

Minutes of meetings of the Council at which consideration was given to the review of Polling Districts and Places

**Constitution and Members' Services
October 2011**

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Scrutiny Standing Panel

24. STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING STATIONS

The Panel received a report regarding the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations, from Mr G Lunnun, Assistant Director of Democratic Services.

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a duty for all polling districts and polling places to be reviewed by the end of 2011.

A polling district was the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts within which polling places could be determined which was convenient to electors. A polling place was the building or area to which polling stations would be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling station was the room or building chosen by the Returning Officer where voting took place.

Aim of the Review

Authorities must:

- (a) Seek to ensure that all of the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as were practicable in the circumstances; and
- (b) Seek to ensure that so far as was reasonable and practicable, the polling places for which they were reasonable were accessible to all electors, including those who were disabled.

Review Process

- (i) A review of polling districts and polling places must be conducted by the end of 2011, and at least every four years after that
- (ii) The review was a function of the Council and not the Electoral Registration Officer or the Returning Officer
- (iii) As part of the review a consultation exercise was undertaken between 25 May and 25 June 2011 in relation to the proposals
- (iv) Members, local MPs, interest groups and Returning Officers for the Brentwood and Ongar and Harlow Parliamentary Constituencies were consulted.

Results of Consultation

A Buckhurst Hill resident referred to two polling stations in the Buckhurst Hill East Ward, the Woollard Centre in Loughton Way and the Roding Valley Hall in Station Way. Although the Woollard Centre was well placed, the Roding Valley Hall was on the edge of the ward necessitating a long walk or travel by car for many electors. It was felt that the Health Centre in Buckhurst Way would be more convenient for the majority of electors. Officers had concerns about this location due to parking problems. Contact was made with the Health Centre to check the extent of accommodation available for polling. The Health Centre responded that the building could not be made available without severe disruption to the services there. Despite the Roding Valley Hall being on the edge of the ward, it was still within easy walking distance for many electors.

A member drew attention to the possibility of the Council converting Faversham Hall, Faversham Close, Chigwell Row into flats and the lack of any other suitable building

in Chigwell Row for use as a polling station. There was a tendering process involved, and it was advised that the Hall would still be available for use as a polling station in May 2012. However it was likely that an alternative location was needed after that period.

Another member expressed the view that the use of part of the bar area in the Railway Hotel in Lower Sheering as a polling station was not ideal as it was on the very edge of the ward and county boundary and was two miles from some electors. Different entrances to the public house made it difficult for tellers and some electors may be unwilling to enter licensed premises. However he recognised that there was no other suitable building in Lower Sheering and that the Railway Hotel represented the best available option and was preferable to the alternative of a portacabin.

Ongar Town Council advised that they were happy with the current arrangements, Brentwood Borough Council, Theydon Bois Parish Council and the Brentwood and Ongar Liberal Democrats all advised that they had no comments on the proposals. No other responses were received.

The Panel was made aware of a late representation from Councillor Mrs J Whitehouse concerning re-organisation of polling districts in the Epping Hemnall Ward so as to make polling stations in some parts of the ward more convenient for voters. After discussion Councillor Mrs J Whitehouse said that she would withdraw her proposals. It was advised that a review would not take place for a further four years.

RECOMMENDED:

That a report be submitted to the Council recommending that:

(1) that the proposals for polling districts and places as set out in the Appendix to the report be approved; and

(2) that the proposals be published and copies made available for inspection by the public at the Civic Offices, in at least one place in each parliamentary constituency covering the Epping Forest District and on the Council's website.

44. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

Councillor Stallan the Chairman of the Constitution and Member Services Scrutiny Standing Panel introduced their report on the review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations. The District had a duty to review all polling places at least every four years. A review had to be completed by the end of 2011 and approved by full Council.

A polling district is the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors. A polling place is the building or area to which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling station is the room or building chosen by the Returning Officer where the poll takes place.

Local authorities are required to divide their area into polling districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections, designate polling places for these polling districts and keep these under review. Polling districts and places for local government elections are not automatically part of the review. However, the polling districts and places for parliamentary and local government elections should always be the same.

As part of the review a consultation exercise was undertaken between May 25 and June 25, 2011. Members, local MPs, agents, interest groups and the public were consulted.

RESOLVED:

That a report be submitted to the Council recommending that:

(a) the proposals for polling districts and places as set out in the Appendix to the report be approved; and

(b) the proposals be published and copies made available for inspection by the public at the Civic Offices, in at least one place in each parliamentary constituency covering the Epping Forest District and on the Council's website.

86. REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

Mover: Councillor Bassett, Chairman of the Committee

Councillor Bassett submitted a report on a review of polling districts and polling places required under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to be undertaken by the end of 2011.

Report as first moved ADOPTED

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposals for polling districts and places as set out in the Appendix to the report of the Committee be approved; and**
- (2) That the proposals be published and copies made available for inspection by the public at the Civic Offices, in at least one place in each local Parliamentary Constituency and on the Council's website.**