

Report of	Meeting	Date
Returning Officer Introduced by (Executive Member (Resources))	Council	19 September 2023

Polling station relocation

Is this report confidential?	No
------------------------------	----

Is this decision key?	No
-----------------------	----

Purpose of the Report

- To inform members of a request for the relocation of polling station 31 in the Chorley North and Astley ward.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that polling station 31 which relates to polling district CHN&A04 currently hosted at St Peter's CE Primary School, Eaves Lane, Chorley be relocated to St Joseph's Parish Centre, Harpers Lane, Chorley.

Reasons for recommendations

- Due to increasing pupil numbers, the headteacher at St Peter's CE Primary School has asked that an alternative venue be found to site polling station 31. This is due to the room, that would normally be used as a polling station, has been turned into a permanent classroom.

Other options considered and rejected

- Three other alternative options were considered and rejected -
 - The air cadet hut, Heapey Road, which was rejected due to the distance from the original polling station.
 - Hire of a portacabin was rejected on the grounds that it would be difficult to find an appropriate location to site it on.
 - Remain at St Peter's CE Primary School, which ward members chose to reject as they preferred the school to remain open if a suitable alternative venue could be found.

Corporate priorities

5. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Housing where residents can live well	A green and sustainable borough
An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas	Healthy, safe and engaged communities

Background to the report

6. In March 2023, the headteacher at St Peter's CE Primary School asked if the council could seek an alternative venue to host polling station 31. The room used for the polling station was no longer available as it had been turned into a permanent classroom.
7. Due to the timing of the request, it was not possible to change the venue for the May 2023 election as preparations were already at an advanced stage, with poll cards being printed and due to be sent out.
8. So that the school could remain open on the day of poll, a compromise was reached, and the polling station was moved into a smaller room situated towards the back of the building. Although the room was manageable for that election, it would not be a suitable long-term solution. If the polling station remained at the school, it would be highly likely that the school would have to close on future polling days.

Relocation of polling station

9. The Chorley North and Astley ward members were informed of the request from St Peter's CE Primary School on 10 July and were consulted on potential alternative venues.
10. As part of their deliberations, ward members considered both appropriateness of the location and ease of accessibility.
11. After careful consideration, St Joseph's Parish Centre, which is an existing polling station, was identified as the preferred option. It has a large function hall which would easily accommodate a second polling station. It is 0.3 miles from St Peter's CE Primary School which is approximately a 5-minute walk. There is parking at the front of the building, including disabled parking bay, and a large car park at the rear.

Climate change and air quality

12. There is no overall impact on the Councils Carbon emissions and the wider Climate Emergency and sustainability targets of the Council.

Equality and diversity

13. St Joseph's Parish Centre, Harpers Lane, has been used successfully as a polling station for the last three years, and meets the requirements for disabled access.
14. The Returning Officer is also required to implement the Elections Act 2022 (The Act) which introduced provisions to assist blind, partially sighted and other disabled voters at all polling stations. The Act -:

- creates a requirement for the Returning Officer to provide each polling station with such equipment as it is reasonable to provide for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for, relevant persons to vote independently and in secret,
 - requires the Returning Officer to have regard to the Electoral Commission's guidance on the equipment to provide at polling stations.
15. The Act also introduced the requirement for voters to produce valid photographic identification prior to their ballot paper being issued, with the option for any voter to have their identification checked in private on request, and without explanation.

Risk

16. The only foreseeable risk would be voters presenting at St Peter's CE Primary School on the day of poll instead of St Joseph's Parish Centre.
17. To minimise the risk -
- All poll cards contain the name and address of the voter's polling station.
 - A poster will be placed on the railing of the school (subject to the headteacher's approval) in the days leading up to the day of poll informing residents of the change of polling station.
 - The communications team will be creating social media posts asking all residents to check their poll card in case their polling station venue has changed.
 - There is a facility for the voters to type in their postcode on the council's website, which will provide the name and address of the polling station which they need to go to.
18. Even with the above measures in place, there is a likelihood that some voters may still present at St Peter's CE Primary School first before realising the polling station has moved.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

19. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

20. No comments.

Background documents

There are no background papers to this report

Report Author:	Email:	Telephone:	Date:
Cathryn Filbin (Electoral Services Team Leader)	cathryn.filbin@chorley.gov.uk	5123	15/08/23