

REPORT TO: FULL COUNCIL

DATE: 9 DECEMBER 2021

TITLE: INTERIM REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES 2021

LEAD OFFICER: BRIAN KEANE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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ALISON HODGSON, ELECTORAL SERVICES
MANAGER (012790 446038)

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** The following changes to the Polling Districts and Places will take place with effect from 1 December 2021:
- i) CA – Great Parndon East - Great Parndon Community Association to be designated as the polling place for all elections.
 - ii) DB – Harlow Common West - The Royal British Legion to be designated as the polling place for all elections.
 - iii) EB – Little Parndon and Hare Street South - Harlow Youth Centre to be designated as the polling place for all elections.
 - iv) EC – Little Parndon and Hare Street West - St Thomas More Church Hall to be designated as the polling place for all elections.
- B** A further consultation is to be carried out to create two polling districts and two polling places in the Netteswell ward.

BACKGROUND

1. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a statutory requirement for councils to conduct a review of polling places every four years but also at any other time if a building becomes unavailable or if any changes are identified following an election.
2. The current buildings used as a polling station in EB – Little Parndon and Hare Street South (Trinity URC) and GA – Netteswell (David Livingstone URC) are no longer available and so alternatives are required to be found and reviewed in accordance with the legislation and guidance.

3. Following the recommendation and encouragement from the Government to not use schools as a polling station in May 2021 this review seeks to confirm those alternative venues that were found and used instead of the schools.
4. The Council began this interim review on 1 October 2021 and gave everyone the opportunity to make a representation until 31 October 2021.
5. A notice of the review was published on the Council's website. A copy was also sent to all local Councillors, relevant polling places, other interested organisations and social media. The responses are attached as Appendix C.
6. The Council is required by law to divide its area into polling districts for the purpose of Parliamentary Elections and to designate polling places for those districts. The current list of polling districts and places is attached as Appendix A to the report.
7. Consideration must be given to the law and the Electoral Commission's Guidance. This means that the Council must:
 - a) Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as practicable in the circumstances;
 - b) Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons;
 - c) The polling place must be within the polling district (and therefore ward) unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible parking can be identified in the district).

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

8. The (Acting) Returning Officer has considered the following factors, in addition to those set out in paragraph 7 above:
 - a) Central or convenient location for the maximum number of electors in the ward;
 - b) Physical accessibility, especially for those with mobility difficulties;
 - c) Guaranteed availability;
 - d) Consistent availability;
 - e) Venue is well known to electors;

- f) Cost;
 - g) Condition of building and facilities; and
 - h) Impartial and ethical use of the building/location.
9. The (Acting) Returning Officer's comments on representations received and any subsequent recommendations are below:
- a) The current David Livingstone URC building is no longer in use, and we are unable to use it therefore an alternative is needed. It is also too small and has insufficient parking and disabled access.
 - b) The YCT building used in May was adequate although may not be able to cope with a large turnout or further social distancing measures.
 - c) Following UK Government advice received in 2021 we are trying not to use schools as a polling station so as not to disrupt the education of the children.
 - d) It is accepted that due to its size the polling district would benefit from two polling places and so a further consultation will be held to create two polling districts and two polling places in Netteswell.
 - e) We would be using the Our Lady of Fatima church hall, not the main Church building. It is in a prominent place, well seen from the road and there are plenty of places for signage.
 - f) The Our Lady of Fatima is a large size hall with good facilities, ample parking and good safe access, with a pedestrian crossing and bus stop on First Avenue close to the church.
 - g) The church hall has sufficient disabled access with a ramped entrance and all level access inside. There is disabled parking right by the entrance.
 - h) Following the voter turnout survey some voters are put off voting because of the parking difficulties and the church can overcome some of these difficulties.
 - i) The new proposal would increase election costs but will make voting more accessible and increase voter turnout.
10. All other polling districts and places received no representations in respect of them and are considered appropriate.

Changes to a Polling Place Before the Next Statutory Review

11. If a polling station becomes unavailable the (Acting) Returning Officer will first consider whether it is feasible to use a different room or area within a designated polling place.
12. If a polling place is or will become unavailable and sufficient time permits, a review will take place and a decision on a replacement polling place will be made by Full Council.
13. However, in an urgent situation where it is not feasible to make alternative arrangements within a designated polling place, such as the building was destroyed by fire or unsafe, the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers would apply whereby the Chief Executive, or another designated Officer in their absence, would identify and designate an alternative polling place taking into account paragraphs 5 and 7 above.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

None specific.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

There may be some additional costs incurred where buildings other than schools are used. These costs can be met from within existing budgets.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

None specific.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Community Wellbeing

Appropriate bodies have been consulted over access needs.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance (Includes HR)

As contained in the report

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Appendices

Appendix A – Current List of Polling Districts

Appendix B – (Acting) Returning Officer's Representation

Appendix C – Responses Received

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None.