

Part
Item No.
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Executive Member: Cllr Fiona
Thomson

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL – 7 JANUARY 2020
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND ACTING RETURNING OFFICER
REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 For electoral purposes, the Council is required to divide each parliamentary constituency in the area into polling districts for parliamentary elections and to designate polling places for each of those polling districts. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, all Polling Districts, Places and Stations should be reviewed on a regular basis.
- 1.2 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of the review of polling arrangements and it is required that the next review must be started and completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive) and every five years thereafter.
- 1.3 This report informs the Council of the responses received to the recent consultation exercise carried out and recommends that in the light of the very few comments received, no amendments be made to the current arrangements, which are detailed in the Appendix to this report.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 That Council notes the small number of responses received to the consultation and agrees, in the light of these, to make minor amendments to the current arrangements for polling districts, places and polling stations as detailed in the Appendix to this report.

3. Financial Implication(s)

- 3.1 There would be notional additional costs for the one of the two newly created polling stations, although a saving in the other as the hire fee is less than the existing station.

4. Link to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 I can confirm that the subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority. "Our Council – ensure fair and open access to our services for all members of our diverse community".

5. Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 Reviews of Polling Places, Polling Districts and Polling Stations are carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

6. Climate Change Implication(s)

- 6.1 None specifically as a result of this report.

7. Risk Management Implication

- 7.1 There are no risk management implications arising directly as a result of this report. Risk assessments are carried out for all polling places and polling stations on a regular basis to ensure that they are safe and fit for purpose.

8. Explanation

- 8.1 Each local authority in Great Britain is responsible for reviewing polling districts and polling places in its area on a regular basis. The Council must complete its review by 31 January 2020.
- 8.2 Responsibility for deciding how many polling stations are required for each polling place lies with the Acting Returning Officer who must allocate electors to the polling stations in such a manner that is most convenient.
- 8.3 The last review of polling districts, places and stations in Welwyn Hatfield was agreed at Council on 24 November 2014.
- 8.4 Public notice of the current review was given on 13 August 2019 at which representations were invited from key stakeholders, interested groups and organisations or individuals on the appropriateness of the polling places and any other comments on the scheme in general. The deadline for submission of comments was 1 October 2019.
- 8.5 There have been seven responses to the consultation which are included in the Appendix under the respective wards:
- 8.6 Christ the King Church Hall and Holy Family Primary School – Haldens and Welwyn East Wards

A response has been received referring to avoiding an increase in the polling stations for these wards and a suggestion that the polling stations at Christ the King Hall and Holy Family Primary School be combined. It is not intended or proposed that there be an increase in polling stations for these Wards. In any event, Christ the

King Church Hall is in Welwyn East Ward and The Holy Family Primary School is in Haldens Ward. To combine the two Wards would be unnecessary and would cause confusion for electors.

The new headteacher of Holy Family School no longer wishes to have The Holy Family Primary School as a polling station. This is due to having to close the school to the children. To accommodate this request, fortunately an alternative polling station has been found just down the road to the School and in the same Ward, namely Haldens Sports and Social Club Margery Wood Welwyn Garden City AL7 1UN. This is far cheaper to hire, accommodating and is accessible to all electors including those who are disabled and has ample parking. It is therefore proposed to use the Haldens Sports and Social Club in place of The Holy Family Primary School.

A further response has been received suggesting a more centralised polling station in the Haldens Ward. It is not certain which of the polling station is referred to of the 3 polling stations in the Ward, but currently, it has not been possible to find an alternative centralised polling station, but this will be kept under review.

Ludwick Family Club – Howlands Ward

It has been suggested that the access to the Ludwick Family Club is hazardous for people with disabilities with the temporary ramp being too short to allow wheelchair access and that there are no handrails. The station has been under consideration arising out of some electors reporting that they have been confused where to vote with another polling station – Douglas Tilbe being virtually next door. After further inspecting both polling stations it would appear to be sensible to have two polling stations within the one building, namely in Douglas Tilbe as this is accessible to all electors including those who are disabled and does have permanent ramps to the building and wide entrances to accommodate larger wheelchairs. Further, the use of these premises as a combined station is far cheaper. It is therefore proposed that Douglas Tilbe will be used as a combined station in place of Ludwick Family Club

King George V Community Centre – Hollybush Ward

There have been three responses concerning this polling station. The first is supportive of this polling station as they find it easy to access with ample parking and wish for its continued use.

The second response states that this is a poor location for anyone on foot and in the evening. This has not been a problem before now and given that there have been no specific details as to why this should be a problem whether on foot or in the evening – there is sufficient lighting in or around the polling station and carpark – there is no current intention to change this as a station. The final response on the contrary has stated that this station along with others they have used have always been excellent; always staffed by pleasant helpful people; always clean and tidy and having good access.

Howe Dell Community Hall and St Johns Youth Centre – Hatfield Villages Ward, Hatfield West Ward, Welham Green Ward and Hatfield South Ward

A response has been received questioning using Beales Hotel (in place of Howe Dell Community Hall as part of a joint station) and St Johns Youth Centre and to consider continuing to use Howe Dell Community Hall along with The Jim McDonald Centre.

Before The Comet or Ramada Hotel closed down for renovation some 2 years ago, this Hotel was used as a polling station and Howe Dell Community Hall has since been used as a joint station. It had been hoped to return to The Comet after the renovations to avoid those electors in the south of the ward having to travel too far, but this has not been possible for two main reasons. The first is that there are only two possible rooms to use, but both of them, whilst sufficient in size and would be accessible to all electors including those who are disabled, contain large unmovable boardroom tables taking up most of the space available and as such would not be able to be adopted for use as a polling station. In addition one of the rooms is upstairs and accessible through a maze of corridors or lifts. The second problem is that it is only possible to use the carpark having obtained a token from reception.

Extensive enquiries have been made for an alternative polling station. Jim McDonald Centre would be too far for electors to travel and would have to pass the existing station – Howe Dell Community Centre to vote. However Beales Hatfield Hotel meets all the criteria for a polling station is accessible to all electors including those who are disabled and has adequate free parking. There would be no additional cost.

9. Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 One of the key reasons for carrying out a review of the polling places and polling stations is to ensure that they continue to be convenient to all electors and are accessible for disabled persons.

- 9.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

10. Background Papers

- 10.1 Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations – Guidance from the Electoral Commission
- 10.2 Consultation documents and responses
Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
Representation of the People Act 1983
Electoral Administration Act 2006
The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006

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