

24 August 2017		ITEM: 5
General Services Committee		
Amendment to Polling Place: Polling District F – Belhus Ward		
Wards and communities affected: Belhus Ward Thurrock constituency		Key Decision: Key
Report of: David Lawson, Monitoring Officer and Deputy Head of Legal Services		
Accountable Assistant Director: David Lawson, Monitoring Officer and Deputy Head of Legal Services		
Accountable Director: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive and Returning Officer		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report requests members of General Services committee to approve the recommendation of the Returning Officer and Chief Executive in relation to the amendment of the Polling Place for Polling District F.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the location of Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Daiglen Drive, South Ockendon be approved as the Polling Place for Polling District F (Belhus Ward, Culverhouse).**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1** A report titled Amendment to Polling Places and Polling Stations was taken to Council on 28 January 2015. Members noted and confirmed the existing polling arrangements for Belhus ward (the South Ockendon Youth Centre within the Culver Centre) and agreed the requirement to source a new polling place after the elections on 7th May 2015 as the Culver Centre was due for closure.
- 2.2** The closure of the Culver Centre was delayed and the centre was used as a polling place until June 2016. Following the Referendum on 23rd June 2016, the Centre was no longer available for use as a polling station. A review of the area was planned for 2017 to locate a new polling place and station.

- 2.3 Emergency arrangements were made for the General Election on 8th June 2017 and temporary portacabins were hired and used as polling stations and placed outside of the Culver Centre. Arranging the location, delivery and hire of portacabins is very resource intensive, expensive and does not provide the best voting experience for electors if a permanent building is available. A permanent polling place is now required.

3. Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 A review of Polling District F has been undertaken.

- 3.2 The Election team reviewed the district for suitable venues. The following venues were considered:

- Woodlands Edge Pub, Broxburn Drive
- Essex Kickboxing Academy, Darenth Lane (outside of the Polling District but within sight of the Culver Centre)
- Sancta Maria Centre (Health centre), Daiglen Drive and Dilkeswood Health Centre, Darenth Lane
- Police Station, Darenth Lane (outside of the Polling District but within sight of the Culver Centre)
- Shaw Primary School, Avon Green
- Holy Cross Primary School, Daiglen Drive

a) Woodlands Edge Pub - the pub was willing and keen to allow use as a polling station however the function room was located upstairs with no lift access. Electors would face accessibility issues. The Manager raised that he was considering converting an outside building in the car park into a room for hire but long term, the pub would want to hire this out on a permanent basis for example to a taxi firm. This would not provide a permanent polling place and there was no start or end time for the work. If an unscheduled election is called, the Returning Officer would still not have a confirmed polling place if work has not finished. Voters are familiar with voting at the Culver Centre and The Woodlands Edge is not located in Daiglen Drive which may cause voter confusion and decrease elector turnout.

b) The Essex Kickboxing Academy is located in Darenth Lane, nearly opposite the Culver Centre. In initial discussions the Academy stated the Returning Officer would need to provide temporary flooring to prevent damage if the building was used as a polling station. The building is located outside of the polling district boundary but within sight of the old Culver Centre. A polling place and station may be agreed outside of the district boundary if there are no suitable venues within the boundary. This is not the case and the use of the venue was not explored further.

- c) The Dilkeswood Health Centre in Darenth Lane is outside of the polling district boundary but within sight of the old Culver Centre. The Centre had no facilities available for use as a polling station and as the venue was outside of the polling district it was not explored further. The Sancta Maria Centre in Daiglen Drive was not contacted as it did not appear to have suitable rooms from the outside.
- d) The Police station building in Darenth Lane is outside of the polling district but still within sight of the Culver Centre. It was not open when the Election team reviewed the area and visited although the team understand the building is being used but with no public access. The use of the building was not followed up further as suitable venues exist within the polling district.

3.3 In order to minimise disruption to schools the review initially explored suitable polling places and did not include schools, As the polling district did not have suitable polling places the schools in the polling district (Shaw Primary School and Holy Cross Catholic Primary School) were contacted by an officer from Children's Services to request use of the facilities on polling day.

3.4 Holy Cross Catholic Primary School agreed to the use of the school on 3rd May 2018 and has planned this to be an inset day, limiting disruption to the children's education.

3.5 The Returning Officer and the use of schools:

Members are asked to note that for the purpose of taking the poll in England and Wales, the (Acting) Returning Officer is entitled to use free of charge schools maintained or assisted by a local authority as well as those schools that receive grants made out of moneys provided by Parliament. This includes academies and free schools.

A school can charge for heating and lighting and caretaking costs in relation to the use of their building as a polling station. The cost will therefore be minimal and similar to other schools used for polling. The cost will be contained within the election budget.

3.6 Members are asked to agree to designate Holy Cross Catholic Primary School as a polling place for all future elections, not limited to polling on 3rd May 2018. If an election is called prior to this date or after the 3rd May 2018, negotiations will take place with the school. If the school is not available for polling, arrangements will be made to designate an emergency polling place / station appropriate to the election. This is the same for all unscheduled elections. Arrangements to designate an emergency polling place are contained with the constitution.

3.7 **Holy Cross Catholic Primary School** is situated near to the previous polling place of the Culver Centre in Daiglen Drive. A map of the

location showing the Culver Centre and Holy Cross School is attached at Appendix A.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Council must seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 4.2 In order to confirm polling station bookings in advance of the scheduled polls in May 2018 and be prepared for any unplanned polls, members are requested to approve the recommendation of the Returning Officer and Chief Executive in relation to an amendment of the Polling Place for Polling District F.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 This report has not been subject to public consultation although ward members and the MP for Thurrock and the Returning Officer have been consulted.
- 5.2 Responses have been received from all ward councillors who are in agreement that the Holy Cross Catholic Primary School be allocated as the current Polling Place. In addition, the MP for Thurrock constituency, Jackie Doyle-Price, raised no objections.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The Council continually seeks to ensure services are accessible by all users and the recommendation if approved will help to ensure that electors who wish to vote will be voting in a location that is similar to the previous polling place and electors will not be discouraged by inaccessible polling stations.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Carl Tomlinson**
Finance Manager

All future costs associated with the changes in polling places or polling stations will be contained within the Electoral Services budget.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Monitoring Officer

The authority must seek to ensure that all the electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. The authority must also seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and

practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Community Development Officer

Within the Equality Act 2010 there is a Public Sector Equality Duty which applies to all 'public authorities', with a broad purpose to integrate the consideration of equality and good relations into day to day business. These considerations sit alongside the statutory obligations set out in the Electoral Administration Act.

The Electoral Administration Act (2006) seeks to improve and encourage engagement in the electoral process, by ensuring that polling places are accessible to all. The proposed change, outlined in section 3 of the report, will improve access to the electoral process, in line with the objective of the legislation and will assist community participation in elections.

7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Report to Council - 28 January 2015 – Web link:
<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s2498/Amendment%20to%20Polling%20Places%20and%20Polling%20Stations.pdf>

9. **Appendices to the report:**

- Map of Polling District F - Belhus Ward (Culverhouse)

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