

Report of the Head of Resources

REVIEW OF POLLING STATIONS 2013

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform members of the actions taken in relation to the review of polling stations following the Northamptonshire County Council elections on 2 May 2013, and to notify members of the decision of the Returning Officer in respect of polling station venues in polling districts EA, FB and WDA.

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 Officers in the elections team reviewed the feedback provided, and carried out a number of investigations to consider any risks associated with continued use of sites where problems had been highlighted. Possible alternative venues were visited by officers during July 2013 to assess their suitability for polling purposes. 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. The representations made by 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: Polling station review 2013 feedback and outcomes;
Appendix C: Background information relating to polling station changes.

4 The Committee is invited to:

4.1 NOTE the decision of the Returning Officer in relation to the situation of polling stations as follows:

- (i) EA (Finedon) – Finedon Wesleyan Chapel, Affleck Bridge;**
- (ii) FB (Wilby) – Wilby Working Mens Club, Main Road;**
- (iii) WDA (Earls Barton) – Earls Barton Methodist Church.**

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) requires local authorities to carry out and complete a review of polling districts and polling places during the period 01 October 2013 to 01 February 2015 (and then in the period of 16 months beginning with 01 October of every fifth year after that).
- 5.3 The most recent statutory review of polling districts and polling places was finalised in February 2012 with a few minor changes to polling places, but no changes to polling districts. The next full review of polling districts and polling places is scheduled to take place on completion of the electoral review currently being carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.
- 5.4 Once the polling districts and places have been determined, it is the responsibility of the Returning Officer to identify suitable polling stations. The positions of Acting Returning Officer (parliamentary elections) and Returning Officer (borough/parish elections) are held by the Chief Executive of the council.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 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 Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) elections held on 02 May 2013 was gathered and subsequently considered by officers in the elections team. Officers then carried out a number of investigations relating to the feedback received, presenting their findings to the Returning Officer for his consideration.
- 6.2 Of particular note were the representations made in respect of some schools, from head teachers, governors and electors. Head teachers at Finedon, Ruskin and Wilby primary schools expressed concerns at the use of schools as polling stations; the cost and inconvenience to parents of arranging alternative childcare for the day was also raised as an issue by all three schools.
- 6.3 Where schools have requested not to be used as polling stations in the future, they were asked to suggest an alternative venue; these suggestions were assessed when investigating potential alternatives. Whilst it is council policy to avoid the use of schools where possible, it should be noted that if the Returning Officer determines that there is no suitable alternative, he may insist on the use of a school as a polling station.

- 6.4 The use of portakabins was investigated as part of the review due to the cost implications – portakabins cost almost £2000 for one temporary unit; the average cost of hire for a permanent building is £218. At the May 2013 elections, only one portakabin was used (Cox site on Westfield Road); there was one instance of negative feedback from an elector.
- 6.5 Ward members from the polling districts affected by the Returning Officer’s initial proposals were given the opportunity to put forward their views, and these have been taken into consideration before making a final decision.
- 6.6 Having taken into consideration all representations received as part of this review, the Returning Officer has made the following changes to polling stations:
- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| EA (Finedon) | Transfer to Finedon Independent Wesleyan Chapel |
| FB (Wilby) | Transfer to Wilby Working Mens Club |
| WDA (Earls Barton) | Transfer to Earls Barton Methodist Church |
- 6.7 An overview of the review feedback together with the outcomes for all polling station venues, are attached at Appendix B.
- 6.8 A full explanation of the reasons for the changes as detailed in 6.6 above are set out in Appendix C (i) to (iii).

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 not affect 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

Paula Lawton, Principal Democratic Services Manager

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 Local Returning Officer for the election.

Returning Officer

The Acting Returning Officer for the Parliamentary election is responsible for deciding polling stations for the local electorate. In other types of election he is variously referred to as Local Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer, amongst other titles.

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.

Review outcome and recommendations:

Current polling district/polling station	Feedback	Returning Officer decision	
BRICKHILL			
St Marks Church Hall, Brickhill Road, Wellingborough, NN8 3SD	AA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Weavers Leisure Centre, Weavers Road, Wellingborough, NN8 3JQ	AB	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Cox site, Westfield Road, Hand car wash yard, Westfield Road, WELLINGBOROUGH, Northamptonshire, NN8 3HD	AC	First year as polling station; no significant issues reported.	No change – the use of portakabins is avoided wherever possible, however, in the absence of suitable alternative permanent premises, continued use of this site is considered appropriate.
CASTLE			
Hindu Community Centre, 148 Highfield Road, Wellingborough, NN8 1PL	BA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Hindu Community Centre, 148 Highfield Road, Wellingborough, NN8 1PL	BB	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
The Castle, Castle Way, Wellingborough, NN8 1XA	BC	Direction of voters difficult owing to layout of venue.	No change – keep side access closed and improve signage.
CROYLAND			
Wrenn School, Doddington Road, Wellingborough, NN8 2JJ	CA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
St Andrews Church Hall, 20 Berrymoor Road, Wellingborough, NN8 2HU	CB	Offensive smell permeates building; unresolved since 2012 elections. Elector complaints. Unpleasant environment for staff.	No change – consideration was given to transferring the polling station to the Methodist Church, Kingsway. On consultation with ward members, the Returning Officer decided that St Andrew's Church Hall be used for one further election, and the situation reviewed thereafter.
Ibis Hotel, Enstone Court, Wellingborough, NN8 2DR	CC	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
FINEDON			
Finedon Infant School, Orchard Road, Finedon, Wellingborough, NN9 5JG	EA	Requests to change polling station location. Use of primary schools is in conflict with local policy.	Transfer to Finedon Independent Wesleyan Chapel, Affleck Bridge – see Appendix C(i).
GREAT DODDINGTON AND WILBY			
The Memorial Hall, Gt Doddington, 42B High Street, Great Doddington, Wellingborough, NN29 7TR	FA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Wilby C of E Primary School, Church Lane, Wilby, Wellingborough, NN8 2UG	FB	Requests to change polling station location. Disabled access concerns. Use of primary schools is in conflict with local policy.	Transfer to Wilby Working Mens Club office, Main Road, Wilby – see Appendix C(ii).

HEMMINGWELL			
Ock `n` Dough, Kidz Zone, Farm Road, Wellingborough, NN8 4UF	GA	First year as polling station. Restrictions to accessing polling station not understood by pub users.	No change – met with new manager, agreed patrolling of entrance, improved signage and preparations on eve of poll.
Ock `n` Dough, Kidz Zone, Farm Road, Wellingborough, NN8 4UF	GB	As above	As above.
Sir Christopher Hatton Academy, The Pyghtle, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, NN8 4RP	GC	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Hemmingwell Skills Centre, 119 Nest Farm Crescent, Wellingborough, NN8 4TU	GD	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Hemmingwell Skills Centre, 119 Nest Farm Crescent, Wellingborough, NN8 4TU	GE	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
IRCHESTER			
Irchester Village Hall, 36 School Road, Irchester, Wellingborough, NN29 7AW	HA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Hilton Hall, Lt Irchester, Milton Road, Little Irchester, Wellingborough, NN8 2DY	HB	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
NORTH			
Little Harrowden Village Hall, 83 - 85 Main Street, Little Harrowden, Wellingborough, NN9 5BA	IA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Little Harrowden Village Hall, 83 - 85 Main Street, Little Harrowden, Wellingborough, NN9 5BA	IB	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Little Harrowden Village Hall, 83 - 85 Main Street, Little Harrowden, Wellingborough, NN9 5BA	IC	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Isham Independent Wesleyan Chapel School Room, Church Street, Isham, Kettering, NN14 1HD	ID	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Orlingbury Village Hall, 15 Rectory Lane, Orlingbury, Kettering, NN14 1JH	IE	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
QUEENSWAY			
Olympic Primary School, Olympic Way, Wellingborough, NN8 3QA	JA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Glamis Hall, Goldsmith Road, Wellingborough, NN8 3RU	JB	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Ruskin Infant School, Ruskin Avenue, Wellingborough, NN8 3EG	JC	Requests to change polling station location. No suitable alternative found.	No change.

REDWELL EAST			
Redwell Leisure Centre, Barnwell Road, Wellingborough, NN8 5LP	KA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Wellingborough Bowling Club, Hatton Street, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, NN8 5AS	KB	Comments that station was further away from elector homes. No suitable alternative found.	No change.
REDWELL WEST			
Vicarage Farm Community Centre, 36 Grafton Close, Wellingborough, NN8 5WA	LA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Vicarage Farm Community Centre, 36 Grafton Close, Wellingborough, NN8 5WA	LB	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
SOUTH			
St Marys Church Hall Bozeat, Allens Hill, Bozeat, Wellingborough, NN29 7LW	MA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
St Marys Church Hall Bozeat, Allens Hill, Bozeat, Wellingborough, NN29 7LW	MB	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
SWANSPOOL			
Scout Hut at Dale End, Wellingborough Scout Hut, Croyland Road, WELLINGBOROUGH, Northamptonshire, NN8 2AX	NA	First year as polling station. No significant issues as to suitability of premises.	No change.
The Tithe Barn, Burystead Place, Wellingborough, NN8 1AH	NB	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Salvation Army, Havelock Street, Wellingborough, NN8 4PZ	NC	Issues every year with directing electors to entrance. Site contact unobtainable during timetable over several years.	No change – having considered potential alternative premises (Everyday Champions Church) the cost is prohibitive. Actions to mitigate negative feedback: appoint familiar Presiding Officer to work closely with booking agent, and to receive specific training on signage and directions to polling station.
WOLLASTON			
Grendon Village Hall, 52 Main Road, Grendon, Northampton, NN7 1JW	PA	No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.	No change.
Wollaston Village Hall, 52 High Street, Wollaston, Wellingborough, NN29 7QQ	PB	Site contact unobtainable during timetable over several years.	No change – third contact now provided in case of emergency and improved communication promised for future elections.
Wollaston Village Hall, 52 High Street, Wollaston, Wellingborough, NN29 7QQ	PC	As above.	No change – as above.

EARLS BARTON**All Saints Church Hall, Earls Barton, 3 High Street, Earls Barton, Northampton, NN6 0JG****WDA****Very steep ascent from main road and steep incline for ambulant disabled and elderly electors.****Transfer to Earls Barton Methodist Church – see Appendix C(iii).****WEST**

Ecton Village Hall, 78A High Street, Ecton, Northampton, NN6 0QB

WOA

No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.

No change.

Mears Ashby Village Hall, 13 Vicarage Lane, Mears Ashby, Northampton, NN6 0EE

WOB

No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.

No change.

Sywell Village Hall, 33 Sywell, Northampton, NN6 0BQ

WOC

No significant issues in relation to suitability of premises.

No change.

Polling district EA (Finedon)

Location of polling station 2013: Finedon Infant School

History

The first time an alternative polling station at Finedon was recorded (so far as records show) was September 2007 when a councillor working group was set up to look at polling districts/places, as part of the 2007 full review. It was suggested that the community centre be considered, but no change was made.

In 2011 the school requested a change of polling station and in the elections review meeting it was noted that complaints had been received about Finedon Infant School being used. As part of the 2011 review the parish council opposed any change. During 2011 other locations were considered and discounted: Finedon Town Hall (parking), the Bell Inn (no suitable room), St Mary’s Church (no suitable room).

Further complaints were received in November 2012. Complaints were received from the Head, Deputy Head and Bursar, a parent-governor and four parents. The parent governor said that she had received a number of complaints from parents and was considering drawing up a petition.

In the light of the complaints received from the school, and council policy to avoid disruption to schools where possible, the Returning Officer, John Campbell, in 2012 visited a number of suggested alternatives in Finedon and deemed the following locations potentially suitable for consideration as alternative polling station venues following the election in 2013 (in order of preference):

Location	Assessment
Finedon Independent Wesleyan Chapel, Affleck Bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No dedicated car parking, but local on-street parking; small car park at medical centre next door potentially available out of hours; space outside building which could be designated for disabled electors • Central location • Disabled entrance <p>Returning Officer comment: Excellent venue with a large room and disabled access; centrally located away from the busy main road.</p>
Finedon Bowls Club, Recreation Ground, Wellingborough Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public car park serving recreation ground, several spaces • Central location but sited on busy road with shops, cafes etc which raised concerns about voter safety • Main access has steps – disabled entrance at side door, from car park <p>Returning Officer comment: Whilst the venue is suitable, even taking into consideration the large car park, the busy main road was still deemed to be a potential issue.</p>
Finedon Community Centre, corner of Wellingborough Road and Summerlee Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking for 8 cars plus 2 disabled and roadside parking in Summerlee Road; arrangement to park at medical centre (next door) out of hours • Good disabled access and suitable rooms • Central location but sited on busy road with shops, cafes etc which raised concerns about voter safety <p>Returning Officer comment: Whilst the venue is suitable, there are particular concerns regarding the busy road. Notwithstanding the parking at the rear, there is a high risk that electors may decide to park on the other side of the road and cross over, which is high risk.</p>

Further representations were received from the ward councillors for Finedon. On balance, however, the Returning Officer decided not to divert from his original 2012 decision. This will be reviewed following the European Parliamentary elections in May 2014.

Returning Officer decision: transfer to Finedon Independent Wesleyan Chapel Hall

Polling district FB (Wilby)

Location of polling station 2013: Wilby C of E Primary School

History

There has been no change to the polling station for Wilby polling district FB since at least 2001.

The Local Returning Officer, Elections officers, Polling Station Inspectors and the electorate have raised ongoing concerns about the restricted parking and disabled access at the school at each election, for which no remedial action can be implemented.

A suggestion to use The George public house was considered and then rejected by the Returning Officer due to concerns about periods of closure over the past two years, which raised potential concern about the stability and viability of this option. Furthermore, when approached by the electoral services officer, the management team at The George did not agree to use of the main building. An exterior barn unit was offered as an alternative. This was risk assessed by a Building Control Surveyor, who deemed it unsuitable as a polling station.

The following alternative has been identified:

Location	Comment
Wilby Working Men's Club office, Main Road, Wilby.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicated parking for at least 8 vehicles, including space for disabled parking directly in front of the building• Central location for electorate• DDA compliant disabled entrance• External floodlighting• Disabled facilities for electors• Space for tellers• Ample space for one polling station• Installation of a temporary step required to meet disability access requirements for ambulant disabled electors

Returning Officer decision: transfer to Wilby Working Men's Club office

Polling district WDA (Earls Barton)

Location of polling station 2013: All Saints' Church Hall

History

There has been no change to the polling station at Earls Barton since at least 2001. The local policy against use of schools was the driver for remaining at All Saints' Church Hall despite the steep and uneven access to the polling station from the main road.

At the Police and Crime Commissioner election in 2012, disabled access to the building was raised as a concern following a risk assessment carried out by a qualified buildings inspector. This was supported by the Returning Officer when he visited in May 2013, during the County Council elections and confirmed by elderly electors on polling day.

Given the potential for disfranchising disabled voters and the risks posed for those who do attend, investigations were carried out to identify suitable alternative premises. Upon consultation with ward members, the following alternative was identified:

Location	Comment
Earls Barton Methodist Church	Advantages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can accommodate up to 4 polling stations • DDA compliant • Level access and flooring throughout • Adequate lighting and ventilation • Central location Disadvantages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No designated parking facilities

Having considered the advantages and disadvantages, notwithstanding the parking issue, the Returning Officer decision is to transfer the polling station to the Methodist Church, and review the impact of the lack of parking facilities following the European Parliamentary elections in May 2014.

Returning Officer decision: transfer to Earls Barton Methodist Church