

Report of the Head of Resources

REVIEW OF POLLING STATIONS 2016

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform members of the actions taken in relation to the review of polling stations following the Police and Crime Commissioner election on 5 May 2016 and the Referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union on 23 June 2016, and to notify members of the decision of the Returning Officer in respect of polling station venues in one polling district of Brickhill Ward (BC) and one polling district of Irchester Ward (IC).

2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 As part of this review of polling stations, feedback was obtained from electors, polling station staff, administrators of polling station venues, and officers of the council engaged in polling station administration and inspection.
- 2.2 In most cases the feedback was positive, although changes are needed in respect of two polling stations, as outlined below. Officers in the elections team reviewed the feedback provided, and investigated any risks associated with continued use of sites where problems had been highlighted. Officers then presented their findings to the Returning Officer for his consideration.
- 2.3 Following this initial review, members representing the polling districts affected by the provisional proposals were consulted to allow them the opportunity to comment. Any representations received from members were then taken into consideration, alongside feedback received from other sources, by the Returning Officer when making his final decision.

3 Appendices

Appendix A: Definitions of polling district/place/station, and returning officer;
Appendix B: Background information relating to polling station changes.

4 Proposed action:

The Committee is invited to:

- 4.1 **RECOMMEND** that council approves the amendment of polling places:
(i) polling place for polling district BC to be polling district BA
(ii) polling place for polling district IC to be Irchester Ward
- 4.2 **RESOLVE** to note the decision of the Returning Officer to transfer the polling stations for BC (Brickhill) to St Mark's Church Hall, Brickhill Road, Wellingborough and for IC (Little Irchester) to Irchester Village Hall, 36 School Road, Irchester with immediate effect.

5 Background

- 5.1 The council is required to divide its area into polling districts and polling places for the purposes of parliamentary elections; these are also used for other types of election.
- 5.2 Section 18C(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) required local authorities to carry out and complete a review of polling districts and polling places intermittently.
- 5.3 The most recent statutory review of polling districts and polling places was finalised in October 2014 with a few minor changes to polling places
- 5.4 After each election a further review of polling stations is carried out to determine whether any circumstances have changed since the last review. Feedback is gathered from a number of sources, including polling station correspondents, electors, polling station staff, and (when the election is fully administered by this council) candidates and agents.
- 5.5 Whilst the Returning Officer is ultimately responsible for the decision as to where to site individual polling stations, he routinely consults members so that he can take their views into account.

6 Discussion

- 6.1 Feedback on the suitability of polling stations at the Police and Crime Commissioner election, held on 5 May 2016, and the Referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, held on 23 June 2016, was gathered and subsequently considered by officers in the elections team. Officers then carried out investigations relating to the feedback received, presenting their findings to the Returning Officer for his consideration.
- 6.2 The only identified issues were surrounding the use of a portakabin on Cox's site on Westfield Road, and Hilton Hall in Little Irchester. It was identified that these sites would not be available for use at future elections and alternative venues would therefore be required going forward. The next planned poll to utilise these polling stations is the county council election due to be held on Thursday 4 May 2017.
- 6.3 Consideration was given to alternative options for the polling stations; there were no other suitable venues within polling district IC, and due to issues with parking and accessibility there were not any viable alternatives in polling district BC. For both polling districts there were options in other parts of the ward: Weavers Leisure Centre and St Mark's Church Hall (BC); and Irchester Village Hall (IC). Of the two suitable locations for polling district BC it was considered that the church hall would be the better location, for the reasons outlined in appendix B.
- 6.4 Ward members from the polling districts affected by the Returning Officer's initial proposals to transfer the polling stations to St Mark's Church Hall in the Brickhill ward and Irchester Village Hall in Irchester ward were given the opportunity to put forward their views; no representations to reconsider were

received, so the Returning Officer has determined that the polling station for polling district BC will be transferred to St Mark's Church Hall, Brickhill Road and the polling station for polling district IC will be transferred to Irchester Village Hall, 36 School Road, subject to members agreeing to an amendment to the polling places for these polling districts.

- 6.5 The council had previously agreed that the polling place for polling district BC (Brickhill no. 3) would be the entire polling district of BC, and that the polling place for polling district IC (Little Irchester) would be the entire polling district of IC. This is the council's usual practice because it allows a level of flexibility if the polling station becomes unavailable. On this occasion there was no suitable alternative in the relevant polling districts, so the decision of the Returning Officer is to re-site the polling station for BC at St Mark's Church Hall, subject to the council agreeing to change the designated polling place for BC from polling district BC (Brickhill no. 3) to polling district BA (Brickhill no. 1), and to re-site the polling station for IC at Irchester Village Hall, subject to the council agreeing to change the designated polling place for IC from polling district IC (Little Irchester) to Irchester ward. The latter change is suggested so that, if a suitable location becomes available in Little Irchester, the Returning Officer can make use of it without changing the statutory polling place.
- 6.6 A full explanation of the reasons for the changes as detailed in 6.2 above are set out in Appendix B.

7 Legal Powers

Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006).

8 Financial and value for money implications

It is anticipated that the proposed changes will reduce existing budgets.

9 Risk analysis and Implications

Nature of risk	Consequences if realised	Likelihood of occurrence	Control measures
Dissatisfaction of stakeholders with proposed changes to polling stations.	Current level of dissatisfaction increases with next election.	Medium	Consultation with interested parties, including borough council members at committee.

9.1 Implications for Resources

- Time spent by officers on making amendments to records and the register of electors
- Time spent by colleagues producing new maps identifying polling stations
- Time and cost of publicity to inform electors of new voting arrangements.

9.2 Implications for Stronger and Safer Communities

- Provision of voting facilities within tolerable distance of households
- Promote sense of community identity by the location of polling stations
- Keeping primary schools open in accordance with local policy.

9.3 Implications for Equalities

Provision of voting facilities which make it possible for all registered electors to exercise their right to vote in person, if they so wish. Particular attention is paid to accessibility of polling stations for people with disabilities. All polling stations undergo a full accessibility assessment by a qualified building control inspection specialist.

10 Author and Contact Officer

Samuel Whiteley, Electoral Services Team Leader

11 Consultees

Returning Officer
Head of Resources
Relevant ward members
Electoral services team
Polling station staff
Local electors
Polling station correspondents

12 Background Papers

Review responses and feedback

Definitions:

Polling district

A geographical area created by the sub-division of a parliamentary constituency or ward, into smaller areas.

Each parish must be in a separate polling district.

Polling districts are designated by a decision of the council.

Polling place

An area defined by the council within which the polling station is found.

Polling places are designated by a decision of the council.

A polling place could be a particular building, or even the whole polling district.

Polling station

The physical location within the polling place in which the poll takes place (the room within a building, in which the actual vote is cast).

Unlike polling districts and polling places which are designated by a decision of the council, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for each election.

Returning Officer

The (Acting) Returning Officer for a Parliamentary election is responsible for deciding polling stations for the local electorate. He is also referred to as the Local Returning Officer and Counting Officer, amongst other titles, dependent on the type of election or referendum.

For ease of reference in this report he is referred to as Returning Officer throughout.

At Wellingborough, the designated Returning Officer is the Chief Executive, John Campbell.

Polling district BC (Brickhill no. 3)

Location of polling station 2016: Cox Site, Westfield Road, Hand car wash yard

History

Freeman’s Endowed C.E. Junior Academy has historically been the usual polling station for this polling district. Following on from a review of polling places in 2012, the station was relocated to a portakabin on the current site so as to follow local preference to avoid siting polling stations in schools.

The current site has been used as a polling station for the last five polls dating back to 2013, with a portakabin located on the grounds of Freeman’s Academy one year previous (2012). As part of the regular risk assessments undertaken at polling stations, the Returning Officer was notified that the Cox Site will no longer be available following the 2016 polls.

In light of the historical concerns received around the use of Freeman’s Academy, and council preference to avoid disruption to schools where possible, the Returning Officer deemed the following locations potentially suitable for consideration as an alternative polling station venue from July 2016 onward (in order of preference):

Location	Assessment
St Mark’s Church Hall, Brickhill Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well sized, dedicated car park and some on-road parking available • Well located with easy access for electors • Good disabled access <p>Returning Officer comment: Excellent venue with a large room and disabled access; has been used as a polling station for many years and due to the size is able to comfortably accommodate multiple polling stations, in line with Electoral Commission guidelines for electorate totals.</p>
Weavers Leisure Centre, Weavers Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable car park shared with staff and students during the day which could lead to difficulties for increased electorate to park • Central location but on a no through road, so could cause issues at busier school run times for voter access and safety with multiple vehicles parking on the road to pick up students • Reasonable disabled access with a dropped pavement and small inclined ramp to the building <p>Returning Officer comment: Whist the venue is suitable, the car park is shared with teaching staff and students throughout the day and would not provide appropriate space for the increased electorate attending the station.</p>

Returning Officer decision: transfer to St Mark’s Church Hall, Brickhill Road, subject to the council agreeing an amendment to the polling place from polling district BC to polling district BA

Polling district IC (Little Irchester)

Location of polling station 2016: Hilton Hall, Milton Road, Little Irchester

History

Hilton Hall has been used as a polling station for many years. Officers were recently notified that Hilton Hall has been closed locally and there is considerable uncertainty around the availability of the site going forward.

In light of the uncertainty surrounding the use of the building and the lack of suitable alternatives within the polling district, the Returning Officer deemed the following location potentially suitable for consideration as an alternative polling station venue from July 2016 onward:

Location	Assessment
Irchester Village Hall, 36 School Road, Irchester	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well sized, dedicated car park and some on-road parking available• Well located with easy access for electors• Good disabled access• Potential for use of a separate room at parish council elections, which will take account of the fact that Irchester and Little Irchester are in separate parish wards and will have separate ballot papers. Only parish council elections are affected in this way. <p>Returning Officer comment: Excellent venue with multiple rooms and disabled access; has been used as a polling station for many years and due to the size is able to comfortably accommodate multiple polling stations, in line with Electoral Commission guidelines for electorate totals.</p>

Returning Officer decision: transfer to Irchester Village Hall, 36 School Road, Irchester, subject to the council agreeing an amendment to the polling place from polling district IC to the whole of Irchester ward