

Cabinet
Council

15 March 2011
22 March 2011

Name of Cabinet Member:
Cabinet Member Corporate & Neighbourhood Services – Councillor Townshend

Director Approving Submission of the report:
Director of Customer & Workforce Services

Ward(s) affected:
Lower Stoke & Longford

Title:
Required changes to designated polling places

Is this a key decision?

No. It is a legislative requirement that the full Council approve any changes to designated polling places.

Executive Summary:

As part of the arrangements for the elections to be held on 5th May 2011, the Returning Officer is required to establish a polling station within the designated polling place approved by the Council. In undertaking this work he has been informed that two of these polling places are no longer available and has advised the Cabinet Member Corporate and Neighbourhood Services accordingly. This report sets out the necessary changes required in order for suitable alternative arrangements to be made.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is asked to recommend that Council:

1.1 Approve the revised polling places for polling district Jg in Lower Stoke and Hi in Longford.

Council is asked to:

1.2 Approve the revised polling places for polling district Jg in Lower Stoke and Hi in Longford

List of Appendices included:

None

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it, or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

Electoral Arrangements Advisory Panel 17 February 2011:

Will this report go to Council?

Yes

22 March 2011

Report title:

Required changes to designated polling places in Lower Stoke & Longford Wards

1. Context or background

- 1.1 In accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 (the Act) the Council is required to designate polling places for each of their parliamentary polling districts.
- 1.2 A Polling District is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area e.g. ward with a Polling Place being a geographical area in which a polling station is located. There is no legal definition of what a polling place is, it can be as tightly defined as a building, a street or as wide as the whole district. The Polling Station is the actual room where the process of voting takes place. It must be located within the polling place that the authority has designated for the polling district. The location of the room within the polling place is the responsibility of the (Acting) Returning Officer.
- 1.3 In designating a polling place, the Act requires local authorities to:
 - seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
 - seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to those who are disabled
 - have regard to the accessibility to disabled persons of potential polling stations in any place which it is considering designating as a polling place or the designation of which as a polling place it is reviewing.
- 1.4 As part of the arrangements for the elections to be held on 5th May 2011, the Returning Officer is required to establish a polling station within the designated polling place approved by the Council. In undertaking this work he has been informed that two of the currently designated polling places are no longer available for electoral purposes due to their imminent sale.
- 1.5 The Returning Officer is unable to determine polling stations within the affected polling districts until new polling places have been approved by Council

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 The Council has been informed of the loss of a current polling place within two wards, Lower Stoke and Longford. Ward Councillors for both of these wards were informed of this and asked for any proposals for alternatives that they would wish Returning Officer to investigate and report to the Cabinet Member's Electoral Arrangements Advisory Panel (referred to here as the Panel) In addition, there are criteria set by the Advisory panel which assist officers to investigate any acceptable, alternative proposals:
 - each ward should have between six and ten polling districts
 - each polling district should contain between 1,000 & 2,000 electors
 - there should be a designated polling place for each polling district wherever possible
 - all Portacabin locations to be reviewed for more suitable alternative arrangements
 - all buildings with known access problems be reviewed together with any buildings where problems were highlighted during the 2010 elections, especially those relating to access.
- 2.2 Both Cllr McNicholas for Lower Stoke and Councillors Duggins & Harvard for Longford requested portacabins to be placed within the polling districts.

- 2.3 One of the criteria specified by the Advisory Panel as listed in 2.1 above is that all Portacabin locations be reviewed for more suitable alternative arrangements. They have agreed that portacabins are generally not suitable venues for polling purposes including limited access to electors with mobility problems and they do not provide adequate facilities for staff under the Workplace, Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations.

Consideration of proposals

- 2.4 The Panel met on 17 February 2011 to consider the representations of ward councillors and the proposals put forward by the Returning Officer, and to agree alternative polling places for submission to Cabinet and Council.
- 2.5 The Electoral Arrangements Advisory Panel agreed that a portacabin should be located in each of the polling districts - Jg, Lower Stoke Ward and Hi, Longford Ward and that the whole polling district should be designated as the polling place. This will allow officers sufficient time to investigate possible locations and to consult with ward councillors regarding suitable sites.
- 2.6 It was also agreed that these arrangements should be reviewed after the elections in May 2011.

3 Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 Ward councillors were consulted as soon as the problem was identified and were kept informed throughout the process.

4 Timetable

4.1	Final polling scheme agreed by publication of Notice of Election	25 March 2011
	Poll Cards to be distributed indicating allocated polling station	25 – 30 March 2011

5 Comments from Director of Finance and Legal Services

- 5.1 Financial Implications
In general any increase or reduction in venue costs will be reflected in any claim made to the relevant Government Department.
- 5.2 Legal Implications
The Council has a statutory duty to designate parliamentary polling districts and polling places within its administrative area.

6. Other implications

- 6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / LAA (or Coventry SCS)?**

The Council will be undertaking one of its statutory requirements.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

6.2.1 The Council needs to maintain its polling arrangements to ensure they meet their statutory requirements. If premises for polling places are chosen which are not convenient in terms of location, or do not have adequate disabled access, or are otherwise not suitable for polling purposes, this could lead to reduced turnout and disenfranchised voters.

6.2.2 By carrying out these required changes promptly and thoroughly, the Council is seeking to maintain the standard and location of polling station facilities, which should assist people wanting to vote, and hence help improve turnout. Further reviews will be carried out prior to the 2012 elections to ensure that the best arrangements are in place for electors in these areas.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

None

6.4 Equalities / EIA

6.4.1 If premises for polling places are chosen which do not have adequate disabled access this could lead to reduced turnout and dissatisfied voters. Access to polling stations for electors with reduced mobility has been considered in formulating the proposals.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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