

REPORT TO: CABINET

DATE: 10 DECEMBER 2015

TITLE: INTERIM REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS
AND POLLING PLACES 2015

LEAD OFFICER: MALCOLM MORLEY, (ACTING) / RETURNING
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**CONTRIBUTING
OFFICERS:** GRAHAM BRANCHETT, CHIEF OPERATING
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This is not a Key Decision

This decision is not subject to Call-in procedures for the following reason:

This decision is being taken in the role of election authority and not as part of normal Council business.

This decision will affect the Wards of Church Langley, Little Parndon and Hare Street and Mark Hall.

RECOMMENDED that:

A With effect from 1 January 2016 that the :-

- (1) Henry Moore Primary School will remain as the designated polling place for the polling district of Church Langley East.
- (2) Pemberley Academy is designated as the polling place for the polling district of Little Parndon and Hare Street East.
- (3) Harlow Museum is designated as the polling place for the polling district of Mark Hall North.

REASON FOR DECISION

A The role of the (Acting) / Returning Officer and the Council as part of the democratic system is to maximise public participation in the electoral process. These proposals seek to ensure that this objective is fully achieved.

B To comply with the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

BACKGROUND

1. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a statutory requirement for councils to conduct a review of polling places every four years. In compliance with that Act, reviews were carried out in 2007, 2011 and 2014. A decision made as a result of the 2014 review was for an interim review to be carried out, therefore, this interim review has been carried out between 16 October 2015 and 13 November 2015. Public comments have been sought and responses have been received in connection with all three polling places. Cabinet is asked to consider these representations and the subsequent recommendations of the Council's (Acting) / Returning Officer.
2. A notice of the review was published on the Council's website, a copy was sent to local ward Councillors, relevant County Councillors, election agents, the local MP, the venues currently used for polling stations, the venues recommended for future use, Hemu (Harlow Ethnic Minority Umbrella) and the Harlow Area Access Group. Respondents were given the opportunity to express their views in writing to the (Acting) / Returning Officer. Appendix 1 summarises the responses received.
3. The Council is required by law to divide its area into polling districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections and designate the polling places for those districts. The law also provides for the Council to divide its wards into polling districts for local elections. Traditionally, the same polling districts are designated for all elections.
4. The law and the statutory guidance issued by the Electoral Commission also requires that Councils must :-
 - a) Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are 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 polling place can be identified in the district).
5. The law makes provision for the (Acting) / Returning Officer to use school premises for the purpose of taking the poll free of charge. Schools are very often used by (Acting) / Returning Officers because they are centrally located, well known venues in the community and have disabled access.

6. Where possible venues other than schools are used, but in selecting polling places the factors considered by the (Acting) / Returning Officer in addition to paragraph 4 above are:-
 - (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 well known to electors.
 - (f) Cost.
 - (g) Condition of building and facilities.
 - (h) Impartial and ethical use of the building / location.
7. Schools often match these requirements more closely than other venues and sometimes are the only venue in the polling district that meets them.

THE (ACTING) RETURNING OFFICER'S COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE RESPONSES RECEIVED FOR A CHANGE IN THE POLLING PLACE

Church Langley Ward Church Langley East polling district (Henry Moore School)

8. The (Acting) Returning Officer originally proposed last year to only use the school for parliamentary elections. However, in light of recent Electoral Commission appeals against the allocation of polling places it is evident that the Commission considers that its guidance on the ratio of voters to a polling station must be followed and that a polling place must be in close proximity to electors. Accordingly, it would be impossible to allocate sufficient separate polling stations within the Church Langley Community Centre as previously recommended, and its use may also be deemed to be not in close proximity particularly for electors who do not drive or are disabled. There are no other available facilities in the polling district.
9. The (Acting) Returning Officer will continue to work with the school to address parking and walking distance concerns, and meanwhile will continue to designate a disabled parking bay outside of the school gates and suspend parking restrictions next to the school on polling day.

Little Parndon and Hare Street Ward Little Parndon and Hare Street East polling district (Little Parndon School)

10. The suggestion to use the Fold Croft Centre is not considered to be a viable alternative option as a polling place as it is very difficult to access. Only light vehicles can access the Centre via a long single unlit private lane and the entrance to the lane is extremely narrow and obscured. Pedestrian access is

also limited to a long footpath from the housing estate

Mark Hall Ward
Mark Hall North polling district (Tany's Dell School)

11. All comments received were in favour of the temporary arrangements currently in place. Therefore, it is proposed to designate Harlow Museum as the polling place.

IMPLICATIONS

Place (includes Sustainability)

None specific.

Author: **Graeme Bloomer, Head of Place**

Finance (Includes ICT)

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

Author: **Simon Freeman, Head of Finance**

Housing

None specific.

Author: **Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

Community Wellbeing (includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

Appropriate bodies and representatives have been consulted over access needs.

Author: **Jane Greer, Acting Head of Community Wellbeing**

Governance (includes HR)

Contained within the report.

Author: **Brian Keane, Interim Head of Governance**

Background Papers

None

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

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| Polling district | is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency or District Council Ward for the purposes of an election |
| Polling place | is the building or area in which polling station(s) will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. |