

POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2018

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillors B Hartnett, Leader and J Fisher, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Ward(s) Affected	Church Hill, Winyates
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	Yes
Not a Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

The report sets out the findings of the review of Polling Places review as requested by members of the public under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. These are changes to the agreed Polling Districts and Polling Places review made in 2014.

The recommendations below set out below arising from investigations, public submissions and Members comments.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to consider the report and RECOMMEND to Council

2.1 whether or not to accept to change the polling place for the electors in Polling District CHB from Abbeywood First School to one of the following:

- a) St Andrews Church**
- b) YMCA Building**
- c) Willow Trees/Church Hill Community Centre**
- d) Health Centre;**

2.2 whether or not to accept to change the polling place for the electors in Polling District WIB from Roman Way First School to Winyates Barn;

2.3 that if any of the above are accepted to take effect for the May 2018 elections apart from 2.1 d) which would require more investigation.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are some minor financial implications for the Council which arise from this report but will be contained within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

3.2 a) Authority to set Polling District boundaries and to designate Polling Places rests with the Council (Statutory elements of the Council's Constitution under the Local Government Act 2000).

b) Decisions about the situation of Polling Stations within designated Polling Places are for the (Acting) Returning Officer. Arrangements must comply with relevant provisions of the Representation of the People Acts and Regulations and the Equality Act 2010.

3.3 "Relevant authorities" (such as Redditch Borough Council) must

"a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances"; and

"b) seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled and, when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons. If it is necessary to use a place where the access is not ideal, then every reasonable adjustment must be undertaken to provide access for all electors."

Service/Operational Implications

3.4 A full review of Polling Places and Stations for Redditch was carried out in 2014.

However, this report considers two areas, where requests have been made to find alternative polling places:

a) Abbeywood First School – Polling District CHB – Church Hill

b) Roman Way First School – Polling District WIB – Winyates

A Abbeywood First School

3.5 A request to find an alternative polling place was received from the Chair of LAGB of RSB Abbeywood First School. There were a number of reasons for this request, these were in regard to safeguarding children, staff wellbeing, reduced pupil attendance on Fridays after polling and access across the Church Hill Middle School site.

3.6 During the consultation phase the Chair reiterated the reasons for using an alternative site and suggested a number of different alternatives, namely St Andrews Church, YMCA Building, Willow Trees/Church Hill Community Centre and the new Health Centre (Maple View).

- 3.7 Submissions were received from the Local Councillors who advocated no change.
- 3.8 Officers visited the current site as well as the suggestions made during consultation. It was noted that the access to Abbeywood First School is not ideal. Observations on the suggested alternatives were:
- a) St Andrews Church – This has been considered previously and is currently used as polling station. The difficulty for electors in CHB would be the access to the Church crossing the busy road where there are no pavements.
 - b) YMCA building – Public access would be very difficult to this building.
 - c) Willow Trees/Church Hill Community Centre is already used as a polling station. It would be possible to have polling there but an additional room would be required and this might mean the closure of the nursery for the day.
 - d) Maple View Medical Centre - There might be the possibility of using this building if they were willing to rent out and a suitable room for polling station use.

B Roman Way First School

- 3.9 Officers received a request from a parent of Roman Way First School to review use of the school as a polling station, the Winyates centre was suggested as an alternative.
- 3.10 Submissions were received from two Councillors requesting the status quo and one from the Head Teacher of Roman Way First School who supported the closure of the school due to disruption to pupils and working families. She suggested the use of ‘the Barn’ at the Winyates Centre.
- 3.11 During the consultation officers visited the Winyates Centre and ‘the Barn’ was considered but access to and car parking for the centre is poor. ‘The Barn’ is now a Dementia day care centre so this would have to close for the day if polling were held here.
- 3.12 It should be noted for both Abbeywood and Roman Way that at its meeting of the 25 May 2017 Worcestershire County Council resolved, for the benefit of staff, parents and for the benefit of children’s education that ‘schools are used as a last resort as far as practicable’.
- 3.13 When considering these polling place members should note that schools can be used as polling places free of charge (although heating, lighting and caretaking duties must be covered).

Customer/Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.14 The Council’s Customer Care / Equalities policies directly cross-relate, particularly in relation to Access issues. Accessibility for members of minority or disadvantaged groups is a key issue in the selection of suitable Polling Stations.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 Any changes agreed must be likely to be sustainable for a reasonable number of years, as frequent changes of Polling Station are not helpful for electors and undermine their knowledge of, and confidence in, electoral systems.
- 4.2 Choice of Polling Place / Polling Station should not give rise to significant grounds of complaint which might put election results at risk of challenge.
- 4.3 In terms of Environmental risks, it is of course preferable that choice of Polling Station location can help minimise unnecessary additional journeys by motorised vehicles.
- 4.4 In terms of Human Resources risks, the (Acting) Returning Officer must provide adequate levels and standards of staffing to secure proper polling arrangements.

5. APPENDICES

None.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Previously published Polling Stations Review reports / Minutes.
- Relevant Statutory provisions.
- Relevant correspondence on file from consultees.

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