

Report to General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

8 June 2021

Subject:	Changes to Polling Places in the Tividale ward
Director:	Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer, Surjit Tour
Contact Officer:	Electoral Services Manager, Tracey Hurst tracey_hurst@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 In view of the prescribed timescale within which the Tividale ward by-election must be held, the Committee confirms its support for the proposed changes to the Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Tividale ward as set out in the Appendix to this report.
- 1.2 Given the limited time available, the Committee notes that the Returning Officer will use his delegated powers to implement the proposed changes to the Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Tividale ward recommended in this report.


2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Following the recent, sad and untimely death of Councillor Hevican, a councillor in the Tividale ward, the Council will now be holding a by-election on 15 July 2021 to fill her vacant seat.



- 2.2. The proposed course of action relocates the sites of three existing Polling stations away from schools and means that no headteacher based in the Tividale ward will be forced to close their school because of the need to hold this by-election.
- 2.3. Against a background of a disrupted year for pupils, the recommendations contained in this report are consistent with a request made to Returning Officers, by the Department for Education and the Cabinet Office in February 2021, to minimise any further disruption to pupils' education by avoiding using schools as Polling stations, where it is practically possible to do so.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Strong resilient communities</p>
	<p>The recommendations detailed in this report will enable voters living in the Tividale ward opportunities to engage in the democratic process by being able to vote, in person, at their appropriate Polling Station, whilst enabling schools in the ward to remain open on the day of polling. Electors will continue to have the right to apply to vote by post or by proxy too.</p>

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 a desire to relocate three Polling Places to new locations in the Ward together with the rationale for seeking to make such changes.
- 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.
- 4.5 Prior to the local elections being held in May 2022, further reviews of school-based Polling stations in Sandwell will be conducted to explore the feasibility of relocating such sites to non-educational venues and thereby enable schools to remain open.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2. These recommendations have been shared with relevant Ward members and they have said:

I am happy with the change from Grace Mary and Oakham schools to Oakham Evangelical Church on City Road. I am a little concerned regarding the change from Tividale Hall Primary School to Tividale Football Club on Packwood Road. Whilst the football club is only a short distance from the school it is rather out of the way and we will need to make sure residents are fully aware of where to access the polling station. This will mean signage from the main road Regent Road not just outside the actual station.

6 Implications

Resources:	Costs associated with making the proposed changes to Polling Places/Stations will be met by the Returning Officer's budget.
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Legal and Governance:	Please see Section 4 above
Risk:	<p>As a result of the recommendations contained in this report, by enabling schools in the Tividale ward to remain open, the risk to pupils' education will be reduced.</p> <p>As was the situation in the May 2021 elections, the new, alternative venues will be managed and made as safe and Covid-secure as possible.</p> <p>To minimise risk of electors going to the incorrect (i.e. "old") Polling Station, a number of mitigations will be put in place. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poll Cards for the by-election will specify details of the elector's new Polling Station and highlight that there has been a change to the location. • Each household affected will receive a letter explaining the change and the details of their "new" polling station. • The council's website will be updated to reflect the change • Temporary signs placed at each former location, advising electors of their "new" Polling Station for these elections and along the route to the new station.
Equality:	<p>Details of the proposed recommendations have been shared, through Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations, with disability groups in the Borough.</p> <p>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.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	The recommendations contained within this report enable voters, living in the Tividale Ward 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
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7. Appendices

Recommended Polling Place and Polling Station changes for Local Borough by-election in Tividale ward.

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. Letter from the Department for Education and the Cabinet office dated 11th February 2021 entitled “Use of school buildings for polls.”

