

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

24th July 2012

POLLING STATIONS – ‘MINI-REVIEW’ 2012

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor P Mould, Portfolio Holder, Corporate Management
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Not yet
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
Wards Affected	Central and Headless Cross & Oakenshaw Wards
Ward Councillor Consulted	Not yet
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

The report seeks the Committee’s approval of amendments to Polling Station arrangements for Elections / Referenda / Polls which take place from November 2012 onwards and related matters.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

- 1) for the reasons stated in the report below, the following changes be made to existing Polling Stations, with immediate effect;**
 - a) in respect of Ipsley Youth House (Smallwood Polling District CEB), the new Polling Station be a portable building to be located on the Council Car Park adjacent to the present premises;**
 - b) in respect of the Methodist Church Schoolroom (Highfields Polling District HOB) that this premises is used for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections and any bi-elections held in 2012 and that from 2013 the new Polling Station be a portable building to be located on the Headless Cross central Car Park off ‘the Green’ ;**
- 2) the Polling District changes attached to this report be made to Vaynor Polling District (HOA) and Highfields Polling District (HOB) in the Headless Cross and Oakenshaw |Ward, with effect from the next revised Register of Electors.**

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3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are some minor financial implications for the Council which arise directly from this report, at this time, but which can be contained within existing budgets.
- 3.2 Use of portable building Polling Stations is inevitably more expensive than use of other premises; but sometimes there is no alternative as in the cases reported here.

Legal Implications

- 3.3 Power to designate Polling Places rests with the Council and decisions about the situation of Polling Stations within Polling Places are for the Returning Officer. Compliance with statutory requirements is required, principally under the Representation of the People Acts and Regulations and the Disability Discrimination Act.
- 3.4 Statutory elements of the Council's Constitution under the Local Government Act 2000, place authority to determine revised Polling Stations with the Council's Executive Committee.

Service/Operational Implications

- 3.5 "Relevant authorities" 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".
 - "c) 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."
- 3.6 Officers continue to attempt to identify polling station locations which improve both general accessibility and access for people with disabilities, but regret that this is not always possible to achieve, mainly because:

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- a) available buildings are not in the ownership or under the control of the Council; and/or
 - b) there are no suitable premises available within the Polling District or Ward.
- 3.7 This “mini review” has been triggered by factors beyond the Council’s control which affect the two Polling Stations in question.
- A. Ipsley Youth House, Ipsley Street, Redditch
- 3.8 As a result of a recent County Council review, Ipsley Youth House will no longer be reliably available for use as a Polling Station for the Smallwood Polling District (CEB).
- 3.9 Officers have invited other suggestions to meet this need, but no suitable alternatives have been identified to date and therefore at present Officers can only suggest use of a Portable Building on a nearby Car Park.
- B. Methodist Church Schoolroom, off The Rough, Headless Cross, Redditch
- 3.11 As a result of decisions of the Headless Cross Methodist Church, the Schoolroom will no longer be available for use as a Polling Station for the current Highfields Polling District (HOB) after 2012. It has been confirmed that it will be available for use at the Police and Crime Commissioner elections to be held on 15th November 2012.
- 3.12 Council has previously indicated that an alternative polling station for this polling district is to be a portable building located on the Headless Cross central Car Park off ‘the Green’.
- 3.13 Another location was suggested for the portable building to be sited at Cherry Wake Field, off Birchfield Road, Headless Cross; and was not thought suitable by Ward and County Councillors
- C. Proposed revision of Polling District Boundaries in Headless Cross
Headless Cross & Oakenshaw Ward – Vaynor Polling District (HOA) and Highfields Polling District (HOB)
- 3.14 The attached plan and electorate statistics suggests a revised Polling Station arrangement which would provide improved access to a greater number of electors in these areas, particularly if the above-revised Polling Station arrangements are agreed. It proposes a ‘horizontal split’ rather than a ‘vertical split’ in the area covered by the

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current Vaynor and Highfields polling districts and associated polling places at Vaynor First School, Tennyson Road and Cherry Wake Field, Birchfield Road.

- 3.15 Officers' proposal would be to undertake the next canvass for the revised Register of Electors, and then to publish it, based on the revised boundaries.

Consultation

- 3.16 Relevant Political Party representatives, Council and County Council Members, Borough Council Officers and the Returning Officer / Electoral Registration Officer have been consulted and their comments have been reflected in the report, as appropriate.
- 3.17 County Highways and County Property Teams have both been consulted and their comments will be reported to the meeting.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.18 The Council's Customer / Equalities policies do cross-relate, particularly in relation to Access issues.
- 3.19 Accessibility for members of minority or disadvantaged groups is a key issue in the selection of suitable polling stations. Where possible Polling Station selection should give due regard to increasing turnout.
- 3.20 Any changes agreed must be likely to be sustainable for a reasonable number of years. Frequent changes of Polling Station are not helpful for electors / confidence in electoral systems.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 Any new Polling Station has to be reliably available for the foreseeable future in order to maximise public knowledge of, and confidence in, the Council's electoral procedures.
- 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 preferable that Polling Station location can help minimise unnecessary additional journeys by car / motorised vehicles.

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5. APPENDICES

Plans – Former and Revised Polling Station Locations:

- A. Ipsley Youth House / Ipsley Street
- B. Methodist Schoolroom / Cherry Wake Field
- C. Revised Polling Districts boundaries in Headless Cross and Oakenshaw Ward

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Previously published Polling Stations Review reports / Minutes.
Relevant Statutory provisions.
Relevant correspondence on file from Polling Station / Returning Officer staff.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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