

# REVIEW OF POLLING STATIONS

REPORT BY: THE RETURNING OFFICER

CABINET

29 MAY 2008

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## Wards Affected

County-wide

## Purpose

To comment on the proposed changes to the number and locations of polling stations in Herefordshire.

## Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards. It was included in the Forward Plan.

## Recommendation

**THAT the Returning Officer's recommendations as indicated in Appendix 2 be approved.**

## Reasons

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA 2006) requires that relevant authorities conduct a review of all polling districts and polling places by the end of 2007 and that a further review be conducted every four years thereafter. Cabinet considered a report in December 2007 and approved the proposals for polling districts and polling places but requested a further review of polling stations. A further review has now been completed and proposals put forward.

The Returning Officer must make representations to the relevant authority as to the location of existing or proposed stations.

The authority must publish the Returning Officer's comments within 30 days of receipt.

## Considerations

1. A report on the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations was considered by Cabinet on 13th December, 2007. Cabinet approved the proposals for Polling Districts and Polling Stations but requested that further work be undertaken on the review of Polling Stations with a report being brought back to Cabinet in April 2008.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
C Maund or J Rochefort on 01432 260110/0733

2. The original report set out the background of the issues taken into consideration in the first review and for ease of reference this is repeated in this report.
3. The law requires that all electors must have reasonable facilities to be able to vote and those venues chosen must be accessible for all electors including those with disabilities.
4. Herefordshire is a very rural area with over 200 parishes. Some of these parishes operate as groups. There is some sympathy with the view that it would be easier to deal with these as a single entity, however legislation requires that elections are organised per individual parish. Should parishes or group parishes wish to have their parish boundaries re-examined, the authority could consider such proposals under a separate process.
5. At present Herefordshire has 168 registered polling stations.
  - a. Many polling stations serve small or very small numbers of electorate.
  - b. Some polling stations do not have adequate facilities for either electorate or staff e.g. inadequate disabled access, toilets or kitchens.
  - c. The costs of using polling stations:
    - 1 Presiding Officer and at least 1 Poll Clerk = £310
    - Travel expenses @ 40p per mile
    - Hire of venue – from £20 - £300 +

At present these costs are borne in part by each parish that uses a particular polling station. The authority could choose to maintain and fund existing polling stations but would need to consider the cost implications that such a decision would have on its budget

- d. There has been an increasing difficulty in finding staff to cover polling stations in very rural areas particularly in the south of the county.
- e. Some polling stations serve two or more wards requiring two or more ballot boxes. This has led to electorate confusion, staff confusion and difficulties at the count. The proposals endeavour to assign electorate to polling stations within their ward.
- f. Postal voting has been available, on application, to all registered electorate since 2001, providing a viable and environmentally friendly alternative to using a polling station. In the 2003 local government elections, Herefordshire undertook an all postal voting pilot. This proved to be very successful and resulted in a 60.72% turnout for the Council. Government legislative changes brought into effect only three months before the 3rd May, 2007 elections had a serious and negative impact on postal voting.
- g. Some areas such as Shrewsbury and Atcham, have run successful pilots in electronic voting (e-voting). These types of pilots are authorised by government. If further pilots in e-voting are proposed, the authority should consider making an application as another way of encouraging voter participation in elections.
- h. Candidates will be encouraged to take a more pro-active role in future elections as a way of raising voter turn out. To this end the Electoral

Registration Office will produce a campaign leaflet for candidates suggesting ways of reaching out to electors whilst remaining within the legislation. In particular candidates will be encouraged to offer assistance to voters who wish to vote at polling stations.

6. Due to anticipated legislation that will require voters at polling stations to sign before receiving a ballot paper the review concentrated on polling stations servicing 200 or less electorate. This excluded some polling stations included in the original review.
7. A set of proposals were drawn up using the revised criteria and sent out to the Consultees listed below on 11th February, 2008. The proposals were also made available on the Council website and at the Electoral Registration Office and the Council's Info Shops. The consultation period ended on 28th March, 2008.
8. Responses to the proposals were received from Members, Parish Clerks and Parishioners and these are set out at Appendix 1. Based on the responses the proposals have been revised and recommendations made which are set out in Appendix 2. Visits have been made to all the venues where there has had to be a change or where an alternative venue has been suggested.

## **Risk Management**

That electors refuse to use new polling places and do not apply for postal voting as an option thus decreasing the turnout at elections. This is a reputational risk for the Council as it should endeavour to achieve a significant electorate turn out for local government elections.

## **Alternative Options**

There are no Alternative Options. This review has been undertaken as a result of statutory requirements.

## **Consultees**

Unitary Councillors	Hereford Access for All
Parish Councils	Hereford Stroke Club
Bill Wiggin MP	Leominster Shop Mobility
Paul Keetch MP	Aspire/Choices
Hereford Conservatives	Cordless Club
North Herefordshire Conservative Association	Scope
Hereford Constituency Labour Party	Herefordshire Headway
Leominster Constituency Labour Party	Herefordshire Mencap
Hereford Liberal Democrats	Herefordshire Service Users
Leominster Liberal Democrats	Age Concern
Hereford Constituency Green Party	Deaf Direct
Leominster Constituency Green Party	ECHO
Hereford Constituency UKIP Party	People's Union
Leominster Constituency UKIP Party	RNIB
Workmatch Ltd	Community Voluntary Action

## **Appendices**

1. Responses to Proposals for Polling Stations.
2. Revised proposals and recommendations.

## **Background Papers**

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA 2006)