

**Committee:** Electoral Working Group

**Agenda Item**

**Date:** 9 November 2011

**5**

**Title:** Polling District Review

**Author:** Peter Snow, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager, 01799 510430

Item for decision

---

## Summary

1. The statutory review of polling districts is reaching a conclusion under the terms of reference and timetable agreed at the meeting on 23 August. The Working Group agreed for consultation a draft proposed scheme of polling arrangements at its last meeting on 10 October. This report summarises those further representations received during the interim period and the Working Group now has to recommend a final scheme for adoption at the Council meeting on 29 November.

## Recommendations

2. Agree a final proposed scheme of polling arrangements to recommend for formal adoption by the Council on 29 November. The revised scheme will operate from 1 December 2011. Members are invited to refer to the main body of the report for a summary of representations received and for further explanation of the proposals being made for changes to the existing scheme.
3. It is also recommended that the following statement is added to the schedule of polling districts: 'Delegated authority is given to the Chief Executive and Returning Officer to change the polling place designated for any of the polling districts defined in this schedule, only at any specific election where the designated polling place is unavailable for any reason, to enable him to make the best arrangements possible for electors at that time.'

## Financial Implications

4. *There are no financial implications arising from this recommendation.*

## Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Representations submitted as part of the final consultation stage

## Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	By publication on the website and direct
----------------------------	--

## Electoral Working Group, item 5: Polling District Review

	consultation with interested parties.
Community Safety	No impact.
Equalities	Taking account of the need to designate only, wherever possible, fully accessible buildings.
Health and Safety	See under 'equalities' above.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The Council must comply with the requirements of legislation in conducting the review and in designating polling districts and places.
Sustainability	No impact.
Ward-specific impacts	All wards are affected by the review.
Workforce/Workplace	No specific implications.

### **Situation and recommendations for change**

7. The final consultation period began on 19 October and ended formally on 3 November. This period was of necessity very short but it must be remembered that consultation on the polling scheme began initially on 1 September and the Council's proposals have been available for public comment since that date.
8. A limited number of further representations have been received since the last meeting and these are summarised in the following paragraphs together with further comment about the practicality of the polling arrangements now proposed.
9. Members are reminded that they must take account of the comments received from John Mitchell in his capacity of Returning Officer. The legislation requires him to comment in this way and Members are asked to have regard to the suggestions and proposals he has made.
10. The comments made in this report should be read in conjunction with both appendix A (the existing scheme) and appendix B (the proposed scheme).
11. The remainder of this report will comment only on those parts of the scheme where either some form of change is considered necessary, or where further representations have been received.
12. Members are reminded of the statutory requirements of the polling review as set out in full in the report considered by the Working Group on 23 August. In a nutshell, the rules require the Council to designate polling places that are reasonable and practicable for all electors, and are accessible to disabled

people. The sole purpose of dividing the area into polling districts is to provide convenient facilities for electors.

13. **Birchanger** – the part of Birchanger parish transferred to Stansted Mountfitchet parish with effect from 1 April 2012 will form a new and separate polling district from 1 December 2011 (see under Stansted South). However, the polling district covering the transferred electors will remain linked to Birchanger for district ward election purposes only. What remains of Birchanger parish will form a reduced polling district and will retain St Mary's Church Hall as the polling place.  
  
**Proposed change to scheme:** ACA: Birchanger – no change to existing arrangements (but refer to Stansted South for further comment).
11. **Bush End** – it is **proposed** that a separate polling district of Bush End be retained in spite of the low number of electors registered there and that The Ancient Foresters continue to be the designated polling place. The justification for the retention of this polling district is the existence of a separate parish ward of Bush End and to provide convenient facilities for electors.
12. Hatfield Broad Oak Parish Council responded to the consultation on 13 October to confirm that there were felt to be no reasons for any change. This comment applies to Bush End as well as to Hatfield Broad Oak.
14. **Wicken Bonhunt** – it is **proposed** that St Margaret's Church is designated as the polling place for the parish of Wicken Bonhunt. The Church was inspected by officers on 2 November. The Church is presently undergoing extensive refurbishment and building work to convert it into a community centre for the village as well as a place of worship, with all the attendant facilities. The work is expected to be largely completed by the middle of December. Although work is not complete, it is considered that the building will be entirely suitable for polling use and it is recommended accordingly.
15. No changes are proposed for **Felsted parish** but the Parish Council responded to the consultation on 14 October to point out that a disabled access ramp at Crix Green Mission, noted as missing in 2006, has now been installed, together with a fire exit, at the rear of the building.
16. **Flitch Green** – it is **proposed** that Flitch Green Community Centre is designated as the polling place for the parish of Flitch Green. The community centre was inspected in September and is considered suitable for purpose.
17. Councillor Favell responded on 24 October to confirm that she is very happy with the proposal to move polling to the community centre as 'there is ample room there and parking would cause less disruption'.
18. **Little Dunmow** – it is **proposed** that the Community Meeting Room off Brook Street is designated as the polling place for the parish of Little Dunmow in place of the Flitch of Bacon Public House. The facility was inspected on 14 September and found to be entirely suitable for use.

19. **Great Dunmow North West** – the Working Group is requested to decide whether Great Dunmow Primary School should continue to be designated as the polling place, in spite of the adverse comments made about the arrangements there, or whether a facility at the Tesco Stores site should be designated instead. The draft scheme left open the designation of the polling place for further investigation.
20. A visit was made to the Tesco site on 3 November. Andrew Doherty the store manager was very helpful and offered use of the site free of charge if a suitable arrangement can be made. The first option is to locate a mobile unit in any one of three separate locations in the car parking area. Such a facility would undoubtedly be convenient for the majority of electors resident at Woodlands Park and in the adjoining residential areas at Waldgroves and Newton Green. The main advantage is the presence of good car parking facilities. Hiring and locating a suitable mobile unit is nevertheless likely to be an expensive option.
21. The second option is to try to identify a suitable area of the Tesco store building in which a polling station can be accommodated. This will not be easy to achieve given the need to keep the polling process entirely separate from the commercial activities at the Tesco store, and the lack of a suitable room or rooms. One possibility is that a polling station can be sited in the conservatory and staff canteen area at the top end of the site. The disadvantage is that the returning officer would not have exclusive access to this part of the building as the canteen area would be partially screened off for use as a polling station. The access to this area is less than ideal and the space available is not regarded as sufficient to accommodate a polling station.
22. There are other rooms in the storage and office area at the back of the store but these would present a considerable challenge in providing suitable access and polling arrangements for electors. It is the officers' judgement that any polling station located within the Tesco building would not prove entirely satisfactory.
23. The Tesco option is undoubtedly more convenient to electors in terms of car parking availability close to the polling station location. It is undeniably the case that parking provision for electors at the school is less than satisfactory. Parking is not permitted at Woodlands Park Drive on the polling station entrance side of the building. There is some parking available in the lay-by near the Stortford Road entrance. In addition, the head teacher has offered the use of the school car park to disabled voters upon request.
24. However, in other respects, the Primary School seems better suited to the accommodation of a polling station. The school hall located on the Woodlands Park Drive side of the building is fully accessible to pedestrians and suitable in all other respects. The building remains within easy walking distance of the majority of electors living within the polling district.
25. If members do wish to designate the Tesco site instead, it will be necessary to define the polling place as the whole of the Tesco site, including the car

parking area, to give the returning officer enough flexibility to identify and locate a suitable polling station.

26. **Saffron Walden Shire North** – it is **proposed** that the polling district boundary between Shire North and Shire South should remain unaltered. The boundary was altered slightly at the last review to follow the line of Peaslands Road, thus dividing the north part of the polling district (forecast electorate 2,033) from the Shire South polling district south of Peaslands Road (forecast electorate 2,678). This boundary line seems to reflect the concentrations of population in the Shire ward and does not need to be altered.
27. However, Members are asked to decide whether the Four Acres Common Room should continue to be the designated polling place for Shire North, or whether the R A Butler School should be designated instead. The draft scheme proposed a change to the School.
28. As previously reported, the Four Acres Common Room suffers from severe disadvantages as the designated polling place due to the cramped space within the building and the lack of dedicated parking space. Disabled access was reported as inadequate at the referendum in May this year. These problems are likely to become more marked as a result of population growth arising from the Bell College site.
29. Generally speaking, facilities for electors at the school are considered to be more suitable and convenient for electors. The school was inspected on 1 November when the options for using the building were discussed with the head teacher Ann Keen. The main difficulty is that the head will not close the school and this means that the hall cannot be used as there are classrooms opening directly into the hall area. The returning officer does have the legal right to requisition a particular part of the school for polling use but would prefer to make arrangements with the full co-operation of the school authorities.
30. Mrs Keen has offered the use of some car parking spaces and a free standing building known as the PPA Room (Play Room) located just off the car parking area at the front of the school site. This is not as suitable a facility as the school hall but is considered to be a better option than continuing to use the Four Acres Common Room.
31. Members are asked to decide on which of these two buildings should be designated as the polling place for Shire North.
32. **Stansted North** – it is **proposed** that Stansted North polling district be subdivided into the following new polling districts:  
  
AQA Stansted North East: that part of Stansted North ward located east of a line drawn through the centre of Cambridge Road from the ward boundary in the south to the parish boundary in the north. It is proposed to designate the Youth Centre at Lower Street as the polling place for the polling district (serving approximately 1015 electors).

AQB Stansted North West: that part of Stansted North ward located west of a line drawn through the centre of Cambridge Road from the ward boundary in the south to the parish boundary in the north. Bentfield Primary School, Rainsford Road, Stansted is proposed as the designated polling place for the polling district (serving approximately 1310 electors).

No change is proposed to be made to the polling district of Ugley except for a change of the designated polling district letters to AQC

33. **Stansted South** – it is **proposed** that Stansted South ward (including the part of Stansted parish transferred from Birchanger ward) be sub-divided into the following new polling districts:

ACB Foresthall Park: that part of Stansted Mountfitchet parish transferred from Birchanger parish under The District of Uttlesford (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Order 2011. The draft scheme proposed that either the Mountfitchet College or the Romeera Leisure Centre would be designated as the polling place (serving approximately 419 electors). The parish designation must now be changed from Birchanger to Stansted South ward.

ARA Stansted South East: that part of Stansted South ward located to the east of the railway line from the point where it meets the northern boundary of the ward to the point where it intersects the ward boundary in the south. The polling place is proposed to be either the Mountfitchet College or the Romeera Leisure Centre as for the Foresthall Park polling district above (serving approximately 1362 electors).

ARB Stansted South West: that part of Stansted South ward located to the west of the railway line from the point where it meets the northern boundary of the ward to the point where it intersects the ward boundary in the south. The polling place to be the St John's Church Hall, St John's Road (or the Peter Kirk Centre) (serving approximately 1137 electors).

34. The above proposals envisage a major change to polling arrangements in both of the Stansted wards. At present, there is just one polling place serving each ward. The respective polling places were not designated in the 2007 review but, in practical terms, the buildings used previously have continued to be used, that is, the Peter Kirk Centre for the North ward, and the Youth Centre for the South ward.
35. As already reported, the problem with this arrangement is that it takes little account of population distribution in Stansted, or of the new development at Foresthall Park. The Youth Centre is located in the North ward some  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile or more distant from Foresthall Park and the Manor Road area, so cannot be described as either convenient or reasonable.
36. The opportunity of this review, and of the recent boundary change, has been taken to propose a re-jigging of polling boundaries and locations to match more closely the polling places with the patterns of residential occupation in the parish.

37. In the long run it was hoped to be able to designate the new junior school at Foresthall Park as the polling place to serve this part of Stansted. In the event, the new school will not be ready for occupation until September 2012.
38. The alternative locations of the Romeera Centre and the Mountfitchet Mathematics and Computing College have both now been inspected. Either of these buildings, which are of course adjacent to one another, can feasibly serve as a polling location. They are both located conveniently for electors registered in this part of Stansted.
39. Of the two locations, the Romeera Centre would probably be better suited to polling use. A visit was made to the Centre on 2 November when the Contracts Manager indicated that it would be possible to locate a polling station in the main hall accessed from the main entrance. Mrs Bradley has indicated that this use is covered in the contract with Leisure Connection and will cause no problems provided that adequate notice is given.
40. A meeting was held on the same day with Mr David, the Facilities Manager at the College. He indicated that the College would be able to provide polling facilities in the main hall which would be accessed via the main entrance. A decision would have to be taken nearer the time of each election as to whether the College should close for the day. He expressed full confidence that the normal day to day activities of the College could be separated from the polling station if it was decided that it should remain open.
41. The electorate of Stansted South (including Foresthall Park) is forecast to rise to a figure in the region of 3,000 by 2015. This number of electors is at the limit of acceptability for a single polling location and it is proposed that a second polling district should be created for the approximately 1100 electors situated north west of the railway line. The polling place is proposed to be St John's Church Hall off St John's Road. Although the church hall is located over the ward boundary to the north of Chapel Hill it is considerably closer in distance to the bulk of electors in that area than the Youth Centre which presently serves all of those electors.
42. In the North ward, the proposal is again to divide the existing single polling district along the line of Cambridge Road primarily for the convenience of electors. The forecast electorate in 2015 of 2,362 is not sufficient justification to split the polling district into two (see comments below from Councillor Rich) but the widespread nature of the population distribution in this part of Stansted indicates that two separate polling locations will be more convenient for the majority of electors in the ward.
43. If the Working Group accepts that principle, it remains to designate buildings that are suitably located for those electors. As reported previously, the Bentfield Primary School is ideally located for those electors west of Cambridge Road; the Youth Centre can then be designated for electors east of Cambridge Road.
44. Further representations have been received from Stansted Parish Council and from Councillor Rich (Stansted North Ward). The communication from Ruth

Clifford dated 3 November confirmed that the Parish Council has no further comments to make and that the only feedback received has been the personal opinion of Councillor Rich (for which see below).

45. Councillor Rich responded on 20 October to say that he would *'be very concerned indeed about any decision to move from two polling districts to four, or from two polling stations to four either. The central location for the polling district in the North has always worked well. I do not understand why it is necessary to change this – indeed this is the first suggestion that any such change was going to take place. It will also mean that candidates, such as myself, in Stansted North & Ugley will have three polling stations to contend with for the purposes of the election, which I think is unfair.*
46. His email goes on to say that the *'decision to "give" "our" central polling station to Stansted South is unhappy. It occurs to me that, in order to save expenditure on all sides, it might be appropriate to run one central polling station in Stansted at this location. There is no demand for this change. As I made perfectly clear, I was happy with the arrangements for the election on the last occasion, and it seems strange that the main polling station for the South is going to be in Stansted North, which is having to give up its best location.'*
47. Councillor Rich exchanged emails with the Democratic Services Manager and with Councillor Dean who replied effectively supporting the proposals being made. He then confirmed that he would like the very satisfactory and economical voting arrangements in Stansted North to stay the same.
48. **Lindsell** – no change is proposed in respect of the arrangements in Lindsell but a communication was received from the village hall secretary on 14 October to make the following comments: 'The committee members were unclear as to why the disabled parking bay is not considered to be compliant with current guidelines as it is level, clearly signed and adjacent to the entrance so clarification would be needed on that point if improvements are still considered necessary. The mat on the ramp has been removed and the hall now has disabled toilet facilities. A handrail will be attached on the left hand side of the ramp at the main entrance. There have never been any complaints from disabled users of the hall so the committee hopes that, with the addition of the handrail, our facilities will be considered adequate.
49. **Manuden** – Mrs Prothero, the secretary of the village hall committee sent the following comments on 18 October: 'As previously advised, Manuden VHC met last night and discussed your letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> September, to which I sent an email on the 11<sup>th</sup>. The situation is more or less as it was then, but the planning application for the new Community Centre is almost ready to be submitted. The committee has agreed that when an election is imminent, work will be done to fix the ramp to the wall by hooks, thus securing it. I would also point out that disabled access to the main school is by no means easy, involving a step over the threshold once you have got up the ramp. The disruption to all the families at the school would need to be considered too.

50. The draft proposal for Manuden is to retain the polling place at the village hall even though facilities there are considered unsatisfactory and the original report on 7 September said that it may be necessary to consider using the school instead.
51. Now that the planning application for the new village hall is imminent, there seems to be no need to change the venue at this stage. Instead, it is **proposed** that the polling place description is changed to read: 'Manuden Village Hall (to become the new hall as soon as that building is constructed and ready for use).'
52. **Little Canfield** – no change is **proposed** to existing arrangements (but refer to comments regarding Takeley below).
53. **Mole Hill Green** – it is **proposed** to retain Mole Hill Green as a separate polling district in spite of the small number of electors served for the convenience of electors because of the travelling distance to the polling place for Takeley Village (this is a similar argument used for the proposed retention of the Bush End polling district - see above).
54. **Takeley** – it is **proposed** that Takeley polling district be sub-divided into the following new polling districts:

AUD Takeley Priors Green: that part of Takeley parish lying to the east of a straight line running from the point where the polling district boundary with Mole Hill Green is intersected by the road leading from Mole Hill Green to Bangers Green and then running in a roughly southerly direction immediately to the west of Warish Hall and Smiths Green to the centre of Dunmow Road, then in an easterly direction to the junction with Canfield Road, then following the centre of that road to the parish boundary. The Priors Green Community Centre at Bennett Canfield is proposed to be the designated polling place for the new polling district (serving approximately 590 electors).

AUE Takeley Village: the remainder of Takeley parish not included within either of the Mole Hill Green or Takeley Priors Green polling districts, polling at the Silver Jubilee Hall, Brewers End (serving approximately 1868 electors).

55. Takeley Parish Council responded to the consultation on 11 October to confirm as follows: *'Takeley PC has agreed with your review of polling stations in that: 1. Molehill Green Village Hall should remain for the reasons described; 2. Silver Jubilee Hall, Takeley should remain and should be laid out in the same way as last time; 3. Priors Green Community Hall, Takeley – new venue – should be inspected as a new venue to relieve pressure on Silver Jubilee Hall and for the convenience of residents of Priors Green.'*
56. The Parish Council followed this up on 3 November to say that 'as previously suggested, TPC is happy to support UDC proposals re polling stations in Takeley (MHG village hall, Silver Jubilee Hall and Priors Green Community Hall. The only concern members have is the confusion that may arise because of hall names. We have (Takeley) Community Centre and Priors Green Community Hall, and Priors Green residents of Lt. Canfield will vote at Lt.

Canfield Village Hall. You will need to be as explicit as possible within the instructions for voting.'

57. Given the sensitivities and lack of certainty over parish identities that became abundantly clear during the recent parish review, it is true to say that a degree of scope for confusion exists in relation to new polling arrangements at Priors Green (as this will affect Takeley parish residents only). Great care will be taken in implementing the new arrangements.
58. **Duton Hill** – following last year’s interim review, it is **proposed** to endorse the decision made then to confirm The Three Horseshoes Public House as the polling place for Duton Hill.
59. **Margaret Roding** – as at Duton Hill, there was an interim review last year. There seems general agreement that the church is unsuitable and it is **proposed** to continue the arrangement to designate the whole of the polling district as the polling place and to seek the best polling venue that can be provided at each election.
60. **Wimbish (Carver Barracks)** – notwithstanding that voter turnout is often low at this polling place, it is **proposed** that separate facilities be maintained for the convenience of electors (many of them service personnel and their families) resident in and around the Barracks.
61. Members are asked to determine their views about the matters set out above and agree a final scheme for recommendation to the Council on 29 November. Maps will be available at the meeting indicating the new polling district boundaries being proposed and the location of the buildings discussed in the report.

### Risk Analysis

62. Please see below for the risk analysis.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
3 – the purpose of the review is to identify suitable arrangements for polling in every part of the district	2 – action may be needed to change polling places in those areas where problems are found to exist	3 – the impact of continuing to operate an unsuitable polling scheme would be significant	By full consultation and proper examination of all potential polling premises as part of the statutory review

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.