

# **ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, 11 November 2021**

## **INTERIM REVIEW OF POLLING STATIONS AND POLLING PLACES 2021**

### **Report of the Acting Returning Officer (ARO)**

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#### **Recommendation(s)**

It is recommended that

- (1) The findings of the interim polling review are noted, and the Committee's thanks to respondents be recorded;**
  - (2) In Chandler's Ford the polling station for CH3, which is currently at Toynbee School be moved to Chandler's Ford Parish Offices, Fryern Hill Pavilion, Greenways, Chandler's Ford;**
  - (3) Eastleigh North polling districts EN2 and EN3 who currently vote at Crestwood Community School be moved to St Peter's Church, Shakespeare Road, Eastleigh;**
  - (4) In Eastleigh North, polling station EN5 be moved to The Café at Eastleigh House, Upper Market Street, Eastleigh to cease use of Shakespeare Junior School;**
  - (5) Hiltingbury polling station for HI3, which currently votes at Scantabout Primary School, be moved to Chandler's Ford Library, Oakmount Road, Chandler's Ford;**
  - (6) Committee notes the relocation of two additional polling stations where venues have become unavailable.**
  - (7) All other polling stations and places remain unchanged.**
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#### **Summary**

Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983, as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, requires the Council to carry out a review of polling districts and polling places in its area with a period of 16 months of 1 October 2013 and then within a period of 16 months from the 1 October of every fifth year after that. The last compulsory review was completed in October 2019.

However, this requirement does not prevent a local authority from conducting a review at any time and it has become necessary to carry out an interim review to assess the

suitability of polling places where the existing polling station is within a school building following the 6 May 2021 elections.

The Government confirmed that the May 2021 elections would go ahead for the elections that were delayed from 2020 due to the pandemic of Covid-19 alongside the scheduled elections for 2021.

Both the Minister of State for School Standards along with the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office wrote to Returning Officers and Headteachers of schools in England, to ask Returning Officers to limit the use of schools as polling stations and to look at other available venues first.

At short notice Returning Officers were instructed to find alternative venues which caused immense pressure on polling arrangements and local relationships between Returning Officers and Headteachers.

The Returning Officer for Eastleigh recognised the concerns about using schools as polling stations and sought alternative venues to minimise disruption to pupils' education.

To support this approach for all future elections the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) is carrying out an interim review of polling places and polling stations to ask Councillors to consider the recommendations which proposes that those polling stations that were temporarily changed on 6 May 2021 agree they become permanent polling stations for all elections.

The review must not be confused with changing any district ward boundaries; this review focuses on the polling stations which are assigned to each polling district.

The arrangements made for Parliamentary elections are also used at other elections.

A consultation was carried out between 9 August and 20 September 2021. This involved a consultation notice and background information being placed on the Council's website, placing alerts through different social media platforms (E-news, Twitter, Facebook) as well as directly contacting elected persons (MPs and Borough Councillors), parish and town councils, Headteachers, County Returning Officer & Winchester ARO and persons and organisations' with particular expertise in relation to access to premises for people with different forms of disability and local community groups.

The ARO's final report will seek approval from the Council's Administration Committee, which has delegated powers to designate polling districts. The new polling places and polling stations will take effect upon publication of the revised Register of Electors on 1 December 2021.

### **Statutory Powers**

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

Representation of the People Act 1983, Schedule A1 (RPA 1983)

## Strategic Implications

1. This report relates to a statutory function and good governance arrangements which underpin all the objectives in the Corporate Plan 2015-2025.

## Proposed Changes

2. Chandler's Ford Borough Ward:

<b>Polling District</b>	<b>Polling Station</b>	<b>Proposals</b>
CH3	Toynbee School Bodycoats Road	Move to Chandler's Ford Parish Offices, Fryern Hill Pavilion, Greenways, Chandler's Ford

The proposed venue was used for the May 2021 combined elections was found to be entirely suitable for a polling station with level access throughout and all the necessary facilities. The single road access did not prove an issue and no complaints were received by voters or staff regarding the location.

Eastleigh North Borough Wards:

<b>Polling District</b>	<b>Polling Station</b>	<b>Proposals</b>
EN2	Crestwood Community School, Shakespeare Road, Eastleigh	St Peter's Church Shakespeare Road, Eastleigh
EN3	Crestwood Community School, Shakespeare Road, Eastleigh	
EN5	Shakespeare Junior School, St Catherine's Road, Eastleigh	The Café, Eastleigh House, Upper Market Street, Eastleigh

The proposal for using St Peter's Church has been welcomed by both the Vicar and management of the Church. The venue was previously used for one polling station and has been assessed a suitable for polling station use. The venue is also close to the existing venue so it will have no impact to voters in terms of distanced travelled.

Eastleigh House Café was trialed successfully on 6 May 2021 and was found to be fully accessible to all with ample space and facilities. The County Returning Officer also supported the change of venue.

Hiltingbury Borough Ward:

<b>Polling District</b>	<b>Polling Station</b>	<b>Proposals</b>
HI3	Scantabout Primary	Chandler's Ford Library,

	School, Ionic Close, Chandler's Ford	Oakmount Road, Chandler's Ford
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The proposed change venue was used for 6 May 2021 combined election to avoid disruption to the primary school and was well received by staff and voters. The venue had ample space and was easily accessible with good facilities.

### **Additional recommendations – venues no longer available:**

Chandler's Ford Borough Ward:

<b>Polling District</b>	<b>Polling Station</b>	<b>Proposals</b>
CH1	United Reformed Church, Kings Road, Chandler's Ford	St Boniface Church, Hursley Road, Chandler's Ford

The ARO has been informed of the permanent closure of the United Reformed Church. The proposed alternative venue, St Boniface Church, was suggested by Borough Ward Councillors and has been evaluated as a suitable new venue being close to the border of polling district with plenty of space, accessible to all voters and having parking nearby on the same side of Hursley Road.

Bishopstoke Borough Ward:

<b>Polling District</b>	<b>Polling Station</b>	<b>Proposals</b>
BI2	Memorial Hall,	Bishopstoke Evangelical Church, Stoke Park Road, Bishopstoke

Notice was given by Bishopstoke Parish Council that the Memorial Hall will permanently close and is scheduled for demolition. Seeking alternative polling places, the Borough Ward Councillors suggested Bishopstoke Evangelical Church which has been assessed as suitable and is proposed as a permanent replacement for the voters in BI2 polling district.

## **Representations Received**

3. A total of **6** representations were received to the consultation, which can be summarised as follows:

Feedback received from a Parish Councillor: who strongly supported the decision to move away from using schools as polling stations to ensure children do not miss out on education. The Councillor also noted that consideration should be given to other child provisions such as premises used for pre-school to prevent disruptions to parents.

**ARO response: Thanked the respondent for their positive response in support of moving away from schools and would consider identifying alternative polling stations venues to replace those that are used for other childcare facilities.**

Head Teacher commented: That they would be grateful if their school could not be used as a polling station due to the layout of the site, they must shut the school and it disrupts the children's learning.

**ARO response: Thanked the respondent for their response and noted the detrimental impact of using the school has on the children.**

The County Returning Officer commented: that the proposals had been reviewed and, subject to feedback from the consultations, has no concerns.

**ARO response: Thanked the respondent for their response.**

The Acting Returning Officer for the Winchester constituency responded: stating that she agrees with the proposals and confirmed that she also avoids using schools. She asked that a communication plan be in place to inform voters of the new polling station locations.

**ARO for Eastleigh Constituency supports the comments of the ARO for Winchester Constituency and concurs that the venues were already used on polling day in May 2021 and confirmed that there will be a variety of communication campaigns prior to election day in May 2022.**

Borough Councillor commented: they agreed with the proposals and had their endorsement.

**ARO response: Thanked the respondent for their response.**

The Council's Elections team concurred with the recommendations made by the ARO and support the approach for moving away from using school rooms as polling stations for all future polls.

**ARO thanks the team for their comments.**

## **Financial Implications**

4. The review has been conducted within existing staff resources and there are no additional financial implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

## **Risk Assessment**

5. As highlighted at the start of this report, the law places a duty on the Council to conduct reviews and, specifically within this, to ensure safe and appropriated access arrangements for both voters and staff. During 2021, a full and comprehensive risk assessment was carried out for all polling stations in the Borough of Eastleigh and this includes the proposed changes in the report.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

6. The Equality Act is relevant to the decision and an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out and attached as an appendix to the report. In summary the EqIA shows that it relates to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, or fostering good relations between different people in the following ways:

The aforementioned duty to conduct the review includes a responsibility to ensure that everyone who is entitled to vote can do so with equality of access – from actual arrangements at the polling station (such as provision of ramps and voting booths for the wheelchair users to cast their vote along with enlarged version of the ballot paper and a Braille voting device provided for the partially-sighted and blind) to the polling station being within a reasonable proximity to their home address.

For the purposes of the review an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out, attached as an appendix to the report.

## **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

7. This report has no climate implications. The siting of multiple polling places in accessible locations in neighbourhoods and communities encourages people to travel sustainably to use them.

## **Conclusion**

8. The review considers the arrangement for voting to permanently avoid using school rooms as polling stations. Following a period of consultation, the ARO has considered the views submitted on the current and proposed arrangements and recommends the changes to polling stations made at the beginning of this report.

Councillors are asked to consider the proposed changes and to make decisions that take account of the views received and the location of the polling stations in relation to the demographics of the area.

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ACTING RETURNING OFFICER

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Appendices Attached: 1

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D**

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

List Background Papers - None.