

Body: Full Council

Date: 9 May 2012

Subject: Polling place review

Wards: Old Town, St Anthony's and Upperton

Report of: Electoral Services Manager

Purpose: To agree revised arrangements in respect of polling districts and polling places in the parts of the Old Town, St Anthony's and Upperton Wards (polling districts OTD, SAA, SAB and UPE).

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Summary:

This report deals with a part review of the polling districts and polling places provided for elections that take place within the Borough of Eastbourne. The Council has a duty to undertake a full review at intervals of not less than 4 years. A review must also be undertaken when a change in a particular polling place is proposed to be made.

The Council is expected to ensure that all electors in the constituency have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and that so far as is reasonable and practicable the polling places are accessible to those who are disabled.

A 5 week consultation was held ending on 18 April 2012. All representations received to the Council's proposals are set out in the report along with proposed responses and final recommendations.

Following this review, the revised polling arrangements will be implemented as from October 2012.

Recommendations:

(1) That the Returning Officer's original proposals in respect of Old Town ward polling district OTD (Greenfield Methodist Church Hall to be designated as the polling place) and St Anthony's ward polling districts SAA/SAB (re-drawn polling district boundary with Sun Coast Church and the Archery Youth Centre as the designated polling places) be approved.

(2) That the Returning Officer's amended proposal in respect of Upperton ward UPE (St Mary's Church hall to be designated as the polling place) be approved.

(3) That the Electoral Services Manager, on behalf of the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, be authorised to implement the Council's decisions in respect of the review.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council must regularly review the division of its area into polling districts and the places where electors are asked to vote. A full review of the whole borough must be undertaken at intervals of not less than 4 years. A review must also be undertaken when a change in a particular polling place is proposed to be made.
- 1.2 This partial review has been necessitated because Edgmond Evangelical Church will not be available for use as a polling station in the future due to the anticipated re-development of the site. In addition, it has been accepted that Roselands School should no longer be used as a polling station. This followed a series of representations that closure of the school was having a detrimental impact on the school and parents.
- 1.3 The relevant legislation can be found in section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006. Guidance is also published by the Electoral Commission.
- 1.4 This matter is brought before full Council as decisions on matters in respect of polling district boundaries and polling places cannot be dealt with by a council's executive (i.e. the Cabinet) by virtue of The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000.
- 1.5 The Council's last full review was carried out in 2010 and approved by the Council in November of that year. The next full review will be undertaken in 2014 and any changes will be in place in time for the parliamentary and borough elections scheduled for May 2015.

2.0 Review process

- 2.1 As part of the review process the Council must:
- 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, and
 - When considering or reviewing the designation of a polling place, have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

2.2 The consultation period for this full review ran for 5 weeks between 12 March and 18 April 2012. This is shorter than the customary 12 week period allowed for full reviews. The shorter period was necessary in order to complete the review in sufficient time for any changes to electoral registers to be implemented in time before the commencement of the annual canvass which this year has an earlier commencement date in late June/early July. Public notice of the review was published and information about the review made available on the Council's website. Any elector in the whole of the Eastbourne constituency (whether they live in the borough or not) was entitled to make representations.

2.3 The consultation document, together with maps of each affected ward showing polling district boundaries, can still be viewed on the Council's website at

<http://www.eastbourne.gov.uk/council/consultations/polling-districts-and-polling-places/>

2.4 As well as being supplied on request, the consultation document was sent to the local Member of Parliament, borough and county Councillors in the relevant wards and local political parties. It was also sent to the Eastbourne Disability Group (DIG) as required under the regulations as persons having particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. The DIG is an umbrella group of local organisations that represents some 1,500 disabled people living in Eastbourne.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 **"Parliamentary constituency"**. This cannot be changed by the review. It is the division of the constituency into polling districts and places that is the subject of the review. It should be noted that only that part of the Eastbourne constituency that is within the Borough of Eastbourne that is being reviewed by the Council. The area of the constituency that lies outside the Borough (Willingdon, Jevington and Wannock) will be reviewed separately by Wealden District Council.

"Polling district". The area created by the division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to the electors.

"Polling place". The building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.

"Polling station". The actual area where the process of voting takes place. This must be located within the polling place and designated for the particular polling district. This function is the responsibility of the Returning Officer.

4.0 The proposals and comments received

- 4.1 An **appendix** to the consultation document set out details of current polling districts and polling places for the 3 wards affected together with details of proposed changes. **This appendix has been updated to include the full text of all comments received.**
- 4.2 The following summarises the proposals and comments received together with any necessary observations on the comments and final recommendations:

Old Town Ward – OTD polling district

The proposal is that voters will now go to Greenfield Methodist Church Hall, Greenfield Road. An alternative of using the Eastbourne Evangelical Free Church in Victoria Drive was considered but on balance it is considered that there would be little or no advantage is designating an additional premise as the polling place given that Greenfield Methodist Church Hall already functions as an adequate polling station for an adjoining part of the Old Town. The additional numbers would necessitate the station being split (as is already the case) with 2 teams of staff catering for voters. This would preclude the use of this venue as a polling station for Upperton ward. The request below that separate entrances are used should be possible as this been done in the past.

Councillor Ungar (Old Town councillor) supports this proposal providing the venue is not also used as a polling station for Upperton ward.

Gerard Thompson (Liberal Democrats constituency agent) agrees use of Greenfield Methodist Church, but asks that a separate entrance is used for OTD voters.

Recommendation: That the Returning Officer's original proposals in respect of Old Town ward polling district OTD (Greenfield Methodist Church Hall to be designated as the polling place) be approved.

St Anthony's Ward – SAA and SAB polling districts

The proposal is that use of Roselands School be discontinued and that the boundaries of both districts be re-drawn and that Suncoast Church in Courtlands Road and the Archery Youth Centre, Seaside be designated as the polling places for the new polling districts. Details of the new boundary line is given in the appendix and a map is also appended. Alternative venues have been considered as discussed in the appendix but are either unsuitable or unavailable.

No comments specific to this ward were received.

Recommendation: That the Returning Officer's original proposals in respect of St Anthony's ward polling districts SAA/SAB (re-drawn polling district boundary with Sun Coast Church and the Archery Youth Centre as the

designated polling places) be approved.

Upperton Ward – UPE polling district

The proposal originally put forward was that the Town Hall should be used as the polling station for this district. The alternative of using Greenfield Methodist Church Hall has been ruled out in view of the intention to use this venue for voters across a wider area of Old Town. The other alternative of using the hall attached to St Mary's Church is however considered suitable and in the light of the representations received the Returning Officer considers that his original proposal should be changed and that St Mary's Church hall should be the designated polling place.

Councillor Rodohan (County Councillor for Upperton Ward) and Gerard Thompson (Liberal Democrats constituency agent) both made strong representations against the use of the Town Hall and supporting use of St Mary's Church hall.

Recommendation: That the Returning Officer's amended proposal in respect of Upperton ward UPE (St Mary's Church hall to be designated as the polling place) be approved.

5.0 Council consideration

5.1 Council is asked to consider the amended proposals and representations received and make a final decision. The Council is required to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of both polling districts and polling places. Reasons have been given in appendix 1 with additional reasoning noted in paragraph 4.2 above.

6.0 Implementation

6.1 The new venues will be used at all future elections. In respect of St Anthony's ward only, due to the need to re-draw the boundary between polling districts SAA and SAB, revised registers for these 2 districts will be required. It is intended that this task will be completed and revised registers published alongside the publication of the electoral registers following the annual canvass on 16 October 2012. This year completion of the canvass has been brought forward to ensure the new registers are used for the police and crime commissioner elections to be held on 15 November.

6.2 It is however important that the review is completed and that final decisions in relation to polling district boundaries are taken by the Council at this meeting in order that the task of re-drawing the boundary can be completed prior to the start of the annual canvass at the beginning of July.

6.3 In addition, the Council must publish:

- All correspondence sent to the Returning Officer in connection with the review and all correspondence sent to any person who the Council thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or

facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

- All representations made by any person in connection with the review;
- The minutes of any meetings held by the Council where details of the review have been considered.
- Details of the actual designations of polling districts and polling places agreed as a result of the review.
- Details of where the results of the review have been published.

7.0 Appeal to Electoral Commission

7.1 The grounds under which the review outcome can be challenged are that the Council has failed to:

- meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or a body of them (i.e. the reasonable requirements of a particular area of the authority have not been satisfactorily met); or
- take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.

7.2 The following may make representations to the Electoral Commission namely;

- not less than 30 registered electors in the constituency
- any person who made representations to the council when the review was being undertaken (except the Returning Officer)
- any person who is not an elector within the constituency who the Electoral Commission feel has sufficient interest in the accessibility of disabled persons;

Also the Returning Officer may make observations on any representations made to the Commission.

8.0 Legal implications/risk assessment

8.1 The Council is under a legal duty keep its polling place arrangements under review at not less than 4-yearly intervals and to follow prescribed procedures when carrying out such reviews.

9.0 Policy and performance implications

9.1 This review helps meet the Council's corporate plan objectives under the heading "thriving communities" for encouraging peoples' involvement in their neighbourhoods and the heading "sustainable performance" in ensuring a customer focus in the delivery of its services.

9.2 The Electoral Commission are empowered under section 9A of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to set out for local Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers the performance standards to be achieved in the conduct of their duties. This review and the associated documentation will help demonstrate that Eastbourne Borough Council is

meeting the required standard.

10.0 Financial and resourcing implications

- 10.1 Election costs are borne by the body holding the election. For parliamentary elections and referendums the Government pays and East Sussex County Council pays for county elections. The foregoing proposals will not increase the number of venues overall. There will, however, be a net increase of one in the number of polling stations that have to be set up, so this will marginally increase staffing costs.

Tracey Pannett
Electoral Services Manager

Background papers:

Consultation document at

<http://www.eastbourne.gov.uk/council/consultations/polling-districts-and-polling-places/>

(dr/P:polling place review/council/12.05.09)

Part review of Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Borough of Eastbourne

Parts of the Old Town, St Anthony’s and Upperton Wards

Returning Officer’s proposals

*(Electorate and postal voter figures as at **1 February 2012**)*

Old Town Ward

PD letters	Current polling place	Electorate
OTD	Edgmond Evangelical Church, 39-41 Church Street	(1,023 less 229 postal voters) = 794

Issues, options and considerations:

The Edgmond Evangelical Church is unlikely to be available for use as a polling station in future elections. Latest information suggests that the site is likely to be re-developed in the near future.

Edgmond serves as a polling station for some 800 electors (electorate minus postal voters) in polling district OTD. This is the polling district that includes that part of the Old Town ward situated south of the A259 (East Dean Road/Church Street). In addition it also acts as an Upperton polling station for some 500 electors in UPE for which separate proposals are made on pages 16/18 below.

Having surveyed the district and surrounding area, there appear to be two potential options as follows:

- 1. Greenfield Methodist Church Hall.** Greenfield is a busy polling station already serving some 3,050 electors in Old Town. Use of this hall would entail crossing the busy main road and this was one of the reasons why Edgmond was utilised in the more recent past. Arrangements can be made at Greenfield to make use of both entrances and divide the hall into 2 separate stations if desired – likely in the case of a parliamentary election when turnout is

somewhat higher. This would require careful signing and staff on hand to guide voters. There is no car park but on-street parking is available.

2. Eastbourne Evangelical Free Church, Victoria Drive. This hall is located at the corner of Victoria Drive and Okehurst Road at the rear of the church. It is a little closer than Greenfield but still requires crossing the main road, although the location of the pedestrian crossing near the junction of Summerdown Road/Victoria Drive/East Dean Road is an advantage. There could be some confusion as voters living in the immediate vicinity of this hall are registered to vote at Greenfield. The main drawback to the use of this hall is the disabled access ramp which is narrow with a tight right-angle turn and considered unsuitable for motorised wheelchairs.

It should also be noted that neither of the above premises are located within the polling district. No suitable premises have been identified within the district itself.

Returning Officer proposal: That Greenfield Methodist Church Hall be designated as the polling place for polling district OTD.

Reasons:

On balance there would be little or no advantage is designating an additional premise as the polling place given that Greenfield Methodist Church Hall already functions as an adequate polling station. The additional numbers would necessitate the station being split (as is already the case) with 2 teams of staff catering for voters.

Comments received:

From: John Ungar, Councillor, Old Town.

Comment: Subject to the views of the other Old Town Councillors I think the Green Street/Greenfield Road Church Hall is the best site, as long as the Upperton polling station is not also moved there.

From: Gerard Thompson, Agent & Constituency Organiser, Eastbourne & Willingdon Liberal Democrats

Comment: In regards to the proposed change to OTD, we agree with the proposed site in Greenfield Methodist Church, but we want our suggestion noted that there should be a separate entrance for OTD voters. The building does have this opportunity within its structure.

St Anthony's Ward

PD letters	Current polling place	Electorate
SAA	Roselands School, Woodgate Road	(1,083 less 159 postal voters) = 924
SAB	Roselands School, Woodgate Road	(2,225 less 379 postal voters) = 1,846

Issues, options and considerations:

A commitment was given to Roseland School that the premises would no longer be used as a polling station in the future. This had followed many years of representations by the school that closure of the school was having a detrimental impact on the school and parents. The decision taken at the last full review (November 2010) was to propose the use of the school as a polling station for district SAA and to use the Suncoast Church for district SAB with the final decision being left to the Returning Officer. In the event, it was decided that if the school was to continue to be used there would be little advantage in also using Suncoast Church and at the last election in May 2011 only the school was used. This in turn resulted in further strong representations being made by the school headteacher and governors. A meeting was held at the school attended by the Leader of the Council (also a ward member) and in the light of the school's representations a commitment was made that the Council would end its use of the school at future elections. This is in line with the Council's previously stated policy of only using school premises where no other suitable venue is available.

Having surveyed the district and surrounding area, there appear to be two viable options. Both are based on the use of the Suncoast Church in Courtlands Road and the Archery Youth Centre, Seaside. Further details of these options are given below.

Other potential options and venues have been ruled out as follows:

- St Agnes Church Hall off Whitley Road. This is already used as a polling station for Devonshire ward and due to its fairly small size and restricted access would not be suitable if expected to cater for two separate polling stations.
- Bridgemere Community Centre. Enquiries have been made on a number of occasions as to the possible availability of this hall, the most recent being last month. The hall management are unable to offer these premises as they are used in term time for their breakfast and afterschool club. The whole building is used and in accordance with Ofsted regulations no members of the public are allowed on the premises when schoolchildren are attending the club.
- Reduce numbers of electors attending the Archery by using the Regency Park Community Centre as the polling station for Devonshire polling district DVD so that the Archery becomes a station used exclusively for St Anthony's

and also include voters in polling district SAC who would otherwise vote at St Andrew's Church Hall. This option has been ruled out as the Community Centre is not available for hire as it is used as a pre-school nursery in term-time.

The Archery Youth Centre is also used as a polling station for Devonshire ward, however its size and access arrangements allows for the provision of two separate polling stations at this venue. This would require careful signing and staff on hand to guide voters. At the last election voters in polling district SAC voted at the Archery following the fire at St Andrew's Church Hall. The expectation is that St Andrew's Church Hall will be re-built in time for the November Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

Sun Coast church has suitable flat access, disability parking space, an entrance reception area and a large hall. There is also on-street parking in the immediate vicinity.

The options are:

1. No change in existing polling district boundaries. Send voters in SAA to the Archery and voters in SAB to Suncoast Church. This has the advantage of not requiring the re-drawing of the polling district boundary (a relatively complex task having implications for other IT databases that use polling district boundaries). The disadvantage is that it would require longer travel distances for an appreciable number of electors than could otherwise be achieved if the boundaries were adjusted.

2. Re-draw polling district boundaries. Re-configure the boundary between SAA and SAB. My initial proposal would be a new boundary that would run from the junction of Seaside and Woodgate Road, along the rear (east side) of Woodgate Road to St Philip's Avenue, east along the middle of St Philip's Avenue and then to the rear of Harding Avenue running along the line of the old rail track ('the Crumbles Siding') to the Horsey Sewer behind Astaire Avenue, then east along the stream. (In addition to the ward map appended to this document, a map showing the proposed re-drawn polling district boundary is also appended.)

East of this line (and including The Sidings (off St Phillip's Avenue) and Chaseley Bungalows (Astaire Close) would vote at the Archery and west of the line (including the whole of Bridgemere would vote at Suncoast Church. A large part of the re-drawn SAA district would be some distance from Suncoast Church, however, it comprises industrial units, farmland and the golfing park and there are no registered voters in this area.

The combined electorate (less postal voters) of SAA and SAB polling districts is approximately 2,770. The likely split of the re-drawn districts will be approximately 1,000 electors to the Archery and 1,800 to Suncoast Church. This would mean that should St Andrew's Church Hall not be available for next November's election, the addition of 1,250 voters in SAC would not push the total number voting at the Archery above the Electoral Commission's recommended maximum of 2,500 voters.

It is not proposed to change polling district SAC (east of Churchdale Road) and this will have the re-built community hall of St Andrew's Church as its polling station. As mentioned above, in the event that the hall has not been rebuilt in time, SAC voters will also have to vote at the Archery in November.

The Suncoast Church and the Archery are on the fringe and just outside the 2 polling districts respectively.

Returning Officer proposal: That the polling district boundary between districts SAA and SAB be re-drawn (described as option 2) with electors in the western section (and including the Bridgemere estate) vote at the Suncoast Church, Courtlands Road and those in the western section vote at the Archery Youth Centre, Seaside.

Reasons:

This proposal is considered to offer the most pragmatic solution to a difficult situation given the lack of suitable/available premises in a more central location.

Comments received:

None.

Upperton Ward

PD letters	Current polling place	Electorate
UPE	Edgmond Evangelical Church, 39/41 Church Street	(598 less 102 postal voters) = 496

Issues, options and considerations:

The Edgmond Evangelical Church is unlikely to be available for use as a polling station in future elections. Latest information suggests that the site is likely to be re-developed in the near future.

Edgmond serves as a polling station for some 500 electors (electorate minus postal voters) in polling district UPE. This is the polling district that is bounded by Church Street to the north, Vicarage Road/Love Lane to the west, Paradise Drive to the south and Compton Place Road/Borough Lane to the east. In addition, Edgmond, also acts as an Old Town polling station for some 800 electors in OTD for which separate proposals are made on pages 11/12 above.

Having surveyed the district and immediate surrounding area, there appear to be three potential options as follows:

- 1. Greenfield Methodist Church Hall, Greenfield Road.** Greenfield is a busy polling station serving approximately 3,050 electors in Old Town. It is proposed that this venue replace Edgmond for electors in Old Town and if this is the approved it would not be practicable to create a separate polling station for Upperton electors. Use of this hall would entail crossing the busy main road. There is no car park but on-street parking is available.
- 2. Small hall adjoining St Mary's Church car park, off Ocklynge Road.** This hall has been used as a polling station in the past. It has reasonable access and some off-street parking. On-street parking in the immediate vicinity is however limited as the side streets are generally fully parked in the daytime. Use of this hall would entail crossing the busy main road, although a pedestrian crossing is located nearby outside Waitrose. The access route for pedestrians would also involve using either the steps or sloped pavement adjoining the Lamb Inn. The hall is small but could cater for the small electorate of UPE.
- 3. The Town Hall, Grove Road.** This is already an Upperton ward polling station (with 733 electors) and although a greater distance for the majority of electors does have plenty of car parking space as we limit staff parking at the Town Hall on election days. This option was used in the recent past for electors in UPE. The addition of electors in UPE would give a total of 1,233 (excluding postal voters) – still relatively small in number and easily accommodated.

It should also be noted that none of the above premises are located within the polling district. No suitable premises have been identified within the district itself.

Returning Officer proposal: That the Town Hall, Grove Road be designated as the polling place for polling district OTD. (Note: In the light of the representations received an amended proposal is now made in the main report to use St Mary's Church hall.)

Reasons:

On balance there would be little or no advantage is designating an additional premise as the polling place given that the Town Hall already functions as an adequate polling station. The Town Hall has excellent parking facilities as it is the normal practice to close the Town Hall car park to staff on election day. It is however acknowledged those living in the upper section of the district would have a longer distance to travel.

Comments received:

From: Pat Rodohan, County Councillor for Upperton Ward

Comment: My preference is the small hall adjoining St. Mary's Church car park. My 2nd choice is Greenfield Methodist Church Hall.

I know from helping in elections over many years that many residents in the area in questions depend on public transport and did not go to the Town Hall when it was the Polling Station in the past and it would affect the turn out again.

In the interests of democracy we should make it as easy as possible for our residents to vote in person if that is their wish.

From: Gerard Thompson, Agent and Constituency Organiser, Eastbourne & Willingdon Liberal Democrats

Comment: On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I would like our objection noted in regards to the recommended polling station change in UPE to the Town Hall.

We feel it is outside the natural community of the polling district, and it would not comply with equalities of opportunity for the residents voting in that district.

Quite simply, for a majority of elderly residents, given the distance between UPE and the Town Hall, those residents would be put at a gross disadvantage in being able to vote in person.

I urge the Returning Officer to reconsider the proposal on that basis.

The preferred choice is the small hall adjoining St. Mary's Church, off Ocklynge Road, given its locality to the previous polling station.

A small hall is suitable for the number of registered voters in the polling station. The number of main roads having to be crossed by voters in UPE to get to the Town Hall is greater than that of our suggested designated polling station.

All wards

Comments received:

From: Dennis Scard, Eastbourne Constituency Labour Party Election Agent

Comment: Thank you for sending me the above proposals. I am happy to accept the Returning Officer's recommendations.