

Electoral Matters Committee

Tuesday, 15th February,
2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), and Councillors Aled Evans, Andrew Fry and Mike Rouse

Officers:

Sue Hanley and Darren Whitney (on Microsoft Teams)

Democratic Services Officers:

Joanne Gresham

5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gemma Monaco.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

7. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on Monday 18th October 2021 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

8. POLLING PLACE CHANGES FOR MAY 2022

As Councillor Aled Evans was running late, at this point, there was a brief adjournment of the meeting between 17:02 and 17:11.

Chair

The Electoral Services Manager introduced a report on the subject of Polling Place Changes for May 2022 in Winyates Ward. Members were advised that due to time constraints there would not be sufficient time to complete all of the stages of a full consultation. However, it was confirmed that voters within Winyates Ward would be consulted on their voting preference for future polling.

During consideration of the report the following was highlighted for Members' consideration:

- That Relevant Authorities (such as Redditch Borough Council) must ensure that any polling places were accessible to all electors including those who were disabled and members of minority or disadvantaged groups. In addition to this it was important to consider any Climate Change implications and to minimise unnecessary additional journeys by motorised vehicles.
- Several alternative sites had been suggested to officers including "The Link" Office, "The Space" Unit and the old Winyates Locality Office. In addition to these sites, the Arrow Valley Visitors Centre had also been suggested as a potential venue however was not considered a possibility as its location is a long distance from the residential area of the polling district and would be difficult for electors to get to.
- Polling District WIA could use "The Space" Unit provided the leak in the roof of the unit could be located and repaired in time for the May 2022 elections. Officers were unable to confirm whether this leak could be identified and rectified in time for the May 2022 elections. In addition to this, there was the risk that, if there had been particularly heavy rain the day before the elections this could significantly impact on the state of the roof and cause further damage to the hanging ceiling which had already suffered a collapse of several of the ceiling tiles. It was further noted that should adverse weather experienced on the day of the elections any repairs would not be able to be undertaken and fixed on that day. All of these situations could potentially lead to lower confidence levels for the electors within the polling district. It was confirmed that "The Link" would work as a polling place for Polling District WIB however residents would have to cross over a bus lane to access this site. Officers reported that

should a snap general election be called neither of the above sites would be suitable and the polling places would have to revert to being located within the two schools currently used.

Following presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- Whether the Council was legally obligated to move the polling places if requested – It was confirmed by officers that there was no legal obligation to move the polling places however officers always took note of any requests by the Local Education Authority or schools regarding polling places and these were brought to Members for consideration. It was noted that requests such as these were generally received from schools in the run up to elections as schools were keen for their pupils to not miss any of their schooling time. Members were in agreement that in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns it was important to consider the loss of additional school days on top of the already lost days that had been experienced over the previous two years. However, there was the potential that complaints might be received were the polling places moved to unsuitable location.
- The use of portable cabins as an alternative site for polling places – officers informed the Committee that due to the pandemic and the use of portable cabins as Covid testing sites there was a shortage of portable cabins. These units were not considered ideal for polling, by officers, due to cost and staffing difficulties; furthermore no suitable locations for units as polling places had been found.
- The central location of the schools as polling places – some Members expressed that the schools that were currently used were at the heart of the community and were most accessible for all residents.

Following a detailed discussion Members

RECOMMENDED that

“The Space” Unit or the old Winyates locality Office be used as the polling place for WIA for May 2022; and

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“The Link” Office be used as the polling place for WIB for May 2022; and

voters attending the station on 5 May be asked their preference for future polling.

The Meeting commenced at 5.00 pm
and closed at 5.42 pm