

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXTRAORDINARY
ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 27TH JANUARY, 2020

AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of the ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE was held at the CIVIC OFFICE, DONCASTER on MONDAY, 27TH JANUARY, 2020 at 1.00 p.m.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Phil Cole
Vice-Chair - Councillor Nick Allen

Councillors Steve Cox, Sean Gibbons, Pat Haith, Mark Houlbrook, Majid Khan, Derek Smith and Sue Wilkinson.

Also in Attendance:

Councillor David Nevett (Observer).

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jane Kidd and Kevin Rodgers.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

No declarations were made at the meeting.

11 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2019/20

The Committee received a report on the outcome of the review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019/20. Members noted that the statutory responsibility for reviewing UK Parliamentary polling districts and places rested with each relevant local authority, with reviews being required to be conducted every four years.

Detailed schedules outlining the existing arrangements for polling districts and places and proposed changes taking into account the submission of the Returning Officer and feedback from public consultation were set out in the appendices to the report. The proposals sought to identify more appropriate polling places where adverse comments had been received on the location and/or suitability of current venues, to enable schools to remain open on election day, to identify alternatives where usual stations were no longer available and to avoid using mobile stations which were expensive to hire and site and were unpopular with voters and residents in the surrounding area.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services explained that the review, which had commenced in August 2019, had been delayed due to the calling of the General Election at short notice on 12 December 2019. This had resulted in the timeframe for the review being revised, with this Extraordinary meeting being convened in order to present the report in time to conclude the review by the statutory deadline of 31st January 2020.

The Interim Electoral Services Manager drew Members' attention to an errata sheet tabled at the meeting, which gave details of errors in the appendices to the report, as follows:-

Appendix 1

- Page 37: Parish council information relating to polling district TA was incorrect. The report indicated that this polling district was within the South Ward of Adwick on Dearne Parish Council. The entry for parish council for this polling district should read **Adwick on Dearne Parish Council North Ward**.
- Page 39: Parish council information relating to polling districts UB and UC was incorrect. The report indicated that there was no parish council for these polling districts. The entry for the parish council in each case should read **Edenthorpe Parish Council**.

Appendix 2

- Page 48: Parish council information relating to polling district UB was incorrect. The report indicated no parish council. The entry for the parish council for this polling district should read **Edenthorpe Parish Council**.

Members then considered in detail the content of the schedules as appended to the report and agreed the proposals for each Ward in turn, subject to discussion and/or questions on the following points:

- Councillor Mark Houlbrook queried whether the trend towards Academies and Free Schools would have an impact on the availability of these premises for use as polling stations in the future. In response, the officers explained that Academies and Free Schools were still funded by the public purse, so the principle remained the same. While these schools could not legally refuse to allow the use of their premises as polling stations, the officers stressed that they always tried to work constructively with schools to identify ways of minimising any disruption so that they could remain open on polling days. It was noted that, under normal circumstances, schools could usually be given plenty of notice in advance of election days, which made it easier for them to put the necessary arrangements in place. In some cases, schools were able to arrange Inset (training) days to coincide with election days, so that they could close the school when the premises were needed as a polling station. On the question of whether schools remained open or not on polling days, it was noted that this was a matter for the Headteacher to decide, based on safeguarding responsibilities if the premises remained open. This involved determining whether unimpeded access to the polling station for voters could be provided, whilst keeping the remainder of the school premises secure.
- Councillor Derek Smith referred to the proposal to merge Polling District LD with LC in the Hatfield ward, and to allocate voters in that area to the Kinsbourne Green Communal Hall, which he advised would result in some residents having to walk a long distance to the polling station compared to the previous arrangements. While he acknowledged that there were limited options as regards identifying suitable alternative polling places in the vicinity, Councillor Smith suggested that the Duncroft Social Working Men's Club at

200 Station Road, Hatfield might be worth investigating. In reply, the officers explained that there was insufficient time to investigate any alternative options if the statutory deadline of 31st January 2020 was to be met for agreeing the recommendations from the Review. However, it was noted that there would still be scope for making further changes to polling places outside of the Review period in cases where this was felt to be imperative. This being the case, the officers indicated that they would be happy to consider Councillor Smith's suggestion in respect of the Working Men's Club at a later date.

- At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor David Nevett (observer) commented on the recommendation to use the Church Balk Centre in Edenthorpe as a polling place in future instead of the Church of the Good Shepherd and gave some feedback on the station used in the December General Election. It was reported that the Church Balk Centre was being recommended on the basis that it was located centrally within Polling District UB and had recently been refurbished. The venue was accessible, with good facilities, external lighting and parking spaces.
- In response to a query by Councillor Mark Houlbrook concerning the proposed merging of polling district QH into QG in Thorne and Moorends Ward, the Interim Electoral Services Manager explained that this change was aimed at simplifying the management of the polling station on polling day by only having to use one Register instead of two. The proposal would not change the arrangements for voters in any way. Councillor Houlbrook also highlighted the fact that there were six polling places covering the Thorne area, but only one polling place (the Community Centre, Northgate, Moorends) for the whole of Moorends, and he felt that this disparity should be looked at in future.

During subsequent discussion, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services suggested a proposed way forward in terms of picking up the issues raised by Councillors Smith and Nevett. He advised that, in view of the impending statutory deadline for signing off the Review recommendations, the Committee should consider agreeing the proposals at today's meeting. There would then be a further opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the polling place arrangements following the Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2020 and the use of the Hatfield and Edenthorpe stations could be reported back at this Committee's meeting in July 2020. This would enable Members to assess whether further changes to polling places were still felt to be necessary and, if so, consider in more detail any alternative options. After the Committee had concurred with this proposed course of action, it was

RESOLVED to approve the proposed changes to Polling Districts and Polling Places, as detailed in the Appendices to the report.

CHAIR: _____

DATE: _____