

**REGULATORY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE****31 JANUARY 2024**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>POLLING PLACES REVIEW</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF LAW AND CORPORATE SERVICES</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report sets out the findings following a review undertaken in respect of the use of a polling station venue in the Moreton West & Saughall Massie Ward, which is currently used as a polling place 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 and costs associated with the hire of the alternative venue are detailed in the exempt appendix 2 to the report.

The appendix attached to the report is exempt under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) to that Act on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. Consideration has been given to the Public Interest Test

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 polling place as detailed in section 3 of the report, in readiness for the May 2024 Police & Crime Commissioner and Combined Authority Mayoral Elections.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

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

- 1.1 A review of a venue used as Polling Places in May 2023 was commissioned by the Returning Officer, because the previous venues is no longer available. Options, associated costs, and member views are presented for consideration in appendix 1 of the report.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 There are no other alternative options as the current polling place has refused to be used for future elections. An alternative option is presented to the Committee for consideration and discussion.

### **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 **Moreton West & Saughall Massie Ward** - Moreton Community Centre is currently used for Polling District YB, the manager of the venue has stated that it cannot be used as a polling station as it is disruptive to the regular users and classes at the community centre. Moreton Methodist Church has been identified as a suitable alternative venue. The church is within the polling district and is easy to locate. The venue is keen to be used for future elections to encourage residents from the local community to visit. The distance from the community centre to the church is 0.1 mile and is an approximate three-minute walk.

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

a) YB is moved from Moreton Community Centre to Moreton Methodist Church as detailed in Appendix 1.

**4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The total cost of the scheduled elections for 2024 will be met from Central Government (for the Police & Crime Commissioner Elections) and from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (for the Combined Authority Mayoral Elections).

4.2 Polling stations costs in 2023 were £30,411. The cost of polling stations increased from £30,300 to £30,411 in May 2023 due to changing 3 venues.

4.3 The total hire cost for the polling station that was used in 2023 is £350.00, the individual costs are detailed in Appendix 2.

4.4 The total hire cost for the proposed venues will be met from the elections budget. The individual costs, where confirmed, are detailed in Appendix 2.

4.5 If the proposal is implemented the anticipated increased costs will be circa £180-230, 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 and provided budgets. There may also be external grants provided from central government to cover additional requirements associated with the implementation of the Elections Act 2022, however, the level of grants is yet to be confirmed.

**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- Rule 20(1)(a), The Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006.
- 5.6 Provision of polling stations 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.
- 7.2 If a certain school or room is deemed to be the most suitable venue, then the school cannot refuse to allow it to be used. The benefit of designating a school as a polling station ensures that the venue can be used, free of charge, for scheduled and unscheduled elections. All schools have appropriate disabled access. Schools can allocate an INSET day if they choose to close on polling day. Unscheduled elections, for schools that close, may cause disruption to staff, parents, and pupils.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Ward councillors for the affected ward of Moreton West & Saughall Massie 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>
<b>Regulatory &amp; General Purposes Committee</b>	<b>Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> Nov 2022</b>
<b>Regulatory &amp; General Purposes Committee</b>	<b>Wednesday 01<sup>st</sup> Feb 2023</b>
<b>Regulatory &amp; General Purposes Committee</b>	<b>Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023</b>