Relevant web links</p> <p>lichfielddc.gov.uk/pollingdistrictsreview</p>
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