

## REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

### 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The General Purposes and Licensing Committee at its meeting of 14 June 2019 appointed a Working Party, with the following terms of reference:

“To oversee the review of the polling districts and polling places in the New Forest District under Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, and to make recommendations to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee”.

- 1.2 The Council is required by law to complete a review of the polling districts and polling places within the District by the end of 2019. The Working Party has to consider any issues involved and to make recommendations to the Committee. The Committee’s recommendations will be approved by Council in October 2019.

- 1.3 Members should be aware that:

- A **Polling District** is a geographical area created by a sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary Election.
- A **Polling Place** is a building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.
- A **Polling Station** is the room or area with the place where voting takes place. Polling stations are chosen by the Returning Officer.
- Each district council must provide “such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances”. The Council has also to seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled
- Unless special circumstances apply, a polling place and polling station should be in the same polling district
- The Returning Officer has no power to requisition buildings in private ownership for use as polling stations but is entitled to use schools maintained or assisted by a local authority, as well as those schools receiving grants made out of monies provided by Parliament. This includes academies and free schools. It is the intention of the Returning Officer where feasible to avoid using schools because the disruption caused to education and to parents.

### 2. THE REVIEW

- 2.1 The Working Party invited comments from all District Councillors, Parish and Town Councils and the District’s MPs as well as persons or groups who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Notice of the Review was publicised on the Council’s website and representations sought by no later than 18<sup>th</sup> August 2019. Those making comment were asked to identify alternative places to hold future elections if they were proposing closure of a particular polling station.

- 2.2 Attached to this report are the following:

- A plan showing the polling districts and their identifiers (Appendix 1)
- A schedule of polling districts, polling places and polling stations including the Returning Officer's comments and a brief summary of any representations received. (Appendix 2). More detailed comments regarding specific polling places and polling stations are set out in paragraph 4 below.
- A plan showing the proposed polling district DL (Appendix 3).

### 3. ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- 3.1 A variety of representations have been received during the consultation period the majority of which relate to the potential closure of schools for election purposes. Those polling stations which have low usage have attracted comments and along with others identified by the Returning Officer or through returns from Presiding Officers or Polling Station Inspectors as being in need of review for other reasons following the District /Parish and European elections in May.
- 3.2 One aspect of the Review which requires consideration is the increase in population and development proposals in the District to 2025. As regards population projections current forecasts estimate that the population will increase from 178500 to 184700 by 2025 or 3.5%. Large scale development is not anticipated in any particular part of the District which would cause major impact by 2025.

### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

- 4.1 Representations during the consultation period raised a number of concerns which the Working Party discussed and considered which are set out in the following paragraphs (a) to (i). The Working Party's full recommendations to the Committee are set out in Paragraph 10 below.
- (a) **The Reading Room, Hinton Admiral (BG Polling District - Bransgore and Burley District Ward)** – This polling station serves an electorate of 128 and had a turnout of 23 electors who attended the polling station. Low usage, access after dark and the car park have been raised in the past. The cost per elector who actually cast a vote at the polling station based on the District/Parish Election turnout is £24.56 and is not considered sustainable. No representations were received as part of the consultation other than those of the Returning Officer. It is conceded that the distances for some of the electorate wishing to vote in person will increase but the Working Party recommended that the polling station be discontinued and the electorate moved to Bransgore Village Hall as part of polling district BH. This area is sparsely populated in any event. Moving the electorate to Polling District BH balances it more closely with Polling District BI and the polling station at the Village Hall can accommodate the minor increase in voters. The Returning Officer will advise electors of the change and also offer postal voting as an alternative. **Recommend closure of Reading Room Polling Place and Polling Station**
- (b) **Calmore Village Hall, Pauletts Lane, Calmore (NA Polling District – Ashurst, Copythorne South and Netley Marsh District Ward)** - This is another Polling station which has low usage with an electorate of 316 of which 75 electors attended the polling station during the District/Parish elections. It serves the more northerly part of the parish where the properties are widely dispersed. The cost per elector who voted at the polling station was £8.52. The average across the District is approximately £2.50 and in many cases

much less. Netley Marsh Parish Council believe that closure of the polling station would be a retrograde step and that it is vital for democracy so that as many people who are entitled to vote may do so in person. They accept that the polling station is not well used but as public transport to the proposed alternative of the Community Hall in Woodlands Road is non-existent, many residents would be denied their vote. The Working Party concluded that the polling station should be discontinued and voters redirected to the Community Hall in Woodlands Road. The Returning Officer will advise the electorate and would offer postal votes as an alternative. Polling district NA would be amalgamated with polling district NB. **Recommend closure of the Calmore Village Hall as a Polling Place and a polling station**

- (c) **Lydlynch Pre-school School, Lydlynch Road, Totton (TA Polling District - Totton Central 1)** – During the District/Parish and European elections a number of comments were received from members of the public regarding access to the polling station during school hours as well as poor access for vehicles on the approach to the school. The School has also made representations to the Town Council and the Council about disruption to pupils caused by school closures. As a result of the consultation a further 28 representations have been received from parents detailing the personal impact of the closures on themselves and their children, the loss of income to the pre-school and the impact on childcare arrangements. In addition, the Town Council resolved at its meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> July that “the Town Clerk inform NFDC of the Council’s suggestion to move the Lydlynch School’s polling station to the Totton and Eling Community Association building for future elections and to request that in all cases the NFDC should consider financial loss by organisations in choosing Polling Stations”. It should be noted that the Association’s building falls within another polling district and Members should be aware of the criteria for selecting polling places outlined in paragraph 1.3 above. The Returning Officer has met with representatives of the Totton and Eling Cricket Club which is close to the current polling station, has a suitable function room, car park and is sited within the polling district and therefore satisfies the criteria. The Club is willing to allow use of the building as a polling place. **Recommend that the polling place is moved from Lydlynch Pre School and relocated to the Totton and Eling Cricket Club building in Bramtoco Way, Totton**
- (d) **Sea Scouts Hall, Becton Lane, New Milton (NM Polling District – Becton)** - A number of comments were received during the District/Parish and European elections regarding general access, internal lighting and the gravel entrance to the polling station particularly during in darkness. It should be noted that in previous reviews it has not been possible to locate an alternative venue within the polling district and the nearest other polling place is the Barton on Sea Methodist Church Hall which is outside the polling district and is currently used by two very large electorates. Adding another electorate of 1770 could prove problematic in terms of control at busy times. The lighting issue was resolved for the European election and improvements to the footpath in the area have also reduced complaints. There were no representations during the consultation period. **Recommend no change**
- (e) **Wildground Junior School, Armitage Avenue, Dibden Purlieu (HN Polling District – Butts Ash & Dibden Purlieu)** – This is one of two schools in this area where attempts have been made in previous reviews to relocate the polling station from the school. Alternative venues have been investigated but fall outside the polling district. Further discussions have been held with the school and Chair of Governors on behalf of the Wildground Federation and a workable arrangement has been achieved. In future elections the Returning

Officer is content to use the infant school which is the most convenient for both schools. There are minor issues regarding furniture at the school but this can be overcome. Whilst is the Returning Officer's intention to reduce the use of schools where feasible in this instance and with the agreement of the school it is considered that this is a useful outcome. **Recommend no change.**

- (f) **Waterside Primary School, Ashford Crescent, Hythe (HK/1 Polling District – Hythe West & Langdown) (Photograph F and Plan F)** – This is the other school within Hythe and Dibden Parish and alternative polling stations have been investigated in reviews which took place in previous years. The difficulty is that there are no suitable alternative venues within the polling district. The electorate is 1342 with 146 voting by post at the European election in May. There have been no complaints regarding the use of the school, Hythe and Dibden Parish Council are content with the existing polling stations within the Parish, and no other representations have been received during the consultation period. **Recommend no change.**
- (g) **Sandleheath Methodist Church Hall, Alderholt Road, Sandleheath (SA Polling District – Fordingbridge)** – As part of the consultation process it was suggested that the polling place for Sandleheath be relocated from the Methodist Church Hall to Sandleheath Village Hall (formerly St Aldhelm's) which is situated on Station Road, the main road between Sandleheath and Fordingbridge, has safer parking than the Church Hall and is more central to the village. The Church Hall is at a road junction, has very limited parking and is not central to the village. Renovation works have recently been carried out to the Village Hall which has a level entrance and good parking. There has been no objection from the Village Hall to its use as a future polling station. The Returning Officer will advise electors of the change of venue and the ability to use postal voting arrangements if necessary. **Recommend transfer of the Polling Place from the Methodist Church Hall to Village Hall in Sandleheath.**
- (h) **The Victoria Rooms, Bridge Street, Fordingbridge (FO & FP Polling Districts - Fordingbridge)** – The Victoria Rooms were used during the recent District/Parish and European Elections as building works were being carried out at the Town Hall in Fordingbridge which is the usual polling station for these polling districts. The Town Council has now advised that all building works have been completed. These are two very large electorates, namely 2414 for polling district FO and 2317 for polling district FP. The Returning Officer's view was that the Victoria Rooms worked well and parking was better but following representations from local members regarding access for disability impaired voters it was considered that the Town Hall was a more suitable location. **Recommend that the Polling Place is transferred from the Victoria Rooms to Fordingbridge Town Hall.**
- (i) **Polling districts DL & DN – Brockenhurst and Forest South East (Appendix 3)** – The proposed change is to combine the two polling districts under Polling District DL as polling district DN has an electorate of only 21 and is co-terminus with polling district DL. A plan is attached showing the proposed new polling district DL. The electorate from both polling districts will continue to vote at Beaulieu Abbey Church Hall, The Rectory, Beaulieu so there will be no inconvenience to the electorate as far as the polling place is concerned. **Recommend Polling District DN is amalgamated with Polling District DL.**

## 5. ADDITIONAL DELEGATED AUTHORITY

- 5.1 The proposed changes to polling districts and polling places would in normal circumstances be introduced on the publication of the new Register on or before 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019. However, should there be an election called in the interim at short notice it may be necessary to find alternative polling stations for a variety of reasons and it is considered prudent to delegate authority to the Returning Officer the ability to designate alternative Polling Places and polling stations.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Closure of any of the smaller polling stations will result in minimal savings but cost should not be a major consideration as part of the review in the light of statutory requirements.

## **7. ENVIRONMENTAL, CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are none.

## **8. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Some polling stations have accessibility issues for example, the polling station at Martin. However, it is acknowledged that it is not a problem as polling staff assist voters with mobility issues. There is no suitable alternative venue that is accessible within that district. Five disability organisations were approached for their views as part of the consultation process.

## **9. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 All representations made during the consultation period will be published on the Council's website and be made available for public scrutiny at Council offices together with comments from the Returning Officer. The online form on the website advised individuals to acknowledge the Privacy Policy dealing with the use of data.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 The Committee agrees the following proposals and recommends to Council,
- (1) That with effect from the from the publication of the Revised Register of Electors in December 2019
    - (a) The Reading Room Polling Place and Polling Station be discontinued; and
    - (b) Existing Polling District BG (approximately 128 electors) be transferred to Polling District BH and the electors allocated to Bransgore Village Hall;
    - (c) The Calmore Village Hall Polling Place and Polling Station be discontinued with electors being transferred to Netley Marsh Community Hall Woodlands Road; and
    - (d) The existing NA Polling District (approximately 316 electors) be transferred and amalgamated to Polling District NB as a single polling district (approximately 1692 electors);
    - (e) The Lydlynch Pre School be discontinued as Polling Pace and Polling Station and the electors allocated to the Totton and Eling Cricket Club building in Bramtoco Way, Totton;

- (f) The Sandleheath Methodist Church Hall, Alderholt Road, Sandleheath be discontinued as a Polling Place and Polling Station and the electors transferred to the Village Hall, Main Road, Sandleheath;
  - (g) The Victoria Rooms, Bridge Street, Fordingbridge be discontinued as a Polling Place and Polling Station and the electors transferred to the Town Hall, Fordingbridge;
  - (h) Polling District DN (approximately 21 electors) is amalgamated with Polling District as a single DL polling district with approximately 131 electors.
- (2) That all other Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations remain the same as outlined in Appendix 2
- (3) That the Returning Officer be authorised to designate alternative Polling Places and Polling Stations should the need arise prior to the publication of the revised Register in December 2019

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**Background Papers:**

Published documents