

**Agenda Item No:**

**Report No:**

**Report Title: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

**Report To: Council**

**Date: 17 July 2014**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

**Report By: Catherine Knight, Assistant Director of Corporate Services**

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### **Purpose of Report:**

- 1** The Council has a statutory duty to undertake a review of polling districts and polling places. This Report considers the outcome of the consultation process and makes recommendations to Council in order to complete the review for Lewes District.

### **Officer Recommendation(s):**

- 1** To consider the results of the consultation process;
  - 2** To approve the Returning Officer's proposals for Polling Places as set out in paragraph 15 and the Appendix of this Report; and
  - 3** That no changes be made to existing polling district boundaries as shown on the maps accompanying the consultation document.
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### **Reason for Recommendations**

- 1** To enable the Council to complete the polling review in accordance with the statutory requirements.

#### **Information**

- 2** 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 District must be undertaken between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015, and at intervals approximately every 4 years after that. The last full review was carried out in 2010 and approved by Council in February 2011.
- 3** The relevant legislation can be found in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and in Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983. Guidance is also published by the Electoral Commission.

- 4 Although the next full review is not due to be completed until January 2015, it has been decided that, as there will be whole Council elections for the District in May 2015, the review should be carried out earlier. A pattern will then be established for the future of having the full review in the year before the District elections.

### **Definitions**

- 5 A **parliamentary constituency** 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. Only the part of Lewes constituency that lies within Lewes District is being reviewed by this Council. The area of the constituency that lies outside the District will be reviewed separately by Wealden District Council.
- 6 A **polling district** is the area created by the division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be selected which is convenient to the electors.
- 7 A **polling place** is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.
- 8 A **polling station** is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district.

### **The review process**

- 9 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.

Key factors such as location, accessibility, size of venue, parking, availability and suitable facilities must be considered by the Returning Officer as part of the review.

- 10 The consultation period ran from 20 December 2013 to 14 March 2014. Notice of the review was published and displayed in public places across the District. Information about the review was made available on the Council's website.
- 11 Any elector in the whole of the Lewes constituency (whether they live in the District or not) could make representations to the Council and were asked to suggest alternative polling districts/places to those proposed where appropriate and to give reasons for the alternative.
- 12 As well as being available on request, the consultation document was sent to the local Member of Parliament, District and County Councillors, Town & Parish

Councils, local political parties and the Returning Officer for Brighton & Hove City Council polling areas.

**13** It was also sent to persons who have particular expertise in relation to access and disability issues including:

- Lewes Area Access Group.
- Peacehaven Accessibility Group.
- Access for Newhaven and Seaford Committee.

**14** Information gathered following the elections held since 2011 was also considered as part of the review including feedback from voters, polling staff, polling station supervisors and Elections staff.

### **Results of consultation process**

**15** Comments received and the Returning Officer's proposals are as follows:

**15.1 Barcombe and Hamsey Ward** – no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.2 Chailey and Wivelsfield Ward** - no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.3 Ditchling and Westmeston Ward** - no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.4 East Saltdean and Telscombe Cliffs Ward** - no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.5 Kingston Ward** – no changes proposed. The entrance to Iford Village Hall, The Street has two steps. The venue has made a temporary ramp available.

**15.6 Lewes Bridge Ward** - no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.7 Lewes Castle Ward** - no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.8 Lewes Priory Ward** - changes proposed. Ms S Massey (Labour Party) endorsed the need to move the polling place for LEF & LHB polling districts from Cluny Annexe, St Pancras Church, Irelands Lane which has no parking at the venue (aside from two disabled spaces) and very little on street parking. The venue is situated on a narrow through road with one lane access which can become congested at busy times. The Elections office has received dozens of complaints from the public at elections since 2011 concerning the lack of parking, despite arrangements being made with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to display signs directing voters to the County Hall car park. It is proposed that Christ Church/United Reformed Church Hall, Fitzjohn Road (used before as a polling venue) would be a more suitable alternative. Elections staff visited the Christ Church/United Reformed Church Hall which has ample parking and can accommodate all three polling stations in one hall.

**It is recommended that Christ Church/United Reformed Church Hall, Fitzjohn Road be designated as the Polling Place for Polling Districts LEF & LHB.**

Ms S Massey (Labour Party) endorsed the need to move the polling place for LHC polling district from Western Road Primary School, Southover High Street which has a long approach to the polling venue from the entrance/car park, giving poor disabled access. Southover Grange has been considered as an alternative but is no longer available for hire as a polling venue as every room will be occupied by the ESCC Registrar in future. It is proposed that Southdown Building, Sussex Downs College, Mountfield Road would be a more suitable alternative venue. Elections staff visited the Southdown Building which has a short approach, giving improved access to voters with limited mobility, as well as ample parking.

**It is recommended that Southdown Building, Mountfield Road be designated as the Polling Place for Polling District LHC.**

- 15.9 Newhaven Denton and Meeching Ward** - change proposed. Ms S Massey (Labour Party) commented that there was limited parking at Meeching Hall, Fort Road (LID polling district) and suggested that the Hillcrest Centre, Hillcrest Road would be a more suitable alternative venue. Elections staff visited the Hillcrest Centre which has more on site and on street parking than Meeching Hall, as well as better disabled access.

**It is recommended that the Hillcrest Centre, Hillcrest Road be designated as the Polling Place for Polling District LID.**

There is a lip at the door threshold to Denton and Mount Pleasant Social Centre, Denton Road. The venue has fitted a handrail and ramp making the entrance wheelchair accessible.

There is a step at the entrance to East Side Social Centre, Norton Terrace. The venue has made a temporary ramp available.

- 15.10 Newhaven Valley Ward** - no changes proposed. There is a step at the entrance to Lewes Road Social Centre, Lewes Road. The venue has made a temporary ramp available.

- 15.11 Newick Ward** – change proposed. Feedback from previous elections supports the need to change the polling place for LKA polling district from Newick Community Centre, The Green to Newick Village Hall, Western Road. The Elections office has received comments at elections since 2010 concerning parking difficulties at busy times at the polling station and the venue not being an adequate size. The Community Centre can only accommodate one polling station for a large electorate (2032 electors) and has limited on-site parking. The Electoral Commission advises local authorities against allocating a large electorate to a single polling station as it risks queues and delays on polling day. This poses more of a risk to the Council for the 2015

elections when Parliamentary, District, Town & Parish Elections will be held on the same day.

Comments received from Councillor Sheppard and Newick Parish Council indicate that they would not be in favour of moving the polling place to the Village Hall as they feel that the Community Centre is well positioned in the hub of the village, has sufficient parking and is large enough for the size of electorate as there is rarely a queue of people waiting to vote.

Elections staff visited Newick Village Hall which could easily accommodate additional polling stations, has plenty of parking spaces and good disabled access. It is positioned fairly centrally within short walking distance of the centre of the village. Therefore, it is considered to be a more suitable alternative venue to Newick Community Centre.

**It is recommended that Newick Village Hall, Western Road be designated as the Polling Place for Polling District LKA.**

**15.12 Ouse Valley and Ringmer Ward** - no changes proposed. There is a lip at the door threshold to Beddingham Reading Room, Station Road. Hazard tape and additional signage to be provided to assist disabled voters.

**15.13 Peacehaven East Ward** – no changes proposed. The entrance to the Scout Headquarters, Arundel Road has a rough pathway giving poor disabled access. A temporary rollout pathway was considered by the Access Officer but was not a practical solution to access issues at the entrance. Setting up the polling station differently inside the venue will be looked at so disabled voters can be seen at the entrance by polling staff and offered assistance, as well as additional signage to be provided.

**15.14 Peacehaven North Ward** – no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.15 Peacehaven West Ward** – no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.16 Plumpton, Streat, East Chiltington and St John (Without) Ward** – change proposed. Comments were received from East Chiltington Parish Council objecting to the change of venue for polling district LPC from the Jolly Sportsman, Chapel Lane to Plumpton Village Hall, West Gate, as it would prefer an alternative venue. East Chiltington Parish Council suggested Beechwood Hall, Beechwood Lane or East Chiltington Church, Chapel Lane as possible alternatives. As Beechwood Hall (which is the current polling venue for LAC & LPD) would be further away than Plumpton Village Hall for the majority of electors in East Chiltington, it is not considered to be a more conveniently located venue. East Chiltington Church does not currently have the amenities required for use as a polling venue under the review (such as toilet facilities). The Parish Council will inform the Elections office if this changes in future as

it intends to adapt the Church so it can be utilised more as a community venue.

Feedback from previous elections supports the need to change the polling place from the Jolly Sportsman which has poor internal and external lighting at the polling station. One step up at the entrance and an uneven pathway to the polling station prevents disabled access. Although Plumpton Village Hall (which is the current polling venue for LPA & LPB) is just outside the polling district, it is large enough to accommodate another polling station for the extra 346 electors from East Chiltington. Plumpton Village Hall would be more suitable as a polling place as it has better lighting and disabled access.

**It is recommended that Plumpton Village Hall, West Gate be designated as the Polling Place for Polling District LPC.**

Comments received from Streat Parish Meeting asked if the voters from polling district LPB, who currently vote at Plumpton Village Hall, West Gate could vote at Westmeston Parish Hall, Lewes Road as it is more conveniently located for the majority of electors in Streat village. Although Westmeston Parish Hall (which is the current polling venue for polling district LCC) is large enough to accommodate another polling station for the extra 139 electors from Streat, it is located further away for most other electors in Streat parish. Therefore, Plumpton Village Hall is considered to be as conveniently located as the suggested alternative with no valid reason to change it under the review.

**15.17 Seaford Central Ward** - no changes proposed. There is a lip at the door threshold to Claremont Hall, Brooklyn Road. Hazard tape and additional signage to be provided to assist disabled voters.

**15.18 Seaford East/South Ward** – no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.19 Seaford North/South Ward** - no comments received or changes proposed.

**15.20 Seaford West Ward** - no comments received or changes proposed.

**16** Comments were received from Miss S Lade objecting to the use of any school as a polling venue if it requires the school to close for the day. The Returning Officer has the right in law to select schools as polling venues which places a duty on schools, as publically funded buildings, to provide the facilities required if asked to do so. Use of schools are kept under constant review, especially where it leads to closure for the day, should alternative suitable venues become available. However, in some polling districts, they remain the only or most appropriate sites for the purpose of voting.

**17** Comments were received from Ms Z Gibbs (Chair of Access in Seaford and Newhaven Committee) querying why many of the polling venues had no wheelchair accessible toilets for voters. The Access Officer responded that as voting was such a time limited activity, it was not a necessary requirement

under the review for venues hired as polling places to have accessible toilets for voters, although this would be a requirement for any polling staff who needed accessible facilities.

### **Implementation**

- 18** Council is asked to consider the comments received and recommended to approve the Returning Officer's proposals for polling districts and polling places. Any changes will become effective at all elections held after this date.
- 19** 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 the Appendix to this Report with more detailed comments noted in paragraph 15 above.
- 20** Where a change in polling place and polling station is made, residents will be notified of the change by letter well in advance of the next scheduled elections. A reminder of the change will also be included on the poll cards for those areas at the next elections.
- 21** Copies of this Report have been sent to the original consultees. Details of the results of the review will be published on the Council's website.

### **Financial Appraisal**

- 22** There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this Report. Election costs are borne by the body for whom the election is being held.

### **Legal Implications**

- 23** None over and above those set out in the body of this Report.

### **Sustainability Implications**

- 24** I have completed the Sustainability Implications questionnaire and have identified no impacts, either positive or negative, arising from this Report.

### **Equality Screening**

- 25** I have completed the initial Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise and have identified low risk, negative impacts regards access to polling venues with remedial actions to be taken as part of the Review. Therefore, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

### **Risk Management Implications**

- 26** I have completed the Risk Management questionnaire and have identified that the main risk is that the Council would fail in its statutory duty to comply with the requirements of the polling review. We will avoid this by implementing the review in accordance with the legislation and within the required timeframe.

## **Background Papers**

- 27** Electoral Commission Guidance 'Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations': <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/electoral-administrator/polling-place-reviews>
- 28** Consultation document, representations and maps of each ward showing polling district boundaries and situation of polling places:  
<http://www.lewes.gov.uk/council/21707.asp>

## **Appendix**

- 29** Returning Officer's Proposals document.