

WIRRAL COUNCIL

LICENSING, HEALTH AND SAFETY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

23 JANUARY 2012

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR & ASSET MANAGEMENT

POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES UPDATE

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the results of the further investigations carried out in relation to alternative polling places/stations for Polling Districts WE and TC as requested by the Committee at its last meeting held on 10 November 2011.
- 1.2 The outcome/details of these further investigations are set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 That the Committee determines which premises should be designated as the polling stations for polling districts TC and WE (having regard to Appendix 1).

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 ('the Act') introduced a duty on authorities to review polling districts and stations on a four yearly basis. The first review of polling districts and stations was undertaken in 2007.
- 3.2 The results of the second review, undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Act, were reported to this Committee on the 10th November 2011.
- 3.3 The Committee at its previous meeting however requested that further investigations be carried out in Polling Districts WE and TC to determine other premises that could be suitable polling places/stations; and that the outcome of those investigations be reported to the next Licensing, Health and Safety and General Purposes Committee.
- 3.4 With regards Polling District TC, the current polling place/station is the Sacred Heart RC Primary School, situated at Danger Lane. At the Committee meeting on 10 November, an Elected Member requested that in order to avoid disruption to the school, the Yew Tree Online Centre on Yew Tree Road should instead be designated as the polling place/station. The Committee resolved: (1) That the Sacred Heart RC Primary School, Danger Lane, continue to be used as the polling place for Polling District TC; and (2) That further enquiries be made regarding the viability of the Yew Tree Online Centre and the outcome of those enquiries be reported to a future meeting of this Committee.
- 3.5 With regards Polling District WE, the previous polling place for this Polling District was the YMCA, Manor Road, which from 30th September 2011 was no longer available for use. During the course of the Polling Place/Station Review, no other suitable building was identified for use as a Polling Place/Station save for the Liscard Primary School. The Committee resolved: 1) that the polling place for Polling District WE be changed to Liscard Primary School and 2) that an

alternative Polling Place and Station for Polling District WE be considered and the outcome be reported back to a future meeting of this Committee.

- 3.6 The Council's Electoral Services Team has investigated alternative Polling Places/Stations for Polling Districts TC and WE as required by the Committee. The details of the outcome of that investigation are set out at Appendix 1.

4.0 STAFFING AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no staffing implications arising out of this report. There are financial implications for polling districts TC and WE.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 It is very important indeed that all polling stations meet equality requirements particularly in relation to appropriate access for those with mobility difficulties.

6.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no such implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no such implications arising directly from this report.

8.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no such implications arising directly from this report.

9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no such implications arising directly from this report.

10.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no such implications arising directly from this report.

11.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 This report affects Leasowe & Moreton East, Liscard and New Brighton Wards

12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 The agenda and minutes of Licensing, Health and Safety and General Purposes Committee of the 10th November 2011

RECENT HISTORY

Council Meeting	Date
Licensing, Health and Safety and General Purposes Committee	10th November 2011

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

1. **Leasowe and Moreton East Ward**

Polling District TC

The current polling place is Sacred Heart RC Primary School, Danger Lane. A council member requested that in order to avoid disruption to the school, the Yew Tree Online Centre be used as an alternative venue.

The Yew Tree Online Centre was visited in 2004 and found to be unsuitable. The room available included a kitchen area at one end resulting in a shortage of space to accommodate the election equipment and limiting disabled access. Parking was considered to be very limited.

The centre has been re-visited and found to have undergone a number of changes. The IT equipment has now been removed which frees up the room where these were situated. The room now offers more reasonable facilities for both electors and election staff and would be accessible to all. The room containing the kitchen area would be made available to election staff.

There would be hire costs but the manager was unable to determine what they would be. No such costs would arise if the Sacred Heart RC Primary School is used.

Access from the street is level and doors are wide enough for wheelchair users to get through. Including motorised wheelchairs.

Upon entering the building, there is a foyer which provides disabled toilets and can accommodate tellers.

The road on which the centre is located is quite narrow so parking is limited, however, there is a small car park.

The Yew Tree Online Centre is considered a suitable venue providing there is no requirement to have two polling stations.

2. **Liscard Ward**

Polling District WE

i. Between2Worlds, Guildford Street – (former mission building)

This building is a former mission and is situated within polling district WE. It is currently let by a local businessman to a group of individuals who run an independent spiritual and holistic centre called "Between 2 Worlds". They have been in occupation since early September 2011.

The premises were inspected on Wednesday 2nd November 2011 and found to be renovated to a high standard, having formerly been a Sure Start venue.

The premises will be suitable for use as a polling station and will provide cover for the tellers in the vestibule and more than adequate accommodation for four staff in the lounge/coffee bar area that leads from the vestibule. There was no overtly 'religious' iconography displayed at the time of the electoral inspection.

There is adequate off street parking with a dropped kerb so wheelchair access will be improved.

The premises are leased to Mr and Mrs Boyd early September this year. The tenants are keen for the premises to be used as a polling place/station as it will boost their income. The cost of hire will be in the region of £500 (although this may be negotiable).

Further enquiries have been made with regard to the tenants reliability following concerns raised by a Ward member with regards to whether the premises provided a sufficiently reliable alternative given that the building has been closed for considerable periods of time and the nature of the business has also changed a number of times. It was further alleged that the current tenants are also known supporters of a political party and it was suggested that the offer was instigated by the party rather than the tenants.

The tenants have confirmed that they have only used the premises as a church since September onwards. They are open for business 6 days a week but do not keep the hours 9 till 5. They open on a flexible basis when their clients/congregation are able to attend i.e. weekends and evenings as well as some daytime sessions.

They are interested in securing a source of income and fully understand the requirements for the opening of the building for polling purposes and are willing to honour those obligations. They are no different to any other private hall owner who agrees that we can use premises.

At the time of inspection, there was no sign of any political activity or indeed any political sign or emblem on display. The tenants fully understood that no activity could take place that would prejudice or otherwise undermine polling.

The committee should note that Mrs Boyd was quite nonplussed at the suggestion of political association. After an initial hesitation resulting from the belief that it was, "none of the council's business" she did confirm that none of the guarantors had any personal contact with the council or councillors. The only person they knew at the council was one particular officer and their relationship was not because of the council but because of Between2Worlds. Mrs Boyd further commented that any councillors or officers were at liberty to use their services and that unless they identified themselves she would not be aware of it.

ii. Other locations within Liscard Ward that have been looked at:

(a) District WE: YMCA car park

A temporary polling station in the car park of the YMCA could be problematic. There is space for a mobile unit but it would take a significant part of the car park. If there is another user in the building they may well not be willing to lose that amount of parking. Additionally the mobile unit would require an electricity connection and it is not known if there is the ability to provide one in the area of the car park. The YMCA has been mothballed and the services have been disconnected, it will therefore be much harder and more expensive to provide power to the mobile unit. Given the uncertainties surrounding the former YMCA it is felt that this is not a suitable venue for a polling station and should not be pursued as a solution.

(b) District WD: Grosvenor Ball Room

Is an existing polling station and could house two polling stations but we consider the distance electors would have to travel to be unreasonable.

(c) District WD: Christ Church in Serpentine Road

Has a hall but as in (b) above, we consider the distance electors would have to travel to be unreasonable.

(d) Car parks at both the British Legion and two public houses are not sufficiently large enough to site a portable polling station. Furthermore, the British Legion and one of the public houses are outside Polling District WE.