

Review of Polling Arrangements

Date of Meeting: 21 November 2019

Portfolio Holder: Cllr S Flower, Leader/Governance, Performance & Communications

Local Member(s): All Dorset Councillors

Director: Jonathan Mair, Corporate Director, Legal & Democratic

Executive Summary: To consider responses to the consultation on the statutory review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations within Dorset and to approve the proposed arrangements. The Council has a duty to carry out a review of polling arrangements within Dorset by 31 January 2020 in accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. It should be noted that although the consultation has been completed it has not been possible to implement all the findings prior to the calling of the Parliamentary Election.

Equalities Impact Assessment:

Given the limited availability in some areas of Dorset of suitable premises for polling stations, the proposals will provide electors with, so far as practicable, fully accessible and convenient places for voting.

Budget:

Not applicable – possible savings due to merging of some stations

Risk Assessment:

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk: LOW

Climate implications:

Where possible polling stations have been allocated centrally to the residential areas to keep travel to a minimum.

Other Implications:

None

Recommendation:

1. That having undertaken the statutory review, amendments are made to DRE1, DRE3, FEN2, FEN3, STA4 and STA5 polling districts as well as a revision of those polling districts in Gillingham GIL5, GIL6 and GIL7.
2. That, having undertaken the statutory review, the polling places and stations remain as listed in Appendix 1 apart from those where further investigation is required with regard to possible change of premises or location as noted in Category 2 of the report. This would be completed with regard to submissions received.
3. That the Returning Officer reserves the right to change or alter polling stations at short notice.

Reason for Recommendation: To enable the Returning Officer to fulfil the statutory responsibility to complete the review, and ensure polling districts, polling places and polling stations used are accessible, practicable and appropriate.

Appendices: Consultation Document

Background Papers: Electoral Commission Guidance on Polling District Reviews

Officer Contact:

Name: Jacqui Andrews

Tel: 01258 484325

Email: jacqui.andrews@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the Council has a duty to carry out a review of polling arrangements within Dorset by 31 January 2020.
- 1.2. In order to comply with this, representations or comments on the Council's proposals were invited from all Councillors, Parish Councils, local political parties and organisations with particular expertise in relation to access to premises for people with different forms of disability, as well as local electors. The proposals were also sent to the Members of Parliament and Area Returning Officers for all constituencies within Dorset. The consultation document, setting out the proposals, is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.3. The principles underlying the Council's proposals for polling arrangements were:
 - to retain the current arrangements for coterminous polling places and polling districts as far as possible, to minimise disruption to voters
 - to try and identify new polling stations in areas where the existing provision is inadequate

- to ensure, as far as practicable, that polling stations are accessible to people with disabilities
- to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

2. Findings

2.1. During the 2 periods of review and consultation a total of 40 submissions were received. A copy of the consultation document showing comments and responses can be found at Appendix 1.

2.2. Following the consultation proposed changes can be placed into 2 categories which have been summarised below. The first category is in regard to either the merging of polling districts or polling stations into one. When reducing previous double stations to a single station, checks have been undertaken to ensure that the number of electors appointed to a polling station is within the limit set by the Electoral Commission.

2.3. The second category concerns the locations of polling stations or rooms used for polling stations.

2.4. Category 1 - Merger of polling stations or polling districts into one in the following areas:

- FEN2 and FEN3 – merge polling districts and location as figures within EC guidelines as single station.
- LYM1 – rationalise to single polling station
- LYM4 – rationalise to single polling station
- SEP3 – rationalise to single polling station
- STA4 and STA5 - merge polling districts and location as figures within EC guidelines as single station.
- SWA1 – rationalise to single polling station
- SWA2 – rationalise to single polling station
- SWA3 – rationalise to single polling station
- SWA4 – rationalise to single polling station
- WAH5 – rationalise to single polling station
- WIM1 and WIM3 – rationalise to single polling station. Will only be split if necessary for parish elections

2.5 Category 2 - Other Issues concerning venue for polling stations:

- BLN3 – different room to be used at Blandford Community Centre if available.
- CHK2 – consider use of Parish Pavilion when refurbishment completed.
- CHM3 – Consider use of Community Hall upon building completion
- COM3 – improve lighting at Portable Station
- DRE1 – consider use of alternative locations and moving of approximately 225 electors from DRE3
- DRP1 – concerns regarding unadopted road and lack of lighting after dark

- GIL5, GIL6 and GIL7 – look into reviewing the number and allocation of electors within the polling districts and revising to possibly 2 stations.
- ROD3 – Scout Hall used for former St Nicholas Church. Cllr Wheller raised concerns about the Scout Hall in both initial and final consultation. However, it should be noted that no concerns were residents and turnout was higher.
- WPU13 – change to D'Urberville Centre subject to availability
- WST6 – move to Ebenezer Evangelical Church

It should be noted that due to the unscheduled Parliamentary Election on 12 December many of these issues have not been able to be rectified for these elections due to time constraints. There may also be polling stations that due to the usual building being unavailable at such short notice alternative locations have been implemented for the 12 December elections.