

POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Committee will recall that the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a requirement for all electoral registration authorities to undertake a review of the polling districts and polling places in their areas by 31 December 2007, and at four-yearly intervals thereafter.
- 1.2 The designation of polling districts is a matter for the Council, while polling places are a matter for the Executive. The Council has delegated authority to this Committee to undertake the review of polling districts and to agree any changes that it considers advisable. The Committee at its meeting on 14 September 2007 appointed a Working Party to consider representations received in response to the review, and to make recommendations to the Committee. This report contains the Working Party's recommendations.
- 1.3 The Cabinet on 7 November agreed to continue with this Authority's previous practice of designating the whole of each of the polling districts as the polling place for that district. Designation of the individual polling stations therefore remains a matter for the Returning Officer for the elections. The Returning Officer has invited comments on individual polling stations as part of the review.
- 1.4 It is hoped that the Committee will be able to agree any changes it wishes to make to polling districts at this meeting, to enable the revised register of electors published on 1 December 2007 to incorporate those changes. Recommendations on polling stations will be forwarded to the Returning Officer.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Information relating to the review was published on the Council's website. All councillors, parish and town councils, political parties and disability groups were consulted. Particular views were sought on those polling stations that are little used and where costs per elector are high. These are set out in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.2 In undertaking the review, authorities are required to bear in mind that, under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended), Councils must seek to ensure that:
 - (a) all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
 - (b) as far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.
 - (c) the polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the polling district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an areas either wholly or partly outside the polling district.

3. ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE'S CONSIDERATION

3.1 A schedule showing the representations received in response to the consultations is attached at Appendix 2. These were considered at a meeting of the Working Party on 15 October 2007. At that meeting, officers were asked to undertake further investigation into some of the representations received, and there was further consideration of these issues at a second meeting of the Working Party on 8 November. A synopsis of the issues considered by the Working Party, together with detailed recommendations for change, are set out below. Maps of the proposals will be available at the meeting.:

3.1.1. Furzedown and Hardley Ward FI polling district – Fountain Court Hotel Polling Station

Representations were received from Hythe and Dibden Parish Council regarding the disabled access to this polling station. The polling station is a function room within the hotel and there is direct access from outside via a number of steps. Disabled access is through the public areas of the hotel and disabled voters have to make their way through these public areas to reach the polling station.

The hotel was approached to explore whether it was possible to locate the polling station closer to the disabled access. Unfortunately, while the hotel would like to be of assistance, there are no private rooms in closer proximity to the disabled access. There are no other suitable alternative venues within the polling district for use as a polling station, and the Working Party therefore

RECOMMENDS:

That the current arrangements remain, but that the Returning Officer be requested to ensure that the disabled access is clearly marked when future elections are held.

3.1.2 Hythe West and Langdown Ward HK, HL & HM Polling Districts – Waterside Primary School, Hythe & Dibden Community Centre, and proposed new polling station at The Grove, St John's Street

Dibden and Hythe East Ward (part) HI Polling District – Hythe & Dibden Community Centre

Representations were received from Hythe and Dibden Parish Council that the Waterside Primary School is not in a logical or convenient place for all HK voters within Hythe West and Langdown Ward. Voters to the north of the ward naturally gravitate to the shopping areas immediately to the east, rather than south to their current polling station at the Waterside Primary School. Similarly, the Working Party heard that HM voters had also expressed a preference to vote closer to the centre of town, rather than at the Waterside Primary School.

Following discussions with representatives of the Parish Council, the Working Party

RECOMMENDS:

- (a) That it be recommended to the Returning Officer that a new polling station be established at Parish Council offices at The Grove, St John's Street (this polling station is within Dibden & Hythe East ward);**
- (b) That a new polling district be created for those voters (approximately 258) north of the railway line in HK polling district and, because of the special circumstances that apply, that it be recommended to the Returning Officer that these voters be assigned to The Grove;**
- (c) That it be recommended to the Returning Officer that HI voters (approximately 1340) in Dibden & Hythe East Ward be reassigned to The Grove from the Community Centre;**
- (d) That it be recommended to the Returning Officer that, because of the special circumstances that apply, HL (approximately 1670) and HM (approximately 1737) voters (in Hythe West & Langdown ward) be assigned to the Community Centre within Dibden & Hythe East Ward. (These recommendations will leave approximately 1402 HK (Hythe West & Langdown) voters at Waterside Primary School which is within the ward.**

**3.1.3 Fawley, Blackfield & Langley Ward (part)
Blackfield Baptist Church and proposed new polling station at St Francis Church Hall, Langley**

The polling station at Blackfield Baptist Church is within Holbury & North Blackfield Ward and serves FE voters (approximately 1104) from that ward. It also serves FC (approximately 1437) and FD (approximately 1836) voters from Fawley, Blackfield and Langley Ward. This polling station is extremely busy at peak times but until now no suitable alternative polling stations have been put forward.

Cllr Dunsdon has suggested that a new polling station be created at St Francis Church Hall, West Common, Langley. The Working Party fully supports this recommendation. Cllr Dunsdon has suggested that voters to the south of FD polling district be assigned to this proposed new polling station, while those to the north of the polling district continue to vote at Blackfield Baptist. His request is supported by the Fawley Parish Council. Both local members for the ward, Cllrs McEvoy and Wappet, favour reassigning all FD voters to the St Francis Church Hall and the Working Party supports this view.

**3.1.4 Holbury & North Blackfield Ward (part)
Blackfield Baptist Church and request for new polling station at Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre**

Cllr Dunsdon has requested the creation of a new polling station at the Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre, to serve part of FE polling district – approximately 789 voters in Heather Road and adjoining roads. He has suggested that the remaining approximately 330 FE voters continue to vote at the Blackfield Baptist Church Hall. This would mean creating a new polling

district for those voters. Cllr Dunsdon's request is supported by the Fawley Parish Council.

The Working Party does not support this recommendation. It considers that the Holbury & North Blackfield Ward is adequately served by three polling stations – the Blackfield Baptist Church Hall, the Good Shepherd Church Hall and the Waterside Theatre. It appreciates that Cllr Dunsdon's request arises from a wish to encourage turnout in the Heather Road area, but convenience to voters has to be balanced against cost and in this case the Working Party considers that an additional polling station in close proximity to a well-used and well-known facility at Blackfield Baptist Church cannot be justified.

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) That it be recommended to the Returning Officer that a new polling station be created at St Francis Church Hall, West Common, Langley and that the whole of FD polling district (approximately 1851 electors) be assigned to that polling station; and

(b) That no other changes to the polling arrangements in Fawley parish be made.

**3.1.5 Totton East Ward
TC, TD and TE Polling Districts – Oakfield Primary School, The Salmon Leap, Totton & Eling Community Centre and proposed new polling station at Testwood Baptist Church, Salisbury Road**

An approach was received from the Testwood Baptist Church, which is at present undergoing substantial extensions and renovations, to use the Church premises as a polling station instead of Oakfield Primary School. The premises have been inspected and are ideal. The Working Party favours this change as it is acknowledged that use of schools as polling stations is a considerable inconvenience to the schools and every effort is made to avoid using school premises where this is possible.

Cllr Weeks has furthermore suggested that use of the Salmon Leap (where TD voters are allocated) be discontinued. He has expressed the view that two polling stations per ward are sufficient in a built-up area such as Totton. He suggested allocating Salmon Leap voters to the Testwood Baptist Church and the Totton & Eling Community Centre instead. This is supported by local members Cllrs Britton and Lagdon, and by Totton & Eling Town Council. Cllr David Harrison, County Councillor for the area, would like the Salmon Leap retained as a polling station.

The Working Party supports Cllr Weeks's views.

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) That it be recommended to the Returning Officer –

(i) That a new polling station be created at Testwood Baptist Church Hall, Salisbury Road.

(ii) That use of the Oakfield Primary School and the Salmon Leap, be discontinued;
(iii) That TC (approximately 1982) voters be reassigned from the Oakfield primary school to the Testwood Baptist Church

(b) That TC polling district be extended to encompass all properties north and west of 103 Testwood Lane (935 Voters) currently in TD polling district, and that it be recommended to the Returning Officer that these voters be reassigned to the Testwood Baptist Church; and

(c) That TE polling district be extended to encompass all properties south and east of 101 Testwood Lane (360 Voters) currently in TD polling district and that it be recommended to the Returning Officer that these voters be reassigned to the Totton & Eling Community Centre.

3.1.6 Totton North Ward TF, TG & TH Polling Districts- Calmore Village Hall and Calmore Community Centre (2 polling stations at Community Centre)

Cllr Weeks has proposed that use of Calmore Village Hall for Totton North voters be discontinued and that all Totton North voters be assigned to Calmore Community Centre. Cllr Weeks pointed out that the polling station is not well used by Totton North voters and expressed the view that many would prefer to travel to the Calmore Community Centre rather than the Village Hall. The proposal was supported by the Totton & Eling Town Council.

The Working Party favours this suggestion and has noted that the Village Hall is far from ideal as a polling station as it is situated on a narrow, unlit, road with very limited parking facilities. The Village Hall is also used as a polling station for NA voters in the Ashurst, Copythorne North and Netley Marsh ward and attempts to find an alternative polling station to serve those voters will continue.

RECOMMENDATION:

- (a) That it be recommended to the Returning Officer that use of the Calmore Village Hall as a polling station for Totton North ward be discontinued and that all Totton North voters be assigned to two polling stations at the Calmore Community Centre;**
- (b) That that part of TF polling district west and south of Calmore Drive (235 electors) be combined with TG polling district; and**
- (c) That that part of TF polling district east and north of Calmore Drive (767 electors) be combined with TH polling district.**

3.1.7 Pennington Ward LF, LG & LH Polling Districts – Pennington WI Hall and proposed polling station at Lymington Health & Leisure Centre

All voters in Pennington ward vote at two polling stations at the Pennington WI Hall. In 2003 there was a polling station at Priestlands School but this proved unsatisfactory and it was discontinued.

Town Cllr Mrs Vernon-Jackson has pointed out that the WI Hall is situated too far north in the ward to be convenient to all voters. She has suggested use of the Lymington Health & Leisure Centre as an alternative or additional polling station. The Centre Manager would welcome a polling station at the Centre. The Working Party recommends that an additional polling station be created at the Centre. This would bring the number of premises used as polling stations in the ward to two. The proposal is supported by Cllr Hickman, one of the District Councillors for the ward.

RECOMMENDATION:

That it be recommended to the Returning Officer that a new polling station be created at Lymington Health & Leisure, and that LG (approximately 2037) and LH (approximately 772) voters be assigned to this polling station (This recommendation would leave 1904 LF electors voting at the Pennington WI Hall)

3.1.8 Polling Stations with Low Usage

Those polling stations that have low usage are set out in Appendix 1. The Working Party has reviewed these in the light of the criteria set out in paragraph 2.2 above.

The Working Party is concerned at the high cost per vote cast at some of these polling stations, but recognises that they serve distinct communities or parts of communities, and, in percentage terms, are fairly well-used. The exception is the Fritham Free Church, but turnout at that polling station was undoubtedly affected by the fact that the elections due on 3 May was countermanded following the death of one of the candidates. The election was re-run on 14 June and turnout on that date was lower than on 3 May.

On balance, the Working Party considers that the position with regard to these polling stations should be reassessed following the next Parliamentary election, when a fairer reflection of turnout at each may be gauged.

RECOMMENDATION:

That continued use of the polling stations set out in Appendix 1 be reassessed following the next Parliamentary election.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL, CRIME & DISORDER AND EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Locating polling stations within, or as close as possible to the centre of the catchment area for that polling station reduces distances voters have to travel. The Working Party has had regard to this in putting forward recommendations for polling stations, but, in some cases, has had to weigh up environmental considerations against cost. Also, premises suitable for use as polling stations are not always ideally located for the catchment area.
- 4.2 There are no crime and disorder implications.
- 4.3 Disability and Equality groups were consulted at the outset of the review and no issues were raised. The Working Party has been mindful of the need to identify accessible premises for use as polling stations and has tried to do this in formulating all its recommendations but unfortunately in some cases fully accessible premises are not available.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The recommendations appearing above should be cost-neutral – two additional polling stations are recommended but two are recommended for closure. The cost of the review will be in the region of £2,000 (mainly in the production of maps, postage and other documents for public inspection), excluding officer time.

6. RECOMMENDATION:

- 6.1 That the recommendations in paragraph 3 be agreed.

Further information:

Rosemary Rutins
Democratic Services Manager
Tel: (023) 8028 5381
e-mail: rosemary.rutins@nfdc.gov.uk

or

Tina Harwood
Electoral Services Officer
Tel: (023) 8028 5420
e-mail: tina.harwood@nfdc.gov.uk

Background papers:

Published documents

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES – POLLING STATIONS WITH LOW USAGE

Polling Station	Polling District	Cost – May 2007 (premises and direct staffing)	Electors allocated to polling station	No of voters at May 2007 elections	Cost per elector (premises & direct staffing only)
Fritham Free Church, Fritham	BF	£436	159	28	£15.57
Reading Room, Hinton Admiral	BG	£421	167	61	£6.90
Thorney Hill Community Centre, Thorney Hill	BI	£458	265	85	£5.38
Caravan adj telephone kiosk, Wootton Farm Road, Wootton	BM	£406	101	37	£10.97
Bold Forester, Marchwood	DM	£446	111	30	£14.86
Exbury Club, Exbury	EX	£546	142	46	£11.86
Bisterne Village Hall, Bisterne	RD	£418	172	64	£6.63
Average for District					£0.77

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES - REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

No.	Name	Representation relates to:	Representation	RO's comments
1	Whitsbury Parish Council	Downlands and Forest Ward – Whitsbury Village Hall Polling Station	Although small electorate, per capita costs probably well above average. But having a polling station in the village/parish is a positive factor in encouraging high turnouts – please keep	Recommend no change
2	Rockbourne Parish Council	Downlands & Forest Ward - Rockbourne Village Hall	No change	No change
3	Cllr Edward Heron	Downlands & Forest Ward – all polling stations within the ward	Whilst individual polling districts within the ward consist of comparatively few electors, the geographical area is relatively large. This may mean that each polling station is used by few electors and the cost per elector may be significantly above average for district as a whole. However, given that the ward is consistently amongst the highest percentage turnout in every election within the district and often the country, usually above 50% in all elections, I feel that any above average costs incurred are necessary. I would not wish to see any reduction in the number of polling stations within the ward or any significant changes in location	No change
4	Ringwood Town Council	Ringwood North, Ringwood South and Ringwood East & Sopley Wards – Crow WI Hall and Bisterne Village Hall	Town Council notes that there are difficulties about the suitability of Crow WI Hall and the high cost of operating a polling station at Bisterne Village Hall. Nonetheless after careful consideration of the issues, the Town Council decided that it should not recommend any changes to the polling districts or polling places within the town.	Recommend no change, but . Working Party asked to consider viability of Bisterne Village Hall

5	Mr & Mrs Gregory, Equalities Network, Ringwood	Ringwood area	All the polling stations in our area are wheelchair friendly and completely accessible. Can't think of anyway they can be bettered or any other buildings in the vicinity that would be suitable.	No change but Working Party to consider Bisterne Village Hall (representation 4 above)
6	Denny Lodge Parish Council	Brockenhurst & Forest South East Ward – Bold Forester polling station	After various discussions regarding realistic alternatives, it was suggested that the parishioners involved be written to explaining the situation and the alternatives before any action is taken	Individual consultation with electors will be costly and would create a precedent for other areas where changes might be proposed.
7	Brockenhurst Parish Council	Brockenhurst & Forest South East Ward – Caravan at Wootton	At the PC meeting on 18th September this issue was discussed. The councillors felt that the caravan at Wootton should continue to be provided for the residents there and that the high cost should be absorbed across the district generally as part of the cost of providing democratic services.	Working Party to consider
8	Cllr Paul Vickers	Brockenhurst & Forest South East Ward	Understands particular review of those polling stations that serve few electors. Is discussing the matter with the Parish Councils involved	Working Party to consider
9	Hyde Parish Council	Forest North West	Happy with status quo	Recommend no change
10	Fordingbridge Parish Council	Fordingbridge	Happy with current arrangements	Recommend no change
11	Sandleheath Parish Council	Fordingbridge	Happy with current arrangements	Recommend no change

12	Hythe & Dibden Parish Council	Furzedown & Hardley Ward – Fountain Court Hotel Polling Station	Concern at the disabled access at this venue. Whilst the disabled entrance is at one side of the Hotel the actual polling station was the other with fairly steep steps for access. Could the location within the Hotel be reviewed? – better disabled access provided closer to the polling station	Will be explored with Hotel. No alternative venue available.
		Hythe West & Langdown Ward – Waterside Primary School	Members have received a number of complaints that the school is not a convenient or logical place to vote for residents in this ward. It has been suggested that the Doug Horrill Centre on Challenger Way, opposite the Sylvans, when completed, might be a more suitable venue Representations also made some months ago that residents on the old Dreamland Site and Hollybank Estate would wish to vote at the Hythe & Dibden Community Centre	Number of other venues explored in 2003 but none found suitable or owners willing to make available as a polling station. Working Party to consider. Working Party to consider. An oral report will be made
13	Mrs M Lewis, Vice-Chair, New Forest Access for All	Pennington Ward – Pennington WI Hall	Hall is fully accessible	No change re use but see comments from Town Cllr Mrs Vernon-Jackson below
14	Mrs Jean Vernon-Jackson, Town Councillor and representing Access for All	Pennington Ward – Pennington WI Hall	WI Hall is too far for many Pennington residents. Many live south of Milford Road, and others far to the west. No-one voted in Deneside Copse. Suggest use part of Recreation Centre.	Agree that the polling station is not ideally situated for the ward, but have been unable to identify suitable alternative premises in the past. Priestlands School was used for a few elections but proved unsuitable. Initial discussions held with Leisure Centre and this might be viable.
15	Cllr Colin Wise	Boldre & Sway Ward – Boldre War Memorial Hall	One polling station at the Boldre War Memorial Hall is entirely satisfactory	No change

16	Cllr Goff Beck	Barton Ward	No reasons for any change in respect of the Barton Ward. The polling station is good, parking good, accessibility for the disabled and elderly good	No change
17	Cllr Lee Dunsdon	Holbury & North Blackfield Ward; Fawley Blackfield & Langley Ward – Blackfield Baptist Church Hall, Blackfield	<p>This polling station serves: Holbury & North Blackfield Ward – FE – 1104 electors Fawley, Blackfield & Langley Ward – FC – 1437 electors Fawley, Blackfield & Langley Ward – FD – 1836 electors Total electors – 4377</p> <p>There have been problems in the past coping with the number of voters at peak times. This review provides an opportunity to provide further polling stations: Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre, Heather Road, Blackfield – to serve part of Polling District FE, namely Heather Road Estate and Blackfield Road (789 electors) St Francis Church Hall, West Common, Langley – to serve the Langley part of Polling District FD (about 1429 electors). This would leave about 404 electors voting at Blackfield Baptist Church Hall</p> <p>These additional polling stations should encourage higher voter turnout and would presumably entail rearranging the polling districts</p>	<p>It is agreed that this is a busy polling station. It is situated within FE polling district and therefore FC and FD electors voting are voting at a facility outside their polling districts, which is permissible only if “special circumstances” apply.</p> <p>(a) New polling station for FD – St Francis Church Hall, West Common, Langley</p> <p>This idea is supported. Prior to 2003, attempts to find an alternative polling station for FD were unsuccessful. Cllr Dunsdon suggests that only part of the FD polling district transfers to St Francis Church Hall. This would mean creating a new polling district. Further details will be available at the meeting.</p> <p>(b) New Polling Station at Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre</p> <p>Cllr Dunsdon suggests that this proposed new polling station serves only part of the FE polling</p>

				<p>District, i.e. those properties situated within the Heather Road Estate immediately adjoining roads, a total of 789 electors. This would leave approximately 330 electors for whom a separate polling district would have to be created to enable them to continue to use the Blackfield Baptist Church. 330 is a very small number of electors for a polling district in a built-up area.</p> <p>We do not consider that, with the increased availability of postal votes and constant pressure to reduce costs, it is reasonable to create a new polling station within a few hundred yards of a well-established and well-known polling station at Blackfield Baptist Church, especially if it is possible to relieve some pressure on that polling station through transferring some voters to the St Francis Church Hall.</p> <p>Working Party to consider</p>
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18	Cllr Alan Weeks	Totton East – The Salmon Leap Totton North – Calmore Village Hall	I am of the opinion that a maximum of two polling stations is sufficient for any ward. TD in Totton East (1291 electors) which uses the Salmon Leap pub could combine with one of the others. TF in Totton North (993 electors) (Calmore Village Hall) has limited use with some electors having to travel further than the alternatives;	An approach has been received from Testwood Baptist Church to use the Church Hall in Salisbury Road, when renovations to the hall are completed, instead of Oakfield Primary School (TC – Totton East – 1963 electors). Subject to inspection of the premises it is suggested that this be agreed. Working Party to consider
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