

Minutes of General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

8 June 2021 at 6.00pm
Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House

Present: Councillor Dhallu (Chair)
Councillor Kaur (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Allcock, Allen and K Singh.

Also present: Tracey Hurst – Electoral Services Manager;
Rebecca Maher – Head of Finance and Acting S151
Officer; Trisha Newton – Senior Democratic Services
Officer.

9/21 **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies for absence were received.

10/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

11/21 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 19
March 2021 be agreed as a correct record.



Changes to Polling Places in the Tividale ward

Following the recent, sad and untimely death of Councillor Hevican, the Council was now to hold a by-election on 15 July 2021 in Tividale ward.

In view of the prescribed timescale within which the Tividale ward by-election must be held, the Committee was asked to confirm its support for the proposed changes to the Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Tividale ward.

It was proposed to relocate the sites of three existing polling stations away from schools, so that no school in the Tividale ward would be forced to close to hold this by-election.

This recommendation was consistent with a request made 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.

Alternative locations had been found. Oakham Evangelical Church on City Road was identified as substitute for existing polling stations at Grace Mary and Oakham schools (districts TIA and TID). Tividale Football Club on Packwood Road could replace Tividale Hall Primary School (district TIB).

The proposals had been shared with Tividale ward members.

In response to questions and comments, the following was noted:

- No complaints were received following changes to polling stations for the May 2021 elections and turnout at the new locations was on average higher than at previous locations;
- 12 complaints were received from parents and teachers about school closures for the purpose of holding this election;



- For the polling station at the football club on Packwood Road, additional signage would be put in place on Regent Road so that residents are aware of how to access the polling station from the main road;
- Discussions would be held with the football club to put shutters around the polling station so that social function rooms (where alcohol is consumed) would not be visible to the electorate on the polling day;
- Schools which had their polling stations relocated would inform parents of the new polling station locations.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the changes to the Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Tivdale ward, as set out in Appendix 1, be approved;
- (2) that, given the limited time available, the Returning Officer would use his delegated powers to implement the proposed changes to the Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Tivdale Ward.

13/21

Admission Agreement to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme relating to services provided to Hargate Lane Primary School

Approval was sought for a Pension Fund Admission Agreement to be signed and executed to enable five catering staff employed by Hargate Primary School, who had been transferred from the Council to Aspens Services Ltd, to continue with participation in the West Midlands Pension Fund Scheme.

In response to questions and comments, the following was noted:



- there was a noticeable and growing trend of schools transferring their catering, cleaning and other staff to private companies;
- Fair Funding Scheme conditions required schools to notify the local authority before transfers were made but, in many cases, schools had failed to do so. Acting S151 Officer undertook to liaise with officers to raise awareness of this issue;
- There was no financial risk for the Council, and no financial gain or loss for the school from the pension scheme transfer;
- Transfers to private employers might involve changes to terms of conditions of employees transferred, hence it was paramount that schools were in contact with the local authority before making their decision.

Agreed to recommend to the Council:-

- (1) that approval be granted for the signing and execution of the Pension Fund Admission Agreement which would allow catering staff working at Hargate Primary School to continue to participate in the Local Government Pension Scheme as a result of a TUPE transfer to Aspens Services Ltd;
- (2) that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to sign the Admission Agreement on behalf of the Council and for the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer to make arrangements for the document to be executed under deed of seal.

Meeting ended at 6.39pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk



Appendix 1

Proposed changes to Polling stations in the Tividale ward

- 1.1 As members may be aware, three of the five Polling Places in the Tividale ward are primary schools (i.e. Tividale Hall, Oakham and Grace Mary) and, because of the recent Local, West Midlands Mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections they were forced to close to pupils on 6th May to accommodate voting.
- 1.2. To try to avoid similar closures occurring when the by-election is held, it is proposed that alternative venues are used and thereby allow all three schools to remain open to pupils on the day of the poll.
- 1.3. Following a review of available premises in the Ward, the following Stations/Places are proposed for the forthcoming elections.

Polling district: TIA – Currently Oakham Primary School

It is proposed that the Station is re-located to Oakham Evangelical Church, City Road, Tividale (see also TID below).

Polling district TIB – Currently Tividale Hall Primary School

It is proposed that this double station is re-located to Tividale Football Club, Packwood Road, Tividale.

Polling district TIC – Currently Oakham Library

No change proposed

Polling district TID – Currently Grace Mary Primary School

It is proposed that the Station is re-located to Oakham Evangelical Church, City Road, Tividale (see also TIA above)

Polling district TIE – Currently Residents' lounge, Darley House

No change proposed

- 1.4. As members will see, it is being proposed that the Polling Stations at Oakham Primary School and Grace Mary Primary School are



re-located to Oakham Evangelical Church, thus it being a double station.

The church is situated mid-way between the two existing Polling stations (0.3 miles from Oakham Primary and 0.2 miles from Grace Mary Primary) and, following a site visit, is considered to have all the necessary attributes necessary for a Polling station (e.g. off-street parking, situated on level ground, wheelchair accessible, and would allow for a one-way system in/out of the building to be put in place, if necessary).

Tividale Football Club is situated in Packwood Road, 0.4 miles from the existing polling double station of Tividale Hall Primary. Again, following a site visit, it is considered the proposed venue would prove to be a suitable site for a double polling station.

Officials from both the church and the Football Club have indicated a willingness for their premises to become Polling Stations.

Subject to an evaluation of the effectiveness of the two new, proposed Polling stations after the forthcoming by-election, it will be recommended that both venues remain as polling stations for future elections too.

