

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The General Purposes and Licensing Committee on 10 September 2010 appointed a Working Party comprising Cllrs Beck, Mrs Jackman, Rice, Rippon-Swaine and S S Wade to:

“oversee the review of polling districts and polling places in New Forest District under Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and to make recommendations to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee”.

- 1.2 The Committee will recall that the review commenced a year in advance of the statutory four year interval at the request of the Electoral Commission, following issues in other areas of the country with the management of voters at some polling stations at the 2010 Parliamentary elections. Notwithstanding the fact that no such issues had occurred in this District, the Committee was content to commence the review early as it wished the Working Party to consider carefully the viability of some little used polling stations in the District.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In agreeing to undertake the review, the Committee was mindful of the need to ensure that polling stations represented value for money, but also that cost was only one of the factors to be taken into account. The major consideration is the provision of such reasonable and accessible facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 2.2 As required by law, steps were taken to publicise the review and to invite comments. This was done by publishing relevant documents on the Council's website and by inviting comments from all Councillors, Parish and Town Councils and disability groups. Only three responses were received. All relevant documents were also kept available for inspection at the Council's Information Offices.
- 2.3 Members are reminded that various pieces of legislation dictate that:
- The designation of polling districts is a matter for the Council
 - The designation of polling places is a matter for the Executive
 - The designation of polling stations is a matter for the Returning Officer
- 2.4 Unless special circumstances apply, a polling place and a polling station should be within the polling district to which they relate.

3. THE REVIEW

- 3.1 The Working Party met on 16 February. All members of the Council were invited to attend the meeting. Cllr Rice was elected Chairman.
- 3.2 The Working Party had before it a list of all polling districts and polling stations in the District, a schedule of the polling stations with low usage which the Committee had requested them to consider in detail, and the three responses received to the consultations. A copy of the minutes of the Working Party's meeting is attached to this report as Appendix 1. These set out the Working Party's deliberations and detailed recommendations.
- 3.3 To aid discussion at this meeting, the Working Party's substantive recommendations are summarised in this paragraph, with the detailed recommendations appearing in the recommendations at paragraph 6. The Committee is requested to note that the recommendations in regard to some polling stations will result in polling stations being situated outside of the polling districts to which they relate, but in each case it has not been possible to identify suitable premises within the polling districts concerned.

Summary of recommendations:

3.3.1 Low Usage Polling Stations

- (a) That the polling stations at Exbury Club and the Caravan at Wootton be discontinued, and that voters be allocated to the Beaulieu Village Hall and St Johns Church Hall, Bashley, respectively.
- (b) That the remaining polling stations identified as low usage be retained, but that the continued use of the Reading Rooms at Hinton Admiral be kept under review.
- (c) There was discussion on a possible alternative venue in Fritham and following the meeting further enquiries were made as to possible other facilities. These have resulted in what should prove to be a much improved facility – Valetta Barn. This is a recent conversion into a function room and its owner has agreed to make it available as a polling station.

3.3.2 Other Issues

- (d) That an additional polling station be established at the St John the Baptist Church Hall in Linford Road, Poulner, and that most of RC voters be allocated to that polling station. A minor change to the RA and RC polling districts is also proposed.
- (e) That the TG and TH polling districts be amended by moving approximately 400 voters from TG to TH to comply with the Chief Counting Officer's direction that no more than 2,500 voters should be allocated to each.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Overall, the Working Party is recommending the establishment of one new polling station and the closure of two. There will be some savings arising from this action but these will be offset to a degree by the one-off cost of writing to all electors affected to inform them of changes in polling stations, and a likely increase in the number of postal voters. Therefore, although there will be savings, these are difficult to quantify and will not be significant.

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

- 5.1 Closure of the polling stations and Exbury and Wootton will result in electors wishing to vote in person having to travel longer distances from their homes to vote. However, voters may vote by post if they find the new polling stations inconvenient.
- 5.2 There are no crime and disorder implications.
- 5.3 The caravan at Wootton is not accessible to the disabled, whereas the new facility at Bashley is.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

To the Council:

- (a) That, with effect from 1 December 2011, the RA and RC polling districts be amended by moving Lilac Close and Winston Way from RC to RA polling district;
- (b) That, with effect from 1 December 2011, the TG and TH polling districts be amended by moving voters in the following roads from TG to TH:

Court Close
Buckland Gardens
Warren Place
Cooks Lane
Pauletts Lane
Loperwood Lane
Flowerdown Close
Cedarwood Close

To the Cabinet:

- (c) That, because of the special circumstances that apply –
- (i) EX and BA polling districts be designated as the polling place for EX polling district;
- (ii) BM and NF polling districts be designated as the polling place for BM polling district;

- (iii) RC and RH polling districts be designated as the polling place for RC polling district.

To the Returning Officer:

- (d) that, because of the special circumstances that apply -
 - (i) The polling station at Exbury Club be discontinued and that EX voters be allocated to the Beaulieu Village Hall (in BA polling district);
 - (ii) The polling station (caravan) at Wootton be discontinued and that BM voters be allocated to the St Johns Church Hall in Bashley (in NF polling district);
 - (iii) RC voters, with the exception of those in Lilac Close and Winston Way, be reallocated to the St John the Baptist Church Hall in Linford Road, Poulner;
 - (iv) the RC register in use at the polling stations on 5 May 2011 be “split” so that voters in Lilac Close and Winston Way continue to vote at the Community Centre at Poulner Junior School;
 - (v) the TG register in use at the May 2011 elections be “split” so that voters in
 - Court Close
 - Buckland Gardens
 - Warren Place
 - Cooks Lane
 - Pauletts Lane
 - Loperwood Lane
 - Flowerdown Close
 - Cedarwood Closevote at the TH polling station at Calmore Community Centre
- (e) That the Valetta Barn in Fritham be used as a polling station for BF voters instead of the Fritham Free Church;
- (f) That no other changes to polling stations be recommended at this stage, but that the continued use of the polling station at the Reading Room, Hinton Admiral, be kept under review;
- (g) That all electors affected by changes in polling stations for the 5 May 2011 elections be advised of the changes in good time to allow them to apply for a postal or proxy vote, should they so wish, and that candidates and political parties be requested to assist in publicising the changes.

Further information:
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Background Papers:
Published documents

16 FEBRUARY 2011

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

POLLING DISTRICTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting of the Polling Districts Working Party held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday 16 February 2011.

Councillors:

p G C Beck
p Mrs P Jackman
p A W Rice

Councillors:

p W S Rippon-Swaine
p S S Wade

Officers Attending:

Ms L Collins; Ms D Everett and Mrs R Rutins

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN.**RESOLVED:**

That Cllr Rice be elected Chairman of the Working Party.

The Chairman (Cllr Rice) in the chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No declarations of interest were made by members in connection with any agenda item.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

4. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES (REPORT A).

The Working Party was reminded that the General Purposes and Licensing Committee had agreed to undertake a general review of polling districts and polling places earlier than the statutory four-yearly interval at the request of the Electoral Commission. The Commission was concerned not to repeat problems that had occurred in other areas of the country at some polling stations at the May 2010 Parliamentary elections. Although no problems had been experienced at polling stations in this District, the Committee had been content to commence the review early as it wished the Working Party to consider carefully the viability of some little used polling stations in the District. In agreeing to undertake the review, the Committee had been mindful of the need to ensure that the polling stations represented value for money, but also that cost was but one of the factors to be

taken into account. The major consideration was the provision of such reasonable and accessible facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

The difference between polling districts, polling places and polling stations was explained. Members noted that, unless special circumstances applied, a polling place and a polling station should be within the related polling district.

Members considered the schedule of polling districts, polling places and polling stations which had formed the basis of consultation with the public, and did not have any issues to raise other than those highlighted in Report A. It was, however, noted that the County Council was considering the possible sale of the Fernmount Centre and its long-term availability as a polling station was uncertain.

4.1 Low Usage Polling Stations:

The polling stations with low usage were considered as follows:

4.1.1 Fritham Free Church, Fritham

The views of Cllr Edward Heron, the County Councillor for the area, and those of Bramshaw Parish Council, both supporting the retention of this polling station, were noted. Members were advised that if the polling station was discontinued, Fritham voters wishing to vote in person at a polling station would have to travel approximately 3 miles to what would be the alternative polling station, Bramshaw Village Hall.

Members were of the view that a polling station should be retained in Fritham but suggested that the officers investigate whether a more suitable venue in Fritham could be identified. The public house which sometimes had a marquee-type structure erected, was suggested. It was agreed that officers would make further enquiries and report to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee on 11 March.

4.1.2 Reading Room, Hinton Admiral

Members considered the retention of this polling station at length. They noted that it had a higher than average turnout, 64%, but also that only 101 voters had voted there at the May 2010 Parliamentary elections, an average of 6.7 electors per hour. On balance, the Working Party decided to recommend its retention but that its use be kept under review.

4.1.3 Thorney Hill Community Centre, Thorney Hill

In percentage terms, this polling station had the lowest turnout of those identified as low usage, but it had the highest number. Members noted that it served a distinct community, some distance from the next available facility at the Bransgore Village Hall, and the Working Party considered that it should be retained.

4.1.4 Caravan adj Telephone Kiosk, Wootton Farm Road

Members were unanimous that this polling station should be discontinued and the voters reallocated to the St Johns Church Hall in Bashley, where there was already a polling station serving the Bashley ward. It was noted that the St Johns Church Hall was outside of the BM polling district, but considered that special circumstances applied to warrant the designation of a polling place and polling station outside of the polling district.

4.1.5 Exbury Club, Exbury

It was noted that Exbury & Lepe Parish Council did not oppose the proposal to discontinue this polling station and reallocate voters to the Beaulieu Village Hall. Members agreed that this should be done. The polling station would be outside the EX polling district but members were of the view that the high cost per elector of the provision at Exbury Club meant that a venue outside of the polling district was warranted.

4.1.6 Bisterne Village Hall, Bisterne

Ringwood Town Council supported the retention of this polling station. It was agreed that this polling station should remain. It was noted that there was a high turnout in percentage terms, the cost of the provision of the polling station at this venue was not considered excessive, and that voters wishing to cast their votes in person would have to travel either to the Public Offices at Ringwood (the future of which was uncertain because of the proposals for the Ringwood Gateway Scheme) or to the Village Hall at Sopley.

4.2 Other issues

The Working Party considered other issues raised by the Returning Officer in Report A, as follows:

4.2.1 RA, RB and RC Polling Districts – Ringwood North District Ward - Polling Station at Community Centre, Poulner Junior School

The Working Party agreed that an additional polling station should be identified for some voters in RA, RB or RC polling districts, currently all voting at the Community Centre, Poulner Junior School, to ease pressure on that polling station. It was reported that, for a number of reasons, but principally parking and access issues, the Errington Hall at Stillwater Park was not considered suitable. It was noted that the owners of the Scout Hall in Southampton Road, adjacent to the A31, were not willing to make the premises available for use as a polling station. The Working Party therefore agreed that RC voters be allocated to the St John the Baptist Church Hall in Linford Road, Poulner, in RH polling district. Members noted that this polling station would not be within RC polling district but considered that the special circumstances applying warranted the polling station being situated outside the polling district.

It was agreed to recommend that the boundary between RA and RC polling districts be redrawn so that Lilac Close and Winston Way fell within RA polling district, because voters in those roads would find it more convenient to vote at the current polling station at Poulner Junior School. It was noted that it would be preferable to delay the change in polling district until the new registers were published in December 2011, but that the registers could be “split” so that voters in the roads mentioned could continue to vote at the Community Centre on 5 May 2011.

4.2.2 TG and TH Polling Districts – Totton North District Ward – Polling Station at Calmore Community Centre

It was noted that the Chief Counting Officer for the referendum had directed that no more than 2,500 electors should be allocated to a single polling station. After taking account of electors voting by post, TG polling district had 2,759 electors. Whilst noting that no difficulties with queues had occurred at the polling stations at

Calmore Community Centre, the Working Party accepted that it would be advisable to reduce the size of the TG polling district. The Working Party agreed to recommend that voters in the roads set out in recommendation (b) below be moved from TG to TH polling district. To avoid the need to republish registers it would be preferable for this change to come into effect on 1 December 2011, but the polling station registers could be "split" for the election so that the voters in the roads set out in recommendation (b) could vote at the TH polling station on 5 May.

The Working Party noted that all voters who would be allocated to a different polling station would be informed in writing of the changes before the despatch of poll cards. Political parties and candidates at the election would also be informed of the changes so that they could assist to bring the changes to the attention of voters when canvassing for the election.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That, with effect from 1 December 2011, the RA and RC polling districts be amended by moving Lilac Close and Winston Way from RC to RA polling district;***
- (b) ***That, with effect from 1 December 2011, the TG and TH polling districts be amended by moving voters in the following roads from TG to TH polling districts:***

***Court Close
Buckland Gardens
Warren Place
Cooks Lane
Pauletts Lane
Loperwood Lane
Flowerdown Close
Cedarwood Close***

RESOLVED:

- (c) That it be recommended to the Cabinet that, because of the special circumstances that apply –
- (i) EX and BA polling districts be designated as the polling place for EX polling district;
- (ii) BM and NF polling districts be designated as the polling place for BM polling district;
- (iii) RC and RH polling districts be designated as the polling place for RC polling district.
- (d) That it be recommended to the Returning Officer that, because of the special circumstances that apply –
- (i) The polling station at Exbury Club be discontinued and that EX voters be allocated to the Beaulieu Village Hall (in BA polling district);

- (ii) The polling station (caravan) at Wootton be discontinued and that BM voters be allocated to the St Johns Church Hall in Bashley (in NF polling district);
- (iii) RC voters, with the exception of those in Lilac Close and Winston Way, be reallocated to the St John the Baptist Church Hall in Linford Road, Poulner;
- (iv) the RC register in use at the polling stations on 5 May 2011 be "split" so that voters in Lilac Close and Winston Way continue to vote at the Community Centre at Poulner Junior School;
- (v) the TG register in use at the May 2011 elections be "split" so that voters in

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Buckland Gardens
Warren Place
Cooks Lane
Pauletts Lane
Loperwood Lane
Flowerdown Close
Cedarwood Close

vote at the TH polling station at Calmore Community Centre

- (e) That the officers investigate and report to the Committee on a possible alternative polling station for BF voters in Fritham;
- (f) That no other changes to polling stations be recommended at this stage, but that the continued use of the polling station at the Reading Room, Hinton Admiral, be kept under review;
- (g) That the Returning Officer be requested to inform, in writing, all electors affected by changes in polling stations at the 5 May 2011 elections in good time to allow them to apply for a postal or proxy vote, should they so wish, and that candidates and political parties be requested to assist in publicising the changes;

5. NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that it was not necessary for the Working Party to meet again.

CHAIRMAN