

REPORT TITLE: PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY POLLING
ARRANGEMENTS

6 DECEMBER 2023

REPORT OF ACTING RETURNING OFFICER

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

All local authorities are required to review their polling districts, polling places, and polling stations for Parliamentary Constituencies every five years. The timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places is set by legislation. Compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months with the next scheduled review period to commence on 1 October 2023 and be completed by 31 January 2025.

As we are aware that there must be a UK Parliamentary General Election called before January 2025 the option to commence our review at the earliest date was chosen to ensure we have concluded the review and have a full set of polling places confirmed prior to the announcement of the next general election.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the following changes to polling districts are agreed:
 - Newlands: To combine WR2 and XW2 creating XW3.
 - Headbourne Worthy: To split WW to create WW1 and WW2 allowing a separate polling district for Barton Farm
 - Whiteley: To split YE into YE1 and YE2 allowing a more manageable polling station register.

2. That the following permanent changes to polling places are agreed:
- WD: Alresford & Itchen Valley - From the Ship Inn to Bishops Sutton Village Hall
 - WR2 & XW2 Denmead – From Berewood School to Newlands Community Hall
 - XV2: The Worthys - From St Andrews Garrison Church to St Andrews Community Centre
 - XZ: Upper Meon Valley – From Tichborne Arms to Cheriton Village Hall
 - YG & YG1: St Barnabas – confirm Winchester Racquets and Fitness
 - YV: St Luke – recognise the name change from Level 10 Church to New Life Church
 - XF: St Barnabas – From Wesley Methodist Church to Weeke Community Centre

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

Democratically elected representatives are central to the decision-making framework of the council. The election of councillors directly supports the Your Council Your Voice priority.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Although there is an increase of one polling station, there are no significant financial implications from the change in polling places.

The preference is that polling stations are in established buildings, due to the familiarity of location and provision of facilities for voters and staff. There is considerable additional workload and cost – potentially in the region of £4,000 - in sourcing temporary polling stations, including the provision of portacabins and mobile facilities.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the council to keep under review polling districts and polling places. Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission: Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations states that if a polling station becomes unavailable then the Returning Officer should consider whether another polling station is available within that area and such action does not require a formal review.

The council's constitution, Part 3.4 paragraph 5(2) appoints the Chief Executive as the Council's Returning Officer, responsible for the functions, staff and budget for elections and registration, and as such may confirm the polling places for the Winchester district. Any proposals for permanent changes are considered by the Licensing and Regulation Committee.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

The council's electoral services team routinely manages this work. The establishment of polling stations is well rehearsed, and the preference is to use permanent buildings. If polling stations are not in established buildings, there is considerable additional workload in sourcing temporary polling stations, including the provision of portacabins.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

The preference is that the council does not use education sites or sheltered home sites for polling stations. However, the use of both is permitted but our local approach is to avoid this wherever possible. There are three polling stations that utilise the common rooms at our sheltered housing communities at Greens Close, Bishops Waltham, King Harold Court, Stanmore and Makins Court, Alresford.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

The review commenced on Monday 2 October 2023 and ran until 5pm on Monday 13 November 2023. The review was publicised on our website, and via our social media feeds. Letters were sent with information on the review and how to comment to all those listed in Appendix A. There were 37 responses received to the consultation.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

We are required to provide a polling place within the ward for the purposes of elections and ideally aim to situate the polling place where it is easy to travel to. Polling places can be busy throughout the day and especially after working hours so sufficient parking is a consideration. Therefore, polling places in 'walking distance' or on any public transport routes are to be welcomed but can be difficult to find, not only in the rural area of the district.

8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

Access to a polling station is a key consideration and as part of this review detailed inspections have been undertaken considering access for those who may fall within s149 of the Equality Act 2010 such as the disabled or the elderly.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

None associated with the polling places although all personal data relating to electors is held on secure servers or under the control of the Presiding Officer at the polling station.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

It is essential that a range of polling places are established for the purposes of an election. Failure to provide sufficient polling places in the appropriate electoral location would constitute a breach of election requirements.

A considerable number of staff are required to work during the election period and recruitment has been slower since the COVID pandemic. Therefore, requests for additional polling stations over the number usually provided are difficult to fulfil.

If staffing numbers are not sufficient at any time it may be necessary to merge registers, this action would be taken by the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) if required.

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 11.1 This report sets out the proposed changes to polling districts and polling places for the Winchester district. Any change in polling place must be carefully and regularly communicated in order that the electorate are clear where and how they may cast their vote.
- 11.2 Following review of the existing arrangements, the ARO considered whether any changes should be made to the polling districts, polling places or polling stations. These were published on the council's website and comments welcomed (App B). A total of 38 responses were received coming from political parties, local ward councillors, parish councils and local residents. Several comments from Parish councils were in support of the venues already used within their areas which they felt served the needs of their communities well.
- 11.3 Although a review for Parliamentary Constituency purposes, comments received were largely concerned with local arrangements. It is important to note that voters may only vote in their ward unless exceptional circumstances apply.

12 CHANGES TO POLLING DISTRICTS

Three changes to polling districts are proposed.

12.1 **WR2 and XW2: Newlands**

Proposal: to merge the two polling districts to create XW3 therefore having just one register in the polling place

Reason: Following the boundary review which created Newlands Parish Council there was a small area designated a separate polling district.

There is a proposal to change the polling arrangements.

12.2 **WW: Headbourne Worthy**

Proposal: to split this polling district into two areas WW1 and WW2 which would separate the Headbourne Worthy and Barton Farm areas into separate polling districts

Reason: There were considerable comments requesting a separate polling place for Kings Barton (see appendix 4), but this has not been possible to provide. However, the community at Kings Barton will grow, and community facilities will be provided therefore opportunity has been taken to split the polling district in readiness for when a more local polling place on Kings Barton becomes available.

Polling district WW consists of the settlements of Headbourne Worthy and Kings Barton. Kings Barton is a relatively new settlement with 505 properties built under the current phase and a further 231 under construction for the next phase.

Current Arrangements

A double polling station is provided at Jubilee Hall, London Road, Kings Worthy – under 2 miles from Kings Barton (google maps walking route).

1. Walking to the polling station is not wholly practicable due to walking on the road.
2. 6 minutes by car – parking is available at Jubilee Hall.

(A map of the ward and polling station is shown at appendix E)

Electoral Statistics

The Headbourne Worthy parish currently consists of 1117 electors.

1. 432 in Kings Barton (121 vote by post)
2. 685 in Headbourne Worthy (149 vote by post)

Election Year	Electorate WW	Turnout WW	The Worthys ward average turnout	Average station turnout (district)
2023	830	29.09%	34.72%	35.61%
2022	732	37.57%	42.44%	39.16%
2021	641	35.41%	42.51%	39.44%
2019	463	45.14%	41.71%	39.08%

The table indicates the increasing number of electorate in polling district WW, and a consistent- but slightly lower – polling district turnout compared to the Worthys ward. This tracks the average station turnout for the district.

Postal vote turnout has remained consistently over 70% in the 5 years shown.

Consultation responses

16 comments have been received in respect of polling district WW.

- 12 from residents

- 1 from a parish councillor
- 1 from Kings Barton Residents Association
- 1 from Headbourne Worthy Parish Council
- 1 from a political party

Fifteen request provision of a polling station in Kings Barton, one consultation response was in support of the existing arrangements.

Consideration of alternative options

A suggestion was made regarding the CALA Homes sales office however this is a commercial sales office in use daily. A visit was made to the office and there is no private area that could be used as a polling place.

Although permitted to do so, since the pandemic, the council has actively moved out of polling stations located in care homes and schools. Use of care homes is disruptive to residents and use of schools is disruptive to working parents and to the education of children. When used, the use of care homes and schools requires careful management of safeguarding issues.

There is no available community facility on Kings Barton to provide a polling station and the 2019 review indicated that when it was available, a polling station would be provided at that location if agreed with the hall committee.

Where there is no suitable place for a polling station, the ARO can provide a portacabin and a generator, but only in locations where there are toilets for polling staff. In previous years there has been no suitable place to locate a portacabin without supplying facilities for polling staff. Provision of a portacabin alone is c £4,000.

2018 Review

There were no comments received regarding polling district WW in the 2018/19 review of polling districts.

Electoral Registration Officer review of comments

Use of school building

Although the use of school buildings is permitted under the regulations since the pandemic, the City Council has actively moved away from the use of educational establishments. The view of the ERO is that if alternative accommodation is available, it is better to use that, than disrupt a day's schooling. In this case the Head at Barton Farm Academy School is not able to release the school premises.

Use of a portacabin

This was raised in 2018 and has been raised again. Although it may be possible to site a portacabin on the development, provision of a portacabin, associated heating and lighting is approximately £4,000. There are additional costs for the generator and fuel, in the absence of toilet facilities for the polling staff we would also need to hire at an additional cost. This would be for the use of 311 voters and is not seen as a value for money solution.

Use of CALA Homes sales office

This site was visited and is not a suitable location for a polling place as the office would still be in use and no suitable private area for polling could be provided.

There is no change to the polling arrangements.

13.3 **YE: Whiteley**

Proposal: to split this polling district into two areas YE1 and YE2 and create separate polling districts

Reason: There were comments requesting a separate polling place for Whiteley (see appendix D) and although suggested options were reviewed, this has not been possible to provide. However, the community at Whiteley will continue to grow, and opportunity has been taken to split the registers in readiness for when a more local polling place becomes available.

There is no change to the polling arrangements.

13 PROPOSED PERMANENT CHANGES TO POLLING PLACES

13.1 **WD: Alresford & Itchen Valley ward**

From The Ship Inn to Bishops Sutton Village Hall

Reason: The Ship Inn is no longer available

Consultation Comments – none

Proposed decision **proceed** to permanent change of polling place.

13.2 **WR2: Denmead**

From Berewood School to Newlands Community Hall

Reason: We have taken this opportunity to combine WR2 and XW2

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision **proceed** to permanent change of polling place.

13.3 **XW2: Denmead**

From Berewood School to Newlands Community Hall

Reason: We have taken this opportunity to combine XW2 and WR2

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision **proceed** to permanent change of polling place.

13.4 **XV2: The Worthys**

From St Andrews Garrison Church to St Andrews Community Centre

Reason: The community centre is a more versatile space and more suited the needs of a polling station

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision **proceed** to permanent change of polling place.

13.5 **XZ: Upper Meon Valley**

From Tichborne Arms to Cheriton Village Hall

Reason: The Tichborne Arms are unable to accommodate a polling place except in an outside gazebo which is not suitable for our purposes.

Consultation comments – an alternative polling place proposed was Makins Court however this is not suitable as it is located in Alresford and Itchen Valley ward. Alresford Golf Club was also suggested however they have no private area to offer as the clubhouse would still be open to members. St Andrews church was a further suggestion however the church cannot offer facilities for polling staff such as restrooms.

Proposed decision **proceed** to permanent change of polling place.

13.6 **YG & YG1: St Barnabas**

From Winchester Racquets & Fitness (temporary change in 2021) to Winchester Racquets & Fitness

Reason: Our temporary move in 2021 was due to the size limitations at Eastacre. The temporary location has been satisfactory, and it is proposed to make this a permanent location.

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision **proceed** to permanent change of polling place.

13.7 **YV: St Luke**

From Level 10 Church to New Life Church (name change of church only)

Consultation comments – none

Proposed decision **proceed** to permanent change of name of polling place.

13.8 **XF: St Barnabas**

From Wesley Methodist Church to Weeke Community Centre

Reason: The proposed new location will be more convenient to voters and will provide better coverage of the ward. Avoiding two polling stations located on Fromond Road will ensure there is no confusion over which polling place to attend.

Consultation comments – there was a suggestion to move to Harestock Primary School, but our preference is not to use schools where possible due to disruption to education and impact on working parents. However, Weeke Community Centre is in similar location and have confirmed they are available for hire.

Proposed decision **proceed** to permanent change of polling place.

14 CONSIDERATION OF CHANGES – NOT PROPOSED FOR RECOMMENDATION

14.1 **YE: Whiteley & Shedfield**

Meadowside Leisure Centre

Reason: It was proposed that due to the increased number of electorate in Whiteley that a new polling station be established to better serve the geography. However, this location provides the space required for the polling station.

Consultation comments – all suggestions for locations were reviewed and discussed with the landowner including Cornerstone Primary School and Hope Church (within school grounds), A location at Zoe Clark Academy would require portacabins with very little parking provision with no wheelchair access.

Proposed decision to retain current polling place but create new polling district in readiness for a new polling place when available.

14.2 **YJ, YJ1, &YK: St Bartholomew**

Winchester Hotel

Consultation comments – a political party commented on the ongoing availability of the venue however made no suggestions re alternative location.

Proposed decision retain current polling place.

14.3 YM: St Bartholomew

Winnal Community Centre

Consultation comments – a political party commented however made no suggestions re alternative location.

Proposed decision retain current polling place.

14.4 YQ1, & YQ2: St Luke

St Lukes Church

Consultation comments – a political party commented on the future of the church however made no suggestions re alternative location.

Proposed decision retain current polling place.

14.5 WF: Bishops Waltham

Greens Close

Consultation comments – one elector suggested the location be changed to Priory Park due to it being more convenient to park, however this suggested location is some distance to walk, and it is all uphill. No other comments have been received regarding this long-established polling place.

Proposed decision retain current polling place.

14.6 XE: The Worthys

St Marys Church to remain at St Marys Church

Consultation comments – a political party suggested the polling district be split so that the small number of Worthy Down camp residents could vote at XV2 St Andrews Community Centre, however several of these electors have permanent absent votes.

Proposed decision **proceed** to retain current polling place.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: -

Previous Committee Reports: -

LR537 – Licensing and Regulation Committee 23 February 2021

LR516 – Licensing and Regulation Committee 29 January 2019

Other Background Documents: -

NONE

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – List of consultees

Appendix B – Current Polling Places Assessment Grid

Appendix C – Proposed Polling Places Assessment Grid

Appendix D - Consultation responses on Polling Districts, and Polling Places for 2023/24

Appendix E – Ward map of The Worthys

APPENDIX A**List of consultees:**

All elected members Winchester City Council
Winchester and Meon Valley current MP's (Steve Brine and Flick Drummond)
Chief Executive Hampshire County Council
ARO Fareham Borough Council
All Parish Councils within the Winchester District
All known political party groups within the existing and proposed parliamentary constituencies.
MIND
Mencap
Trinity
Winchester GOLD
University of Winchester
University of Southampton
Community First
Winchester Business Improvement District (BID)
Citizens Advice Bureau – Winchester District
Age Concern
National Autistic Society South Hampshire
Dementia Friendly Winchester / Hampshire
Deaf Action South East
Winchester University Students Union
Winchester Samaritans
Winchester Basics Bank
Winchester Rotary
Winchester Good Neighbours
Winchester Street Pastors
Choices Advocacy
The Carroll Centre

A hard copy of the review letter and relevant maps was on deposit in the City Offices
A hard copy was also placed in the members rooms in the Guildhall.