

**ELECTORAL WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 28 OCTOBER 2014 at 5pm**

Present: Councillor R Chambers – Chairman.  
Councillors J Davey, A Dean, M Lemon and J Ketteridge.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) and R Dobson (Principal Democratic Services Officer).

**EWG10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rose.

**EWG11 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2014 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**EWG12 POLLING DISTRICT REVIEW – FINAL PROPOSALS FOR REVISED SCHEME**

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the final stage consultation had now closed. All further representations had been received and circulated to members together with the site visit reports and the revised scheme proposals. He reminded members of the specific definitions and elements for a polling district review, and the fact that the revised scheme would incorporate the new ward boundary changes, which would apply at the elections in May 2015.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the regulations stated that the polling place was meant to be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they would be able to reach the polling station. This requirement could mean in some cases where polling arrangements would only be feasible if a certain part of a building were used that the scheme should be specific. A further requirement was that the total number of electors per polling district should not usually exceed 2,500. There were some instances where certain specific factors operated against compliance with that rule, so the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager would give full explanations where this was the case.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager set out the next steps, in that once the scheme was adopted it would be published in full on the website together with a statement of reasons. After 11 November there could be no elections held and the new scheme would be reflected in the electoral register to be published on 1 December. The scheme would then operate for the next five years, and not just for the elections in May 2015. Whilst the proposed scheme included information to signpost areas where due to new development there could be a reason to consider an interim review, the scheme would be intended to operate for the next five years.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager referred to the site visit reports which had been carried out. He said not every building had been inspected on this occasion. All buildings had undergone detailed inspection by external consultants in the past for a previous review and in most cases those arrangements had not changed. Site visits this time had been carried out in relation to polling places affected by boundary changes; where there were particular problems with the existing location; and at locations suggested by any party or where officers considered it necessary to compare locations. The factors for suitability of polling places which had been taken into account were location, accessibility and facilities. All inspections had been measured against the criteria explained in the appendices.

Members considered the revised polling scheme in full, with particular regard to proposals for changes, as set out in the revised scheme and accompanying site visit reports. Members considered each proposal and agreed all recommendations made, other than where two options were proposed in relation to arrangements for Audley South, in respect of which a decision to recommend one option was made, as minuted below.

Regarding Saffron Walden Audley ward, Audley South polling district, the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the electorate for this polling district was close to 2,500 electors. It was good practice to provide a second polling station for an electorate greater than 1,500 otherwise there could be undue complaints and difficulties. It was necessary to designate a room of a suitable size to accommodate two polling stations. It was not feasible to use a mobile unit for this election.

There had been suggestions to consider three alternative locations. The report set out reasons why the offices at Uttlesford District Council should be discounted. Members were therefore asked to consider two alternative polling places, which were locations situated at the Friends' School and at the County High School.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager drew members' attention to assessments of the access, location and facilities at each site which were set out in the report and site visit reports. He referred members to supplementary representations received from Councillor Rolfe and from the head teacher at The County High School, opposing the designation of the polling place at The County High School. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said closure of a school was not a factor which was relevant for the purposes of a review of polling places.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the Friends' School was not located in the polling district, as legislation permitted a polling place to be outside a polling district in certain circumstances, so in the past because of a lack of suitable polling places the decision had been taken to use this location. However, he said the Friends' School was only feasible as a polling place if its Assembly Hall was available, and therefore if this location were designated as the polling place, the scheme should specify that room. The Friends' School had always maintained a friendly and helpful attitude, but on at least three recent

occasions the Returning Officer had been denied use of the Assembly Hall. On those occasions the School had made available either its car park on which a mobile unit had been sited, or the Music Room. Neither facility was suitable for use as a double polling station.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the site inspection at The County High School had assessed its Gymnasium within the Sports Hall complex as suitable for designation as a polling place, taking into account all factors. The dimensions of the Gym would accommodate two polling stations. There was no great difference in the distance to either of the two schools for the majority of electors in the polling district.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager referred members to the detailed assessments set out in the reports. He said members had to consider a fine balance between the two suggested locations.

Councillor Dean said the Returning Officer had a legal right to use The County High School, but not the Friends' School. It was a matter for the head's judgment whether to close the school. It was feasible to use the lower part of the school site with suitable signposting and provision to confine electors to that area. The rest of the site should be unaffected.

Councillor Chambers asked about car parking.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the Returning Officer had the right to require closure of part of the car park at The County High School if it was designated the polling place.

Councillor Ketteridge said there was an argument for retaining the Friends' School Assembly Hall as the polling place, as electors were used to it. People tended not to like change, and both sites were on a par. The County High School site suffered from gridlocked traffic at certain times of the day, whereas the new traffic lights near the Friends' School were working well.

Councillor Chambers agreed that people did not like change, but that if designated, The County High School should remain the polling place for the next five years and people would get used to it.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said he had also looked at the Sports Hall at the Friends' School, but it was not very suitable due to issues of access.

Councillor Dean asked about parking at the Friends' School. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the School stayed open on polling day, and made parking available.

Councillor Lemon said as a former chairman of the board of governors of The County High School he would not wish to see the School close for polling. Otherwise he would be content with the designation of the Gymnasium.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said some schools which were already used as polling places did close, although these were primary schools.

Councillor Dean said it seemed possible for The County High School to be kept open during polling.

Councillor Chambers agreed, but said congestion was possibly an issue.

Councillor Dean said those dropping off children would be likely to be able to cast their ballot at the same time.

Councillor Ketteridge said he was concerned that the School clearly felt strongly opposed to designation as a polling place. The School had provided parking for various community events such as the Olympic Torch event. The relationship between the School and the Council should be taken into account.

The Chief Executive said the provision of parking for community events was entirely separate from the democratic process of a polling district review.

Councillor Davey proposed that the recommendation be approved to designate the Gymnasium at The County High School as the polling place for Audley South. The proposal was supported by Councillors Chambers, Davey and Dean, and opposed by Councillor Lemon, with Councillor Ketteridge abstaining from the decision.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager referred to a representation received from the Liberal Democrat group regarding a suggestion for “subdivision” of larger urban wards. He explained that the practice of splitting the electoral register for a polling district enabled consistency in managing electorate numbers.

Regarding Saffron Walden Shire ward, Shire North polling district, the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the proposals for the polling boundary description took into account approved development on the Manor Oak site. At present it was impossible to split the ward satisfactorily, so the recommendation was to make the boundary run along the centre of Mount Pleasant Road and then Peaslands Road to the junction of that road with Thaxted Road. The R A Butler School was the current polling place, and following site inspection, it was recommended that the School Hall be specified as the polling place.

Members agreed a recommendation to change the polling place for Shire South from Golden Acre Community Centre to The School Hall at the Katherine Semar Junior School for the reasons set out in the report.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager set out the proposals for Stansted. He explained the boundary changes which were proposed, with changes to the names of the polling districts as described in the report.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager referred to representations received from Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council, expressing the view that the

primary schools should not be used as closure was disruptive to the students' education. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said representations had been received too late for any further site visits to be scheduled. Site visits in Stansted had been carried out at the Peter Kirk Centre, the Youth Centre, the Mountfitchet Romeera Leisure Centre and St Mary's Primary School at Forest Hall Park. Recommendations as set out in the revised final scheme had been made.

Councillor Dean asked questions regarding the use of double polling stations. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said double polling stations were commonly used where the electorate exceeded 1,500. St Mary's Primary School would readily accommodate two polling stations.

Councillor Dean said the concern of the parish council was the potential loss of connectivity for electors who would have previously used a bus to travel to the Youth Centre. This could be problematic for some electors travelling between the Mountfitchet Estate and Foresthall Park.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said there was a footpath between the two areas at Greys Close. The parking provision at St Mary's Primary School was more than adequate, and the School would almost certainly be closed on polling day so congestion should not be a problem.

Councillor Dean said there were still houses coming onstream at Foresthall Park.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the remaining development at Foresthall Park could be managed within the proposed scheme for the next five years.

Members agreed the proposals in relation to Stansted.

The proposals relating to Thaxted were considered and agreed with no further comments.

AGREED to recommend to Full Council the adoption of the final scheme, as set out in the appendix, and as agreed in relation to the designation of The Gymnasium at the County High School, Audley End Road to replace the Assembly Hall at the Friends' School, Mount Pleasant Road as the polling place for Audley South.