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LICENSING, HEALTH AND SAFETY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 20 November 2019

Present:

P Stuart (Chair)

Councillors

M Collins
C Cooke
A Corkhill
A Hodson

D Mitchell
T Norbury
L Rowlands

18 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non pecuniary interests in connection with any application on the agenda and state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

19 REFORM OF THE ANNUAL CANVASS

The Director of Governance and Assurance reported upon planned reforms to improve the annual canvass of electors undertaken each year by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) across Great Britain.

The Electoral Services Manager advised Members that Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain were required to conduct an annual canvass of all residential properties in the area for which they have responsibility in order to identify everyone who should be on the electoral register.

Members of the Committee were informed that alternative models for conducting the annual canvass had been piloted and after evaluation, the Cabinet Office intended to amend the legislation that governs the annual canvass with the aim for this reform to start in 2020. The Cabinet Office Statement of Policy provided a full overview of the Canvass Reform and was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

On a motion by Councillor D Mitchell and seconded by Councillor A Hodson it was -

Resolved – That the report be noted.

20 CONCLUSION OF STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES 2019

The Director of Governance and Assurance submitted a report requesting Members of the Committee to consider the outcome of the consultation pursuant to the statutory review of polling districts and polling places 2019.

The Electoral Services Manager informed Members that the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 determined that there must be a review of all polling districts and polling places every five years and the compulsory period determined that the next full review must be completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. It was reported that the Council's Electoral Services evaluated the effectiveness and suitability of polling places and stations following each election and any issues or changes required would be reported to this Committee. The review formally commenced on 19 August 2019 with the consultation period ending on 18 October 2019.

Members were advised that during the consultation period, representations had been received from electors and Ward Councillors. The representations were received in the form of eleven emails and one letter from the public, and six emails from Ward Councillors. Five responses received had commented they were satisfied with the current arrangements; seven emails and one letter related to requests for changes to polling places; two emails related to requests for changes in polling district boundaries and three emails commented on the general dissatisfaction with using schools as polling places. Three emails had been received that related to areas not considered to be part of the review. One email was a general offer to use their Church hall and two emails commented on Ward boundaries.

The Council's (Acting) Returning Officer submitted comments on 2 September 2019, as required by legislation, on both existing and proposed polling stations and with the exception of five polling districts, the comments stated that the current arrangements offered the most reasonable facilities for voting. Five polling districts had been commented on in respect of proposed changes to polling district boundaries and polling places.

The outcome of the review had been that the public and elected representatives were largely satisfied with the current arrangements, therefore it was recommended that the majority of polling districts and polling places should remain unchanged. In response to requests to changes to some polling district boundaries and polling places it had been necessary to consider alternative options.

Members were informed that currently schools were used for forty five of the one hundred and three designated polling places which equated to less than half and that the decision to close the school was taken by the headteacher. Where possible, the (Acting) Returning Officer and the school would make such arrangements for the school to remain open, however, pupil safety must always be considered as paramount and if the school decides to close on the day of the poll and it is not reasonably practicable to arrange an alternative day to try and make up the lost education, the school will be treated as if it had met the requisite 190 days for the purposes of the school year regulations.

An email had been received from an elector who had requested that the current polling place for polling district GC (Bebington Ward), St Andrews C of E Primary School [Townfield Lane] be stopped and suggested using Mayer Hall or Civic Centre in Bebington instead. The suggestions had been investigated by Electoral Services but subsequently discounted on the basis that the Civic Centre was located in a different polling district and Mayer Hall was located at the opposite end of the polling district (as shown on the map in Appendix 1 to the report) and would result in some electors having to travel further to vote. The headteacher had been contacted to

discuss possible arrangements to allow the school to remain open during elections, however confirmed that they did not have any concerns about the school being used and that arrangements were in place in the event of any unscheduled elections. The (Acting) Returning Officer commented that the school offered the most reasonable facilities for voting.

It was recommended that the status quo should remain.

An email had been received from a Councillor for Clatterbridge Ward who had requested that the current polling place for polling district JA (Eastham Ward), Mendell Primary School [Allport Lane] be moved to Bromborough Methodist Church Hall [Allport Lane]. Concern had been raised about the days lost for children in school every time an election was held. Electoral Services had investigated the possible use of Bromborough Methodist Church Hall as a polling place. The Church had been visited and good facilities were in place. It was located 100yds from the school (as shown on the map in Appendix 2) so there would be minimal impact on voters possibly having to travel further to vote. There would be additional costs for use of the Church who had yet to provide the exact amount and consideration would have to be given on the statutory guidance on the use of schools. Previous investigations into the possibility of the school remaining open during elections had proven unsuccessful. The (Acting) Returning Officer commented that Mendell Primary School offered the most reasonable facilities for voting.

It was recommended that the status quo should remain.

An email had been received from an elector who commented that a review of the use of schools as polling places should be carried out because of the interruption of a child's education in order that people could vote. The elector gave the current polling place for polling district MD (Upton Ward) which is Fender Primary School [New Hey Road] as an example stating the school was closed each time voting took place and that a lot of special needs children were on roll. The elector suggested using Woodchurch Community Centre as an alternative polling place and this was investigated by Electoral Services. However, it was discounted on the basis that the location of the building was at the far end of the polling district and sits on the boundary which runs alongside the M53 motorway (as shown on the map in Appendix 3) whilst the school is located in a central position within the polling district and was as close to electors as possible. The (Acting) Returning Officer commented that Fender Primary School offered the most reasonable facilities for voting.

It was recommended that the status quo should remain.

An email had been received from an elector in respect of the current polling place for polling district UA (New Brighton Ward), SS Peter & Paul Primary School [Atherton Street/Sandringham Drive] which encouraged the Council to seek an alternative polling place as the school was closed at least once a year and more when unexpected elections took place, with the effect that pupils received less teaching than they should do. The elector advised it also caused additional problems for parents to make child care arrangements. The elector did not provide details of an alternative building that could be used.

In respect of the same polling place, an email had also been received from the Clerk to Governors with a letter attached from the Chair of Governors of SS Peter & Paul

Primary School. The letter requested that, again, an alternative building be identified for use as a polling place rather than the school. The reason for this request generally related to concerns about the disruption to the school attendance and the challenges faced by families working full time balancing work and school closures. However, the concerns were not only directed at the school being used as a polling place but also school closures due to other cultural events taking place in Wirral.

Electoral Services had attempted to identify alternative buildings, however, other than the adjacent Church, there were no other buildings that could be used as a polling place. Unfortunately, the Church declined being used as a polling place. The (Acting) Returning Officer commented that SS Peter & Paul Primary School offered the most reasonable facilities for voting.

It was recommended that the status quo should remain.

The Electoral Services Manager outlined the proposals for changes to polling places and polling district boundaries as follows:

Polling Districts in Eastham Ward

An email had been received from a Councillor for Eastham Ward who commented on the loss of Eastham Youth Centre (Youth Hub) in Lyndale Road which was the current polling place for polling district JD and a suggestion for an alternative venue. The Councillor also commented on a possible review of polling district boundary anomalies where residents in the same road had to vote in different polling places, specifically the boundary between polling district JA and JC around the Bettisfield Avenue area and also the boundary between polling district JC and JD along Heygarth Road.

When reviewing the boundary around the Bettisfield Avenue area, it was established that part of the boundary between polling districts JA and JC runs down the middle of Bettisfield Avenue and therefore residents living in the even numbered properties voted at the polling place for polling district JA [Mendell Primary School] and residents living in the odd numbered properties voted at the polling place for polling district JC [Heygarth Primary School]. However, to resolve the anomaly, it would not be a simple case of moving the boundary that runs down the middle of Bettisfield Avenue and therefore the surrounding roads were also considered. Upon reviewing the boundary along Heygarth Road, most of the boundary between polling districts JC and JD runs down the middle of Heygarth Road therefore residents living in the even numbered properties voted at the polling place for polling district JC [Heygarth Primary School] and residents living in the odd numbered properties voted at the polling place for polling district JD [Eastham Youth Centre]. To resolve the anomaly, it would not be a simple case of moving the boundary that runs down the middle of Heygarth Road and therefore the whole boundary was considered.

Members were advised that the current polling place for polling district JD was Eastham Youth Centre (or Youth Hub) [Lyndale Avenue]. After the UK European Parliamentary election on 23 May 2019 it had been confirmed by Steve Chan, Service Manager for Youth Support Service, Childrens Services, that the existing Youth Hub was due for demolition within the next 12 months and would no longer be available for use as a polling place. The Councillor for Eastham Ward suggested the changing room at the Plymyard Sports Pavilion as a possible alternative polling

place, however, the Sports Pavilion was located well within a different polling district and so this suggestion had been discounted.

An email had been received by another Councillor from Eastham Ward who had suggested using Carlett Evangelical Church on Carlett Boulevard as an alternative building to replace the Youth Hub, however, the Church had declined to be used as a polling place.

As no other alternative building had been identified within polling district JD, it was proposed to move part of the boundary between polling districts JD and JE to encompass the Chapel of the Holy Spirit which would become the new polling place. This building had been inspected by Electoral Services (Appendix 6 to the report) and was considered suitable for the purposes of being used as a polling place.

It was recommended that the Chapel of the Holy Spirit [Eastham Rake] be designated as the polling place for polling district JD (Eastham Ward).

The details of the proposals were outlined within the report and the (Acting) Returning Officer considered that the proposals offered the most reasonable facilities for voting.

Polling District VC and VF (Wallasey Ward)

The Electoral Services Manager reported that an anomaly existed with the boundary between polling districts VC and VF as some properties in Wallasey Village were currently situated in polling district VC and electors in these properties voted at Wallasey United Reformed Church [Wallasey Village]. As there was no practical explanation as to why these properties were situated in polling district VC it was proposed that a small adjustment be made to move these properties into polling district VF to allow electors to vote at Wallasey Village Library [St Georges Road] which would be closer. Details of the proposal were outlined within the report and the (Acting) Returning Officer considered this proposal offered the most reasonable facilities for voting.

The Electoral Services Manager reported that subject to Members' approval of the proposals and recommendations outlined, any changes would come into effect from the 1st January 2020 due to preparations for the UK Parliamentary General Election taking place on 12 December 2019 and the printing of poll cards prior to this. A Notice of Conclusion of the Review would be published on the Council's website and displayed in One Stop Shops. Following the conclusion of the review, individuals would have a right to make representations to the Electoral Commission, although the Commission would only consider representations in respect of the review process not being conducted correctly. The Borough's polling districts and places would continue to be monitored each year and a full review carried out every five years as required.

Resolved – That the proposed changes and recommendations contained within the report be approved and the Council's Polling Districts and Polling Places be agreed with effect from 1 January 2020.

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