

Report to General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

22 February 2021

Subject:	Changes to Polling Places for the Local, Police and Crime Commissioner and Combined Authority Mayoral Elections on 6 May 2021
Director:	Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, Surjit Tour
Contact Officer:	Electoral Services Manager, Tracey Hurst tracey_hurst@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations


- 1.1 That approval is given to changes to particular Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Blackheath, Langley, Smethwick, Soho and Victoria and West Bromwich Central Wards for the Local, Police and Crime Commissioner and Combined Authority Mayoral Elections on 6 May 2021, as set out in the Appendix to this report.
- 1.2 To agree to delegate authority for making any future changes to Polling Places as a result of unforeseen safety concerns, to the Returning Officer, subject to consultation with relevant Ward members.
- 1.3 That the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer implement the changes recommended in this report.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Council has been informed that a number of venues used as Polling Stations for the most recent elections in the Borough are not available for use for the Local, Police and Crime Commissioner and Combined Authority Mayoral elections in May 2021, or indeed, in other cases, not available to be used for any future elections, at all.
- 2.2. This report deals with this information and recommends suitable alternative places in which electors in relevant districts in the Borough can exercise their right to vote, in person.
- 2.3. In view of current concerns surrounding Covid-19, and the sudden, potential disruption of plans to the use of particular Polling Stations, it is being recommended that approval for making any “late” changes to Polling Places or Stations is delegated to the Returning Officer, subject to consultation with relevant Ward members.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Strong resilient communities The recommendations detailed in this report will enable voters living in Sandwell opportunities to engage in the democratic process by being able to vote, in person, at their appropriate Polling Station. Electors will continue to have the right to apply to vote by post or by proxy too.
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983 states the authority must designate the polling places for the polling districts in its area. Each polling district must have a polling place and it is the duty of the Council to designate polling places and keep them under review. The Council is required, so far as is reasonable and practicable to designate polling places which are accessible to disabled electors.



- 4.2 Paragraph 25 of Schedule 1 to the RPA 1983 states that the Returning Officer must provide a sufficient number of polling stations, shall allocate electors to those polling stations, and those polling stations shall be in the polling place for that district.
- 4.3 The appendix to this report sets out the details of existing Polling Places that are unavailable for use on the 6 May 2021 along with the alternative proposals and recommendations.
- 4.4 The RPA also requires local authorities to, periodically, conduct and complete a review of Polling Districts and Polling Places. The next compulsory review of all polling places must be completed between October 2023 and January 2025.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 As members will appreciate, where a previously-used Polling Station/Place is not able to be used for a forthcoming election, the council still has a legal obligation to identify and find suitable alternative, venues in which voters can exercise their right to vote, in person, should they wish to do so.
- 5.2. In making the recommendations outlined in this report, officers have considered a number of alternative sites in each of the affected Polling districts and concluded that, for reasons based on availability, location, size and ease of access, the locations detailed in the appendix are the most suitable in each case
- 5.3. These recommendations have been shared with relevant Ward members and, in some instances, amended to produce an outcome, which, it is considered, is better for the electorate, given the above criteria.



6 Implications

Resources:	Any costs associated with making the essential changes to Polling Places/Stations are shared between the council, and the offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Combined Authority. Any expenditure needing to be incurred as a consequence of Covid-19 will be met from the dedicated emergency funding budget.
Legal and Governance:	Please see Section 4 above
Risk:	<p>The authority is obliged to make alternative provisions for voters in Wards where their Polling Station and/or Place is not available the forthcoming elections.</p> <p>The alternative venues recommended will be managed and made as safe and Covid-secure as possible, as will all other Polling Stations in the Borough.</p> <p>In the event that any further, hitherto unforeseen, changes need to be made, the recommendations in this report enable the Returning Officer and the Council to have the necessary delegated authority to effect any such changes, and thereby manage the risk.</p> <p>To minimise risk of electors going to the incorrect (i.e. “old”) Polling Station, Poll Cards will specify details of the elector’s new Polling Station, the Sandwell internet site will be updated to reflect the change and temporary signs placed at each former location, advising electors of their “new” Polling Station for these elections.</p>
Equality:	Details of the proposed recommendations have been shared, through Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations, with disability groups in the Borough.



	No objections to the recommendations have been received to date and any comments received subsequent to the production of this report will be shared verbally with members at the Committee.
Health and Wellbeing:	The recommendations contained within this report enable voters, living in Polling districts with enforced changes, to be able to vote, at a Polling Station, in person in the forthcoming elections, should they wish to do to so.
Social Value	Not applicable

7. Appendices

Recommended Polling Place and Polling Station changes for Local, Police and Crime Commissioner and Combined Authority Mayoral elections in May 2021.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1. Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations – published by the Electoral Commission.
- 8.2. Do I need to undertake a Polling District review to change polling places for local elections in 2021? – published by the Association of Electoral Administrators
- 8.3. Key Considerations for planning for the delivery of the May 2021 polls – published by the Electoral Commission

