

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLLING STATIONS - ANNUAL REVIEW 2011

Responsible Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Carole Gandy and Cllr Michael Braley, Portfolio Holders for Community Leadership and Corporate Management.
Responsible Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services

1. SUMMARY

To consider the outcomes of an interim review of Polling Places within the Borough of Redditch in compliance with the Review of Polling Districts & Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Council is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- 1) **the polling places detailed at Appendix 1 to the report be approved and adopted, with particular reference to proposed changes in respect of Abbeywood First School in Church Hill and the REDI Centre, which are to take immediate effect; and**
- 2) **with regard to the Methodist Church Schoolroom, Headless Cross, the change take effect only when necessary, once the date of closure of the current premises is known.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This review is not concerned with alterations to Ward or Polling District boundaries, only the situation of polling stations; and then only with proposed changes to three Polling Places.
- 3.2 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires all local authorities in England and Wales to undertake a full review of Polling Districts and Polling Places every 4 years this full review will take place later in 2011. An interim annual review of polling places is, however, also considered good practice.
- 3.3 This interim review has been prompted by issues relating to three specific locations in the Borough and the need to assure polling arrangements are in place.

- 3.4 In undertaking the review, the Council must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances, and have regard to the needs of electors who have disabilities.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 All polling places and polling stations within the Borough have been evaluated in terms of suitability and accessibility. The law says that facilities for voting must be reasonable and practicable. What this means in practice is a matter of judgement, but there is certainly no duty on the Council to make an unreasonably high level of provision, or to provide facilities in locations where it is impracticable to do so.

Representations Received

- 4.2 A request has been received from Abbeywood First School to consider an alternative venue for use as a polling station for the Church Hill North Polling District (CHB) as current use of the school also includes closure of the Church Hill Middle School on the day of poll.
- 4.3 A request has been received from County Councillor Barry Gandy to look at use of St Augustine's High School as an alternative venue for the Hunt End Polling District (AFB), the Portable Building at Banners Lane.

Revisions Considered

- 4.4 Electors for the Church Hill North Polling District (CHB) currently vote at the Abbeywood First School, Wood Piece Lane which shares a site with Church Hill Middle School. There have been a number of requests from parents and the Head Teacher to relocate this polling station. A suitable alternative would be to use the St Andrew's Methodist Church, Upperfield Close which is currently used as a polling station for Marlfield Polling District (CHD). This polling place has accommodation for multiple polling stations; it is within the electoral Ward and only a short distance from Abbeywood First School.
- 4.5 Electors for the Smallwood Polling District (CEB) currently vote at the REDI Centre, South Street, which closed in Spring 2010. A suitable alternative location for a polling station has been identified at the Youthworcs Centre on West Street / Ipsley Street (Youth House). These premises have the required accommodation for multiple polling stations with access that meets the Disabilities Act recommendations and adjacent car parking.
- 4.6 Electors for the Highfield Polling District (HOB) currently vote at the Headless Cross Methodist School Room, Evesham Road.

Officers are aware of likely closure of these premises pending large-scale renovation work and, although no date has yet been set, it has been necessary to identify a suitable alternative should notification of closure be received at the time of an election. The only viable location available is the car park at the 'Headless Cross Triangle' off Birchfield Road / Evesham Road which could be used with for a portable building(s) with ramped access for electors with disabilities and have car parking facilities. Other identified local venues were considered but were either not suitable or else not available.

- 4.7 The polling station for Hunt End Polling District (AFB) is the Portable Building at Banners Lane. Following the Electoral Boundary Review in 2004 this polling place was allocated following visits to sites including St Augustine's High School which was considered unsuitable following a risk assessment. No other suitable alternatives have ever been identified.

The Council would not normally consider closing a High School, because of impact on education and examinations; and at the same time there would be a serious child safety issue arising from additional vehicles bringing voters to the school while it was open, particularly at 'school run' times.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The hire of a portable building costs considerably more than usual accommodation (some £1,000 - £1,200 as against £200 - £300). Overall costs should, however, remain within budget.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The report is in accordance with the requirements of Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983. Polling Places are for the Council to identify, within which the Returning Officer identifies Polling Station(s).

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The proposed action is more statutory than Policy led, although it supports Equalities and public involvement in Democracy aims and objectives.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The proposals contribute towards the 'Well Managed Organisation' objective.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

No significant risks have been identified.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

The proposals help to meet the needs of customers by seeking to reduce discrimination and promote equality. The change of polling stations will be identified to electors by a special note included on polling cards.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

By addressing Polling Station issues, the Council seeks to improve access to all areas of the Community.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

Competitive quotes are sought in accordance with procurement requirements, but costs have to be weighed against location / accessibility / sustainability and general quality of accommodation issues.

There are no Asset Management implications for the authority.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

None have been identified. However, Polling Stations are selected to be as accessible as possible both to pedestrians and, in view of distances, to people travelling by car.

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

No direct HR implications have been identified.

15. GOVERNANCE / PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The Electoral Commission monitors performance of Electoral Services with a view to ensure proper conduct of electoral processes at all times. The Redditch & Bromsgrove Shared Service has been judged to perform at, and often above, the required standards.

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

The proposed Polling Stations have been considered in Community Safety Terms and deemed to be appropriate.

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

Ease of access varies from station to station, but is always an important consideration in proposals for Polling Stations.

Other options are available for people who can not readily go to a Polling Station to vote in person, or to assist people with disabilities (postal or proxy voting for instance).

18. LESSONS LEARNT

There continue to be very few suitable options available in any given area, so choices of venue are generally fairly simple, given the limited choices. Sadly, use of portable buildings often seems to be the only solution.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Local Borough and County Members have been consulted, together with various premises managers.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder(s)	YES
Chief Executive	YES
Returning Officer	YES
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	N/A
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	N/A
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	N/A
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	N/A
Head of Service	YES *
Head of Finance and Resources	N/A
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	YES *
Corporate Procurement Team	NO

21. WARDS AFFECTED

Central, Church Hill and Headless Cross & Oakenshaw Wards.

22. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 List of Polling Districts and Polling Stations
- Appendix 2 Youthworcs, Ipsley Street location plan
- Appendix 3 St Andrew's Methodist Church location plan
- Appendix 4 Headless Cross Car Park location plan.

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Relevant Statutes and correspondence on file.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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