

Meeting: COUNCIL
Date: 12 OCTOBER 2011

Agenda Item: 12

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise on the outcome of a review of the Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Borough of Stevenage and to make recommendations on appropriate or necessary changes or amendments to the existing Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations Order.
- 1.2 This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days in advance of the meeting, nor had it been available for public inspection for this time. The Mayor is therefore requested to accept the report as urgent given that the review must be completed for implementation in tandem with the publication of the new Electoral Register on 1 December 2011 and therefore a decision is required before the next scheduled Council meeting on 7 December 2011.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That a new Polling Districts and Polling Places Schedule be made, to come into operation on 1 December 2011 the new Schedule based on the existing Order with the following revisions -

2.1.1 Chells Ward

That the Polling Districts CHA and CHB be divided into three new Districts, CHA, CHB and CHC (see Appendix C for street index).

2.1.2 Martins Wood

- 2.1.2.1 That Polling Districts CEA and CED be amalgamated to become known as CEA (see Appendix D for street index).

- 2.1.2.2 That Polling Districts CEB and CEC be amalgamated to become known as CEB (see Appendix E for street index).

2.1.3 St Nicholas

That Polling District CDA be divided into three new Districts, CDA, CDB and

CDC (see Appendix F for street index).

2.1.4 Woodfield

2.2.4.1 That Polling Districts CCA and CCB be amalgamated to become known as CCA (see Appendix G for street index).

2.2.4.2 That Polling Districts CCC and CCD be amalgamated to become known as CCB (see Appendix H for street index)

2.2 That the 'Polling Place' for each identified Polling District be the Polling District itself and the Polling Districts adjoining, hence allowing, where necessary, polling stations to be located cross- border.

2.3 That the Polling Stations, as detailed in Appendix I, identified by the Returning Officer for each for the Polling Districts, be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006, which came into operation in September 2006, introduced a requirement for Councils to carry out a statutory review of Polling Districts and Polling Places every 4 years, with the first review being completed at the end of 2007.

3.2 Following the review a consultation document which included the Returning Officers initial comments in relation to Polling Stations, was published in accordance with the statutory deadlines (see Appendix A).

3.3 The consultation document was sent to:-

The Leaders of the 3 political parties represented on the Council
Ward Councillors
Member Parliament for the Stevenage constituency
Member of the European Parliament Eastern Region
Local Political Parties
REACT
HHAS
Hertfordshire Society for the Blind

The document was available for inspection and also for viewing on the webpage.

3.4 Definitions

3.4.1 Polling Districts - A Polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a European Parliamentary electoral region, a ward or an electoral division.

3.4.2 Polling Places - A Polling place is a geographical area in which a Polling station is located. However, as there is no legal definition of what a Polling

Place is, the geographical area can be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire Polling District.

- 3.4.3 Polling Stations - A Polling Station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the Polling place designated for the particular Polling district. The Returning Officer for the particular election must provide a sufficient number of Polling stations, and allot the electors to those Polling Stations in such manner as he or she thinks the most convenient.

3.5 Consultation Responses

Responses have been received from:-

Councillor Philip Bibby

'None- I am happy with the arrangements as listed.'

Councillor Graham Clark

'I have no problems with the principle of reducing the number of Polling stations although I think that some regard should be given to the accessibility of Polling stations by public transport e.g. Ayr Close area (CEC) to the Oval.'

Councillor James Fraser

'With reference to your letter dated 27 July, I can see no reason to object to your proposals.'

Councillor Mrs Joan Lloyd

'I would like consideration of the community building on the old Stoney Hall Estate (William Sutton site in Popple Way) to become a Polling station (it was in the original old Stoney Hall estate). At present they vote at the Methodist Church at the end of Sish Lane which is at the extreme edge of the Ward.'

Councillor Robin Parker

'The arrangements currently in use seem satisfactory to me, for CFA and CFB. However, it would make life simpler for voters and tellers alike if the Emperors Gate Polling Station served only one Polling District i.e. not Martins Wood as well.'

Comments were also received from the Labour Party please see Appendix B.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 In order to ensure that a Polling District is served by the most convenient Polling Station is recommended that the 'Polling Place' be determined as the Polling District itself and the Polling Districts adjoining, hence allowing, where necessary, polling stations to be located across a Ward boundary.

- 4.2 The Chief Executive as Electoral Registration Officer makes recommendation to the Council on Polling Districts. However, the Chief Executive as the Returning Officer has the responsibility to provide Polling Stations.

Therefore, having taken account of the Comments received the Chief Executive has amended the recommendations set out in the consultation document as follows

4.2.1 Chells

Having considered the arguments put forward in relation to turnout for the Brittain Way area it is accepted that this Ward be divided into three new Districts, CHA, CHB and CHC and the Chief Executive has indicated that the Polling Station for Polling District CHC (the Brittain Way area) be located at the The Fairlands Valley Lakes.

Given criticism of the Stevenage Education Support Centre as a Polling Station for new CHA and CHB Polling Districts the Chief Executive has identified Camps Hill Primary School as the location for their Polling Stations.

4.2.2 Martins Wood

The Chief Executive has considered the Labour Party proposal to retain CEB and CEC with altered boundaries but considers that the Polling Districts would remain too small. Therefore he proposes to proceed with the original proposal. However in light of comments made regarding the location of the Polling Station for the new CEB Polling District he has therefore identified Martins Wood Primary School to serve as the Polling Station for that District.

4.2.3 Pin Green

As the Chief Executive has successfully acquired the use of the Stoney Hall Community Centre this facility has been confirmed for use from now on.

4.2.4 St Nicholas

In the light of consultation responses the Chief Executive has identified St. Nicholas Recreation Centre as the Polling Station for the new CDC District.

4.2.5 Woodfield

The Chief Executive has considered the objections made by the Labour Party but has decided to proceed with the original proposal.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 Additional cost will be incurred in the administration of elections if the council decides to designate additional Polling Districts and associated Polling Places and /or temporary buildings. Conversely, cost savings will be accrued if Polling Districts are merged and/or fewer Polling Stations utilised

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 The Council is required by the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide its area into Polling Districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections, to keep those Polling Districts under review and to undertake a full statutory review as a minimum every four years. The Council must ensure that all the electors in the constituency have reasonable facilities for voting and take account of the access needs of all electors. Failure to comply could lead to the Council being in breach of its official duty.

5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.3.1 The proposals do not have the potential to discriminate against people on grounds of age; disability; gender; ethnicity; sexual orientation; religion/belief; or by way of financial exclusion.

5.4 Risk Implications

Poor designation of Polling Districts and Polling Places could have an adverse effect on the administration of future elections, directly impacting on the electorate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 2011 Review File

APPENDICES

- A – Consultation Document July 2011
- B – Consultation Response from Stevenage Labour Party
- C - Proposed Street Index – Chells Ward
- D – Proposed Street Index – New CEA District (Martins Wood Ward)
- E – Proposed Street Index – New CEB District (Martins Wood Ward)
- F - Proposed Street Index – St. Nicholas Ward

- G - Proposed Street Index – New CCA District (Woodfield)
- H - Proposed Street Index – New CCB District (Woodfield)
- I - Polling Stations as determined by the Returning Officer