

Report of	Meeting	Date
Returning Officer (Introduced by Executive Member (Resources))	Council	Tuesday, 16 November 2021

Polling Station Review

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Not applicable
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Purpose of the Report

- To consider the proposed recommendations relating to changes in polling stations, which if approved, will be implemented at the next scheduled election on 5 May 2022.

Recommendations to Council

The Returning Officer would like members to approve the following recommendations –

- Transfer the polling station register for AA07 (Anglezarke) from St Barnabas Church Hall to Rivington Parish Church Hall, Horrobin Lane, Rivington.
- Permit voters at the three properties at the end of Lodge Bank to use Brinscall Hillside Methodist Church Hall as their polling station for future elections.
- ~~Relocate the existing polling station at St Laurence's Primary School to Chorley Unitarian Chapel Hall, Park Street, Chorley (Chorley North West ward). To continue using St Laurence's CE Primary School as a polling station and increase the amount of signage displayed on polling day.~~
- Relocate the existing polling station at St Chad's Primary School to St Chad's Parish Hall, Town Lane (Chorley North East ward)
- Transfer voters from St Mary's Parish Centre to **Chorley Trinity Methodist Church** (Chorley North West ward).

Reasons for recommendations

2. To comply with legislation, improve efficiency and voter experience.

Other options considered and rejected

3. To keep the polling stations as they were for the election held in May 2021. The polling stations used at the previous election were allocated and based on changes to borough wards and polling districts following an electoral review. However, as you will read later in this report, due to a recent survey of elected members and issues highlighted by other means the Returning Officer felt that to comply with legislation, improve efficiency and voter experience that changes were necessary.

Corporate priorities

4. The report relates to the following corporate priorities: (please bold all those applicable):

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all		A strong local economy	
Clean, safe and healthy communities		An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	X

Background to the report

5. Each year it is customary for the Returning Officer to review the success of the polling stations used at that year's election. This year was particularly important to do so following the first election on new ward boundaries and changes to polling districts which were made as a direct result of the 2019 Electoral Review of Chorley Council.
6. To gain a greater understanding on the suitability of polling stations used, members of the council were invited to complete a short survey between 8 October and 29 October 2021. The survey consisted of questions about the suitability of premises for the use as a polling station, safety measures implemented to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and the ability of polling station staff used. In total nine members responded to the survey.
7. In addition to the survey, the Returning Officer has also received feedback by other means which needed to be addressed. The results of the survey and the additional feedback have been considered jointly in this report and are detailed below.

Polling Stations

8. In total there of 52 venues hosting polling stations across the borough. Listed below are the polling stations which were highlighted as action that needed to be taken.

Polling Station Premise	Comments	Returning Officer recommendations
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<p>Lancaster Way Community Centre (Buckshaw & Whittle ward)</p>	<p>This venue was highlighted via the member survey as being suitable premises for a polling station but required more signage at the entrance.</p>	<p>This venue was tried for the first time this year and the fact is has been highlighted as being suitable is very positive. Additional signage to be provided to ensure that the entrance is more obvious for future elections.</p>
<p>St James' CE Primary School (Chorley East ward)</p>	<p>The member survey highlighted this premises as potentially having a second entrance providing access to those living on Crosse Hall Lane as it would be a benefit for some voters and potentially increase the voter turnout.</p>	<p>The polling station is situated in the school's nursery the entrance to which is on Devonport Way. To have a second entrance from Crosse Hall Lane would require access right through the school grounds. This would be potentially an extremely difficult safeguarding issue forcing the school to close on polling days. This polling station venue is well established and has not previously been highlighted as a cause for concern.</p> <p>However, additional signage, including directional arrows will be placed (if permitted by the school) on the railings of Crosse Hall Lane, to remind residents to vote.</p>
<p>St Barnabas Church Hall (Chorley North East ward)</p>	<p>The electoral review altered the ward boundaries in which the polling district AA07 (the area of Anglezarke) is situated. As a result, the polling station which electors in this area historically attended to vote, St Barnabas Church, is no longer in the same borough ward.</p> <p>The legislation does allow location of a polling place outside a polling district* but only under special circumstances, for which there are none considered in this case.</p> <p>The member survey highlighted that residents of Blackburn Road, Heapey, which is directly across the road from the polling station at St Chad's RC Primary School were not best pleased to have to go to St Barnabas's, across the A674 and uphill.</p>	<p>To transfer electors listed on polling district register AA07 from St Barnabas Church to Rivington Parish Church Hall which is now situated in the same borough ward and already has an established polling station.</p> <p>Voters will have to travel a little further to vote at the proposed polling station, but it is noted that voters would probably require transport to either polling station, it is therefore considered that the extra distance to travel is negligible.</p> <p>This particular group of properties related to the old polling district register 19C which due to the electoral review and consequential boundary changes has now been merged with what was the larger polling district of 19B bringing the parish of Heapey together in the new polling district CHNE02. Most of the voters on this new register (those on</p>

		<p>the old 19B register) had historically voted at St Barnabas.</p> <p>It is right that these voters are allocated to St Barnabas as those who vote at St Chard's Primary School are based in a different parish and are therefore in different polling districts*.</p>
<p>Heapy and Wheelton Village Hall (Chorley North East ward)</p>	<p>The member survey highlighted that voters living in three properties situated towards the bottom end of Lodge Bank had not been able to vote at their usual polling station, Brinscall Hillside Methodist Church in May, and instead had to attend Heapy and Wheelton Village Hall. This polling station is a long way around by road from the properties near Drakeshead fishing lodge.</p>	<p>This was an historical error that was corrected by software used as part of the electoral review. Three properties on Lodge Bank are in a different parish to those who vote at Brinscall Hillside Methodist Church Hall, and as such in a different polling district*. This technically means residents living at these three properties should not be voting at this polling station.</p> <p>However, due to the fact that there is no direct route to the polling station, voters would have to travel a considerable distance to vote (passing Brinscall Hillside Methodist Church Hall on the way), the parish council elections being in different election cycles, it is considered that there is enough special circumstances to warrant voters in this area to continue to vote at Brindle Hillside Methodist Church Hall.</p>
<p>St Chad's RC Primary School (Chorley North East ward)</p>	<p>The headteacher has asked that the polling station be moved from this venue citing safeguarding risks and the disruption caused to the school as being a major factor for their request.</p>	<p>That the polling station be relocated to St Chad's Church Hall, additional signage, and directional arrows to be placed at the entrance. At the first election, additional signage (if permitted) will also be placed on the school railings at St Chad's RC Primary School. Poll cards would also display the new polling station address.</p>
<p>St Laurence's CE Primary School (Chorley North West ward)</p>	<p>The headteacher has asked that the polling station be moved from this venue citing safeguarding risks and the disruption caused to the school as being a major factor for their request.</p>	<p>The Chorley Unitarian Chapel Hall on Park Street had been considered as a potential venue to replace St Laurence's CE Primary School as a polling station. However, due to the lack of suitable car parking at the Chapel Hall which may deter some voters from attending the polling</p>

	<p>This venue was also highlighted as a premise that required extra signage, as part of the member survey.</p>	<p>station, it is recommended that St Laurence's CE Primary School is still the preferred venue, of the two premises for polling station use.</p> <p>Additional signage to be displayed at St Laurence's CE Primary School to assist voters locate the polling station.</p> <p>That the polling station be relocated to Chorley Unitarian Chapel Hall on Park Street, with extra signage and directional arrows to be placed at the entrance to the road. At the first election, additional signage (if permitted) will also be placed on the school railings at St Laurence's CE Primary School. Poll cards would also display the new polling station address.</p>
<p>St Mary's Parish Centre (Chorley North West ward)</p>	<p>Since the electoral review in 2019, the polling stations located at St George's Church Hall and St Mary's Parish Centre fall within the same polling district boundary. As only one polling station is required, it is proposed that the polling stations be consolidated.</p>	<p>To transfer existing electors from St Mary's Parish Centre to St George's Church Hall. St George's Church Hall has been highlighted as the preferred polling station location as there are other polling stations in the same proximity to St Mary's Parish Centre and could confuse voters.</p>

** Representation of the People Act 1983 (Sec 18B)(d) states that the polling place for a polling district must be in an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district.;*

15. Other polling stations highlighted in the survey for being appropriate venues were Fairview Youth & Community Centre (Adlington & Anderton), Heskin Village Hall (Eccleston, Heskin & Charnock Richard), St Joseph's Parish Centre (Chorley North & Astley ward) and the Talbot Inn Public House (Euxton). The latter two polling stations were of particular interest to the Returning Officer as both premises were used for the first time at the last elections in May.

16. When considering the Returning Officer's recommendations, members are reminded that following the electoral review the borough wards have reduced from 20 wards to 14 much larger wards. The electoral review did not take into consideration county boundaries or parish boundaries (with the exception of Clayton le Woods and Euxton parish councils). As a consequence, the new borough wards cross, in some cases, multiple divisional and parish boundaries which have created different polling districts. The impact on this for voters means that not all voters will be voting at the same polling station they have done previously and in some cases the nearest polling station to their home may not necessarily be the polling station that they need to vote at.

Climate change and air quality

9. The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

Equality and diversity

10. The existing polling stations highlighted in this report have already been checked and adapted appropriately for access.
11. The polling stations proposed to replace St Chad's RC Primary School and St Laurence's CE Primary School would be new premises. However, both premises are used by the public for events and/or meetings and an initial visit to the venues found little adaption required. If these premises are approved a further inspection will be made and equipment sources if required, to provide access.

Risk

12. The introduction of new polling stations and where signage is lacking could potentially cause voters not to vote. To mitigate this risk all polling station addresses are printed on poll cards and in the weeks prior to the election social media will remind voters to check their poll cards to make sure they know where their polling station is. Additional signage will be provided to polling station staff to be displayed in appropriate locations.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

17. There are no significant financial implications of these changes.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

18. Clearly it is important that the polling stations we use in elections are reviewed periodically as to assessing their continuing suitability. That is the basic premise of this report. There is nothing of concern from a Monitoring Officer perspective.

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