

Report to: Full Council

Date: 20 November 2023

Title: Polling Districts and Polling Places Review

Report of: Head of Elections and Local Land Charges

Ward(s): All

Purpose of report: To agree arrangements in respect of polling districts and polling places in the District of Lewes.

Officer recommendation(s): (1) That the Acting Returning Officer's proposals as set out in the report be approved.

(2) That the Head of Elections and Local Land Charges, on behalf of the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, be authorised to implement the Council's decisions in respect of the review.

Reasons for recommendations: To fulfil the Council's statutory duty in respect of conducting a Polling District and Polling Place Review.

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1 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 district must be undertaken at intervals of not less than 5 years. A review must also be undertaken when a change in a particular polling place is proposed to be made.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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.

2 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 2 October and 3 November 2023. The timing of the review has been determined by a number of factors. First to complete the review ahead of the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections in May 2024, secondly because of the need for a Parliamentary Election to be held prior to 28 January 2025, and thirdly, to ensure that the review is completed in advance of the publication of the new register on 1 December. Public notice of the review was published and information about the review made available on the Council's website. Any elector in the Lewes County, Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven Borough and new East Grinstead and Uckfield constituencies was entitled to make representations.

2.3 As well as being supplied on request, the consultation document (Appendix 1) was sent to the local Members of Parliament, District and County Councillors in the relevant wards, Town and Parish clerks and local political parties. It was also sent to the Community Service Lead to circulate with local groups 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.

3 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 Acting 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 Acting Returning Officer.

4 The proposals and comments received

4.1 The consultation document set out details of current polling districts and polling places together with details of the proposed changes. Appendix 1 contains the full consultation document and **Appendix 2** 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:

All Wards - To confirm the designation of the whole of each of the wards as the polling place. If a polling station becomes unavailable at any time, we can conduct an internal review to locate the most suitable venue to serve the voters in the area and where there is only one choice, this mitigates the need to conduct a full public consultation.

Recommendation: That the Returning Officer's proposal be approved.

Chailey, Barcombe and Hamsey Ward- No proposals to change any of the stations in this Ward

Ditchling and Westmeston Ward- No proposals to change any of the stations in this Ward.

Comment: The proposed continued use of Westmeston Parish Hall as the polling station for the parish is welcomed. The hall is well located and accessible for residents, with good facilities including car parking, level access and toilets.

East Saltdean and Telscombe Cliffs Ward – Since the original consultation document we are now proposing to merge STB and STC which are Telscombe Cliffs Polling Districts to become one polling district known as STB to vote at Telesombe Town Council, Civic Centre. It makes sense to merge them together, making savings on venue costs, equipment and staffing.

Comment: There were some comments received from Councillors who had misunderstood the proposal and once explained that it only affected Telscombe Cliffs, were satisfied.

Kingston Ward - No proposals to change any of the stations in this ward.

Lewes Bridge Ward – No proposals to change any of the stations in this ward.

Lewes Castle Ward- No proposals to change any of the stations in this ward.

Lewes Priory Ward - No proposals to change any of the stations in this ward.

Newhaven North Ward - No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Newhaven South Ward – No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Comment: Councillor MacCleary suggested that other polling venues be identified; an additional polling station for Newhaven, specifically the large NSC polling district.

To note: Of the options suggested only the Newhaven Football club is potentially viable, however on visiting the site, it is clear that access works are still required to enable this to be considered. We will continue to keep this under review, with possibility of adding this venue in the future, should the standards improve.

Newick Ward - No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Comment: The proposal to continue to use Newick Village Hall as the Polling station is sensible as it is the most obvious community space, easily accessible with good disabled access and parking.

Ouse Valley and Ringmer Ward - No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Recommendation: To change the name of Beddingham Reading Room to be known as **Reading Room**.

Comment: Can I suggest that for clarity we call the Glynde venue "[Glynde and Beddingham reading room](#)" as it is increasingly known or failing that 'the reading room') so people don't go to Beddingham looking for it.

Peacehaven East Ward - No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Since publication of the consultation document we have been made aware that the Scout Hut is designated for renovation but with no current clear timescales. We do note that currently this venue's access does not meet the disability access as it is a shingle drive and path. However, it does appear to meet the local electorate needs, with regards to its convenient location.

Recommendation: We have noted the comments received and we recommend that we continue to use this venue until it is closed for the renovation works. We will have to place this electorate at the Pavilion in the interim following closure of the Scout Hut. Once renovations are completed and providing the renovations to the Scout Hut make accessibility improvements we will then return to using it.

Comment: There are two key polling stations for the area, neither are ideal. However, not using them would have a considerable impact on people's ability to vote.

The Scout Hut in East Peacehaven – whilst not ideal, this is a very big and spread outward and it is a very long from one end to the other.

The Returning Officer for Brighton and Hove has also expressed their concerns of the continued use of the Scout Hut due to its poor accessibility and state that decision to continue to use the venue is the decision of the Lewes Council and against their advice.

Peacehaven North Ward: Since the commencement of the consultation, we have been made aware that the planned works at the Meridian Centre may impact the Town Council office space which may result in their use of the Anzac Room. Obviously, the knock-on effect is that it would reduce the available rooms for us to use. We have been in talks with the Town Council to have a back up plan. We are proposing the following:-

Recommendations: To merge PNA and PNB polling districts together to become one known as PNA. PNA electorate currently vote at The Annexe, Meridian CP School, but could relocate to one of two smaller adequate rooms known as the Copper Room and Charles Neville Room. To merge PNC and PND polling districts together to become one known as PNB. They both use the same polling station Annexe Room at Meridian CP School. Making saving on equipment and staffing costs.

Peacehaven West Ward: Since the commencement of the consultation, we have been made aware that the planned works at the Meridian Centre may impact the Town Council office space which may result in their use of the Anzac Room.

Recommendations: We have found a new venue known as the Immaculate Conception of our lady, Horsham Avenue located within PWA. To Merge PWA and PWD polling districts to one known as PWA at this new venue. Making savings on equipment and staffing costs.

We have been made aware by the MP for Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven Borough Constituency that The Joff, Peacehaven Youth Centre is also closing for renovations. This is used to serve the voters of PWC. We have therefore had to identify another venue. We are communicating with a possible venue known as Kempton House, Cavell Avenue and are hopeful that this will become the new polling station but is yet to be confirmed. Otherwise we will arrange to work with the Meridian centre, Peacehaven to see if we can make any of the rooms work to include a station for PWC.

Plumpton, Streat, East Chiltington and St John (Without) Ward – No proposals to change any of stations in the ward.

Seaford Central Ward: Proposal for SCA to move to the Life Church, Steyne Road, Seaford . This venue is within the polling district of SCA and better serves the electorate. SCA is also Seaford Central Ward at District Level but Seaford Esplanade at Town level at combined District and Town elections having two stations at St Thomas More is more complex.

SCC will remain at the Church of St Thomas More.

Seaford East Ward – No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Seaford North Ward – No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Seaford South Ward – No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Seaford West Ward – No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

Wivelsfield Ward – No proposals to change any of the stations in the ward.

5 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 Implementation

6.1 The chosen venues will be used at all future elections. No re-drawing of polling district boundaries will be required.

6.2 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 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 Financial appraisal

- 8.1 Police and Crime Commissioner elections and UK referendums are funded by the government. East Sussex County Council provide funding for county elections, Town and Parish elections are funded by each Town or Parish Council. The District elections are funded by the District Council. Where there are combined elections, the costs are split across the different bodies. We have a duty to provide accessible and convenient Polling Stations but will always keep the financial costs of Rent/Hire, Heating and lighting costs under review.

Approved by Steven Houchin 09.11.2023

9 Legal implications

(Legal implications are mandatory and for completion by a qualified council lawyer only. Please send your draft report to practicemanager@lewes.gov.uk and allow 5 working days for the designated lawyer to give full consideration to the report in advance of the deadline for submission to Democratic Services. Thank you.)

- 9.1 The content and recommendations of this report complies with the legislation detailed in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 above.

Lawyer consulted on: : 9th November 2023 12535-EBC-KS

10 Risk management implications

- 10.1 We conduct this review to ensure that our polling places are suitable venues and where we are aware that a venue will no longer be available carry out visits to find new suitable venues. The risk of not accepting the recommendations, in particular, where we are aware that we will no longer be able use a current venue's, is that it will prevent electors from voting and therefore disenfranchise voters.

11 Equality analysis

- 11.1 In carrying out the review we have sought 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 had regard to the accessibility needs of disabled people.

We had to make some changes to Peacehaven after the consultation document was published. We ensured that we consulted with the local councillors on the new recommendations.

Where we have received other responses that needed a response to provide more detail we have replied.

12 Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Review of Lewes Polling Districts and Polling Places Consultation
- Appendix 2 – Consultation responses

13 Background papers

- Equalities assessment.