

**REGULATORY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE****1 FEBRUARY 2023**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>POLLING PLACES REVIEW</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC &amp; MEMBER SERVICES</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report sets out the findings following a review undertaken in respect to the use of polling station venues in two wards, which are currently used as polling places for the purposes of Local Authority, Parliamentary and other elections.

The report details guidance on selecting polling places and an outline of alternative polling places which have been identified by the Returning Officer. Local ward members have been consulted in respect to options. Costs associated with the hire of alternative venues are detailed in the exempt appendix 2 to the report as they are commercially sensitive.

The recommendations contained within this report meet the objectives in the Wirral Plan 2021 – 26 in respect to the safe and pleasant communities and inclusive economy.

The recommendations in this report do not constitute a key decision.

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Regulatory and General Purposes Committee is recommended to

- a) Consider and comment on the report; and
- b) Agree to the relocating of the two polling places as detailed in section 3 of the report, in readiness for the May 2023 Local Authority Elections.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 A review of two venues which were used as Polling Places in May 2022 was commissioned by the Returning Officer, as a result of the Elections Office being informed that the venues in question would not be available for the delivery of the May 2023 Local Authority Election. Options, associated costs, and member views are presented for consideration in appendix 1 of the report.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Options for the relocation of both polling places are detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, which also includes an explanation of why they have been discounted as viable alternatives.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 When considering the overall suitability of a polling place or polling station the following criteria are considered:

External areas access and facilities:

**Location:**

- Is it reasonably accessible within the polling district?
- Is the building clearly identifiable?
- Does it avoid barriers for the voter such as steep hills, major roads, rivers, etc.?
- Does the building have level access or an alternative disabled route?
- Are the doors wide enough, and light enough, to be opened by someone using a motorised scooter / wheelchair?
- Are there convenient transport links?
- Are there adequate parking facilities for disabled people and polling station staff?

Internal areas access and facilities:

**Entrance doors & Corridors:**

- Are all external and internal doors easy to open?
- Are there any internal steps or hazards?
- Is the floor covering nonslip?
- Is there adequate heating and lighting?
- Are there toilet facilities for staff?
- Are there kitchen facilities for staff?

**Size:**

- Is there sufficient space inside to comfortably accommodate staff, voters, polling agents and observers?
- Is there suitable furniture available for staff and voters, where required?
- Can it accommodate more than one polling station if required?
- If multiple polling stations are required, is the polling place capable of accommodating all voters going into and out of the polling stations, even where there is a high turnout?

**Availability:**

- Is the building readily available in the event of any unscheduled elections?
- Is there any possibility that the building may be demolished as part of a new development?

**Accessibility:**

- Is the building accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place?

3.2 **Bromborough Ward – Bromborough Civic Centre** is currently used for the Polling District HE. The Civic Centre has been closed since March 2020 with no future plans to reopen in time for the planned election. The Village Hall at St Barnabas Church is approximately 3 minutes' walk away from Bromborough Civic Centre, it has good parking facilities and good accessibility for all electors within the ward.

3.3 **Wallasey Ward – Wallasey Village Library**, which is currently used for Polling District VF, is part of the Community Asset Transfer programme and is scheduled to be transferred in early 2023, the library will undergo some building work prior to re-opening and as yet the dates for the building work have not been confirmed and may run through to the beginning of May 2023. St Hilary's Church is a suitable alternative for the local elections taking place on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023, with a view to returning to Wallasey Village Library from May 2024 onwards.

3.4 In summary, it is recommended that the Polling Station for Polling District:

- a) HE is moved from Bromborough Civic Centre to The Village Hall, St Barnabas Church
- b) VF is moved from Wallasey Village Library to St Hilary's Church

**4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The annual budget set for Elections is £341,400. (2021/2022). This will be reduced in future years due to the move to Whole Council elections from May 2023.

4.2 Polling stations costs in 2022 were £30,300. The cost of polling stations increased from £27,000 to £30,300 in May 2022 due to changing 7 venues from schools to private venues.

4.3 The total hire cost for the two polling stations that were used in 2022 is nil cost as they are both Council owned buildings.

4.4 The total hire cost for the proposed venues will be £488.00 and the individual costs are detailed in Appendix 2.

4.5 If all proposals are implemented the increased costs will be £30,788.00, however, this is subject to a potential increase in costs for all polling stations due to the rise in energy costs across the UK.

4.6 All costs will be met from existing budgets.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There is a legal duty on the local authority to provide accommodation for polling stations with the Representation of the People Act 1983, Chapter 2, Schedule 1, Part III, paragraph 22.
- 5.2 Planned elections do not have an impact on the 190 statutory days of education (189 days for –2022) as the 28 schools that do not open to pupils set a planned INSET day. Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999.
- 5.3 In the exception of an unexpected school closure due to unscheduled elections, a school can mitigate by a move to online virtual learning where an INSET day has not been planned.
- 5.4 Polling stations must be accessible to all -Section 20, 29 and 31, Equality Act 2010.
- 5.5 Use of schools and public rooms. The Returning Officer may use, free of charge, for the purpose of taking the poll or counting the votes a room in a school maintained or assisted by a local education authority - Rule 20(1)(a), The Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006.
- 5.6 Provision of polling stations. The Returning Officer must provide a sufficient number of polling stations and, subject to the following provisions of this rule, must allot the electors to the polling stations in such manner as he thinks most convenient - Rule 23(1-4), The Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 6.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 There is a legal duty on the local authority to provide accommodation for polling stations with the Representation of the People Act 1983, Chapter 2, Schedule 1, Part III, paragraph 22.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Ward councillors for the two affected wards of Bromborough and Wallasey have been consulted on the proposed moves and there have been no objections to the proposals.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Wirral Council has an ongoing responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (S149) to take equality implications into consideration in policy decision, implementation, and day to day activities. The impact on those with protected characteristics under the Act were taken into consideration during this exercise when assessing the overall suitability of a venue. Any changes to venues and or arrangements will be assessed with equality impacts in mind and other voting

practices such as proxy and postal voting remains in place for those who wish to use it.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 The use of privately owned venues benefits local businesses financially, but it also promotes and enhances the social network in the local area. Furthermore, it redirects wealth back into the local community.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Summary findings doc

Appendix 2 – Cost implications (contains exempt financial information)

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Representation of the People Act 1983

Equality Act 2010

The Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006.

Education Act 1996

Polling Place visit reports

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

This report is presented to Committee in accordance with section 8.2(i) of the Committees terms of reference

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Regulatory &amp; General Purposes Committee</b>	<b>Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 2022</b>

**Regulatory & General Purposes Committee**

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> Nov 2022**

## Appendix 1 – Summary Findings

Proposed Polling Stations to be moved from schools				
Ward	Polling District	Current venue	Alternative Venue	Recommendation
Bromborough	HE	Bromborough Civic Centre	Village Hall, St Barnabas Church	Suitable alternative venue. All ward Councillors support proposal.  Recommend the Village Hall, St Barnabas Church as the most suitable venue for polling district HE.
Wallasey	VF	Wallasey Village Library	St Hilary's Church	Suitable alternative venue. All ward Councillors support proposal.  Recommend St Hilary's Church as most suitable venue for polling district VF.

Polling District	Other Alternatives	Reason for not recommending
HE	Bromborough Social Club	No car parking available nearby, no accessible ramped entrance, entrance in a position whereby a ramp could not be installed
VF	St George's Primary School	School has been used previously but had to close for the day. Inset days for the calendar year have already been set and would require an additional closure day.
	28 <sup>th</sup> Wallasey Scout Hut	Entrance path to the scout hut is not considered DDA accessible for electors and access to the hut would be limited when St George's Road is closed twice during the day at school opening and closing times.
	Wirral Joint Services Club	Entrance path to the joint services club is not considered DDA accessible for electors and access to the club would be limited when St George's Road is closed twice during the day at school opening and closing times.
	The Mosslands School	The Mosslands does not have any rooms available without closing the school to some pupils and the election falls during GCSE and A'level time.
	Wallasey Cricket Club	The cricket club is out of the polling district.

## Appendix 2 - Cost implications (contains exempt financial information)

Ward	PD	Current Location	Current Cost	Alternative	Cost
Bromborough	HE	Bromborough Civic Centre	£0	The Village Hall, St Barnabas Church	£288
Wallasey	VF	Wallasey Village Library	£0	St Hilary's Church	£200

Current hire charge for the venues listed above is £0 as they are council owned buildings.

Proposed cost to implement change £488.00

Increase of £488.00

Please note that signage will be required at each polling station to advise electors that the polling station has moved. The banners are approximately £50.00 - £100.00 each

Total for banners and hire costs £100.00 - £200.00