

CORPORATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Corporate Affairs Committee was held on 19 December 2007.

PRESENT: Councillor Clark (Chair), Councillors Elder, McPartland, Porley and Rehman.

OFFICIALS: J Bennington, C Davies, R G Long and R Painter.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Jones and Mrs H Pearson.

**** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES – SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Affairs Committee held on 26 September 2007 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

Reference was made to the appointments, which had made in respect of North Ormesby Primary School for which there had only been one vacancy. With the consent of those involved it had been agreed that appointments for a four-term of office with effect from 1 January 2008 be made as follows: -

North Ormesby Primary School	Councillor Lancaster
Brambles Primary School	Councillor Jones.

NOTED AND APPROVED

POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS REVIEW

The Members' Office Manager submitted a report on the review of Polling Districts and Polling Places as required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

The aim of the review was to seek to ensure that all electors had such reasonable facilities for voting as practicable in the circumstances. The Council had to ensure that so far was reasonable and practicable the polling places were accessible to all electors including those who were disabled.

In view of difficulties of finding polling places of optimum choice the Commission indicates that often a balance had to be made between the quality in terms of access and the facilities of a building and the distances between the residents and that building compared to other options for polling places.

In accordance with the regulations it was confirmed that a public notice had been published in the Evening Gazette and notices posted in various locations in Middlesbrough as indicated in Appendix 1 of the report.

In line with the recommendations of the Electoral Commission, letters and questionnaires had been sent to all local MPs, Middlesbrough Councillors and Election Agents. Local disability organisations and black and ethnic groups had also been consulted the full list of which was shown in Appendix 1 of the report.

The Voiceover Panel, the Council's citizen panel had been sent a questionnaire exploring the issues around local elections, polling places and polling districts.

In accordance with the requirements the views of the Returning Officer had also been sought.

It was confirmed that consideration had been given to each Ward, its polling districts and polling places, in line with the legislative requirements and taking into account the responses to the consultation.

It was noted that the Returning Officer had requested that as part of the exercise all polling places with a turnout of 15% or less in the May 2007 election should be identified and consideration given to the future viability of such polling places.

A complete list of Polling Districts and Polling Stations was shown at Appendix 2 of the report, which included details of the number of eligible electors for each Polling District and the number of voters and percentage turnout for the May 2007, elections. Maps of the Polling Districts as used for the May 2007 elections were shown in Appendix 4 of the report submitted.

The Committee considered each Ward in particular the responses received in respect of the current and possible future arrangements.

Middlehaven Ward:

A request had been received to enable residents in the area of Pearl Street, Emerald Street, Ruby Street, Amber Street and Garnet Street to use the Polling Station at Grange Road as this was considered to be considerably closer than the existing Polling Station at Abingdon Road Polling Station. The reduced number of electors in Polling District AA as a result of demolition was noted.

It was confirmed that no representations had been received from the Ward Councillors.

Ayresome Ward:

It was confirmed that the Harehills Road Youth & Community Centre, which housed the Polling Station for Polling District BB, was to be demolished in the future.

It was noted that Ayresome Ward covered a large geographical area. Polling District BB had certain roads to the North of the District that were not easily accessible to the southern area where the Polling Station was presently located.

It was suggested that a Polling Station should be established at Archibald School or in a mobile station to cater for the Bell Street, Ayresome Green Lane, Barnaby Avenue, Liverton Avenue and Ashton Way area.

University Ward:

It was noted that although Polling District DA had a 10% turnout in respect of votes cast at the Polling Station the Ward had one of the highest levels of postal voting in the Town.

It was pointed out that for the first time the former Clinic at Woodlands Road/Clarendon Road junction had been used as a Polling Station although this was located in the Middlehaven Ward. Although the respective Ward Councillors had not responded to the consultation exercise a subsequent informal request had been received from a Councillor to try and identify a Polling Station within the Ward.

Members were advised that initial examination of the area had not identified any obvious suitable buildings owned by the Council but it was suggested that further work be undertaken including an approach to Teesside University.

North Ormesby and Brambles Farm Ward:

Consideration had been given to the location of the Polling Station in Polling District ED at Brambles Farm Community Centre, Marshall Avenue which was centrally located. It was suggested that a better site was not likely to be found.

Linthorpe Ward:

Reference was made to comments received regarding issues of heating, access and lack of mobile phone signal at Linthorpe Road Primary School. The Committee was also advised of comments received from two of the Ward Councillors. Parents of children attending Linthorpe Primary School had objected to the use of the school as a Polling Station.

It was reported that there were no Polling Stations in the east of the Ward, which was some distance, from the two Polling Stations located on Cambridge Road. The difficulties faced by residents of that part of the Ward were recognised.

It was also noted that north of the Ward (the old hospital site) was being developed as housing and there was no Polling Station in that part of the Ward.

Members were advised that initial work had failed to identify any obvious buildings suitable for use as Polling Stations. The 'Barnes Annex' had been suggested but it was located in the neighbouring Park Ward and its availability was uncertain in any case.

A suggestion was also made for the possibility of using the Masonic Hall, Roman Road as a Polling Station be explored.

Park Ward:

Reference was made to comments made regarding the disabled access including an undulating grassed area at the bottom of the ramp.

The Committee was advised that Officers had been unable to identify any suitable buildings in the area in which to locate a Polling Station.

It was acknowledged that mobile stations were not ideal but were the only option in many areas of the Town. It was recognised that Mobile Stations had limitations especially in respect of access by users of electric wheelchairs that had a large wheelbase and turning circle than manual wheelchairs.

Clairville Ward:

In relation to Polling District HB the Grove Hill Youth and Community Centre was considered to be reasonably sited toward the centre of the Polling District with good accessibility. It was considered unlikely that a better alternative site would be found to accommodate a Polling Station.

Although comments had been made regarding problems of access in respect of the Mobile Station at Kildale Road it was confirmed that no obvious buildings in Polling District HC that might be suitable and available for use as a Polling Station.

Pallister Ward:

In response to a comment received regarding wheelchair accessibility at a polling booth in Charlbury Road Community Centre it was confirmed that this would be rectified.

In respect of the low turnout of 14% in Polling Districts IA and IC it was reported that both had Polling Stations reasonably sited toward the centre of the Polling District and both with good accessibility.

Members were advised that it would be difficult to identify any locations in such Polling Districts that would be any more suitable as Polling Stations than the current arrangements.

Thorntree Ward:

Since the access to Middlesbrough Teaching Learning Centre had been changed and the entrance from Tranmere Avenue had been closed there was a need to clarify with the managers

at MTLC of pedestrian access could be facilitated from Tranmere Road, otherwise the suitability of MTLC as a Polling Station might be in doubt.

In respect of the low turnout, the Polling Station in Polling District JA, Thorntree Community Centre, Birkhall Road was considered to be centrally located and in an accessible building. Although the Polling Station in Polling District JC was situated at the southern end of the district there were no readily identifiable alternatives that could be used as a Polling Station.

Acklam Ward:

In response to comments received regarding the lack of insufficient space at Acklam Branch Library it was confirmed that the situation would continue to be reviewed for suitability.

Beechwood Ward:

It was reported that the Polling Station serving Polling District LB (Grove Hill Methodist Church, Marton Road) had previously been sited at Beechwood School where the turnout had been 11.42%. It was confirmed that there were no readily identifiable alternatives to the two Polling Stations within Polling District LB.

The Ward was divided into four Polling Districts the eligible electors in each being as follows: -

LA	896
LB	1543
LC	645
LD	855.

It was suggested that consideration be given to merging Polling Districts LC and LD although this would be dependent on whether there was easy pedestrian access between the Polling Districts.

Park End Ward:

In response to comments received regarding the access to St Pius X RC Primary School it was confirmed that the re-siting of the entrance via the front of the building would be explored with the head teacher.

In respect of the low turnout, it was considered that the Polling Station in Polling District MA was reasonably located toward the centre of the polling District and in an accessible building. Members were advised that there were no identifiably alternatives that could be used as a Polling Station.

Beckfield Ward:

In response to comments received regarding the siting of the Polling Station within Southland's Leisure Centre, Ormesby Road it was confirmed that the Centre Manager would be contacted to explore the possibility of using the old canteen area as a Polling Station in the future.

Kader Ward:

In response to comments received regarding disability access at Kader Primary School, Staindrop Drive, it was confirmed that the site would be inspected to see whether the internal layout could be arranged in order to provide full disability access.

Ladgate Ward:

It was noted that the previous use of a mobile station at Marton Manor Primary School was a temporary arrangement and the intention was to move the Polling Station back inside the school once the building works had been completed.

Stainton and Thornton Ward:

In response to comments received regarding the lack of a ramp for wheelchair access at Hemlington Hall Primary School, Briscoe Way, it was confirmed that a DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) Audit had been undertaken by Children Families and Learning Department. Accessibility would be checked prior to any future elections.

Reference was made to a major residential development planned on the Hemlington Grange site. Once building commenced and prior to the next election the development would be reviewed in respect of Polling Districts and Polling Places. It was envisaged that a new Polling Station would be required as the existing Polling Stations were considered to be too far removed from the site of the development.

Hemlington Ward:

In response to comments received regarding confusion over access to Viewley Hill Primary School it was confirmed that the wording of the poll cards at future elections would be checked to ensure that they accurately reflected the access point to the Polling Station which was via the Surestart premises on Cass House Road.

Coulby Newham Ward:

Reference was made to problems, which had been experienced by people in finding the Polling Station at Lingfield Ash Meeting Hall and the very limited parking due to the extent of resident parking.

Although the problems were acknowledged it was suggested that the use of a mobile station would increase access problems and no alternative site had been identified in the area that would be suitable to use as a Polling Station.

It was confirmed that no comments had been received regarding the current arrangements in respect of the Gresham, Marton Ward, Marton West Ward and Nunthorpe Ward.

ORDERED as follows: -

1. That taking into account that no comments had been received regarding current arrangements no changes be made in respect of the polling districts and polling stations in respect of Gresham, Brookfield, Ladgate, Marton, Marton West and Nunthorpe Wards.
2. That taking into account that previous arrangements were considered to be satisfactory and that no representations had been submitted from the Ward Councillors no changes be made to the current polling stations in respect of the Middlehaven Ward.
3. That in relation to the Ayresome Ward further work be carried out to determine the timescales for the demolition of the Harehills Road Youth and Community Centre, and that depending on the outcome, further consideration be given as to how best to serve Polling District BB in the future, possibly a Polling Station in Bell Street.
4. That further work be undertaken in respect of the University Ward and in particular Teesside University be contacted to try and identify a suitable location for a Polling Station within Polling District DA.
5. That in view of the lack of available and suitable improved sites/premises for a polling station no changes be made to current arrangements in respect of North Ormesby and Brambles Farm, Clairville, Pallister, Park End and Coulby Newham Wards.

6. That in terms of the Linthorpe Ward:
 - a) an approach be made to Joint Strategy Unit to try and establish the population estimate for the old hospital site;
 - b) consideration be given to dividing Polling District FA into two separate districts, thus giving four polling districts in the Ward;
 - c) consideration be given to exploring the possibility of establishing a new Polling Station in Sacred Heart School to serve the north of the Ward;
 - d) further work be undertaken to explore possible Polling Station sites in the east of the Ward including the Masonic Hall, Roman Road as an alternative to Baptist Church Hall, Cambridge Road.
7. That Officers together with Streetscene Officers examine the location of the mobile at Phillida Terrace and Cumberland Road in Park Ward prior to future elections to ensure that the Mobile was sited in the optimum position for access.
8. That in respect of the Thorntree Ward clarification be sought from MTLC as to whether pedestrian access could be facilitated from Tranmere Road.
9. That the suitability of Acklam Branch Library, Acklam Road in the Acklam Ward continues to be reviewed.
10. That in respect of the Beckfield Ward the possibility of using the old canteen area at Southlands Leisure Centre, Ormesby Road, as a polling station be explored.
11. That in respect of the Kader Ward, Kader Primary School, Staindrop Drive be inspected to see whether the internal layout could be arranged in order to provide full disability access.
12. That the reports submitted in relation to Stainton and Thornton Ward and Hemlington Ward regarding future requirements be noted.
13. That further investigation be undertaken to explore the viability of merging Polling Districts LC and LD in respect of the Beechwood Ward.
14. That the findings of the Voiceover Panel in respect of election matters be reported to the Corporate Affairs Committee in early 2008 and be taken into account as part of the ongoing review of Polling Stations.