

Polling Districts and Places Review 2023

Consultation Details and Summary of Responses

1. Background:

- 1.1 The report to council outlines the background to this review, as the council has a statutory duty to review the polling districts and polling places scheme every five years, as directed by section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended).
- 1.2 Full council is reminded that whilst it is the responsibility of the council to draw up a scheme of Polling Districts, and to designate geographical Polling Places, it is the personal responsibility of the Returning Officer to designate the physical Polling Stations within those geographical areas.
- 1.3 For the sake of completeness this report includes, in Appendix 2, a list of the Polling Stations currently allocated to each Polling District. Circumstances may arise which mean that the Returning Officer has to designate alternative venues as Polling Stations, possibly at short notice.

2. Consultation:

- 2.1 In drawing up these recommendations the following groups or individuals were invited to comment at the outset of the review:
 - Local government electors for the Isle of Wight (via a press release, a notice on the council notice board, and via a webpage on iow.gov.uk)
 - Town, Parish and Community Councils and their elected members via an e-mail to all town and parish clerks.
 - Isle of Wight Council members, directly, via e-mail.
 - Local Constituency Political Parties via an e-mail to all Constituency Party contacts.
 - The MP for the Isle of Wight, via e-mail
 - Local organisations who work with people who have disabilities, via e-mail

3. Summary of Responses

- 3.1 General comments where the respondent was content with the proposed arrangements have been excluded, except where a conflicting opinion has been expressed by others.
- 3.2 Responses were received from one town councillor, one Parish Council and one member of the public.

4. Parish and Town Councils

- 4.1 Only one comment was received as a result of the consultation, and that was from a Parish Council who simply stated that they were content with the existing arrangements.

5. Parish and Town Councillors

- 5.1 The only response from a Parish or Town Councillor related to the provision of polling stations in the Ventnor West polling district:

“The Salisbury Gardens polling station is quite some distance from many of the residential areas on the west side of Ventnor and is difficult to access by car as it is in a one-way and heavily parked street. Whereas St Catherine's is much closer to the west side of town and has a car park that is usually otherwise empty (apart from the cars of polling staff) on election day.

I would ask you to consider creating two polling districts within the West Town Council ward, so that St Catherine's can once again be used as a polling place serving voters living west of the town centre.”

- 5.2 Ventnor Town Council had previously discussed this as part of the consultation to the 2020 Polling Places and Districts review, and the following was noted in their minutes. However, the outcome of the meeting was never submitted to the Isle of Wight Council:

- a) *The Town Council has been asked to respond to the Isle of Wight Council's plans for the 6 May Local elections in respect of the Polling Districts and Polling venues.*
- b) *Members were concerned at the loss of the Polling facility at St Catherine's and the consequent increase in the distance for many residents to register their vote.*
- c) *The clerk said he would respond to the Isle of Wight Council's electoral services and local land charges manager accordingly.*

- 5.3 Commentary: If the council were to divide this area into two polling districts, one would be both geographically and numerically small, as it would serve an area running from Pier Street to Madeira Road. The total electorate for the whole area is around 2450 (minus postal voters), so if the district were to be split in two, the numbers allocated to the existing polling station in Dudley Road would only be around 800 (again, less postal voters).

If the council were only to retain one polling station for the whole area then the difference in the distance between the polling stations (less than 365m) is not enough to make any significant difference to the majority of electors in the ward, as most of them live a much greater

distance to the west, and so relocating to St Catherines Church would make little difference to the majority of electors.

Whilst there is some parking in the grounds of the church it is not extensive, and there is a public car park less than 120m from the existing polling station, with some on-street parking also available.

RECOMMENDATION: No Action.

6. Other Responses and Considerations

- 6.1 One member of the public submitted a response which related to the location of their property in relation to the section of Undercliff Drive which is closed to through traffic:

“Since the closure of Undercliff Drive in 2013 for highway stabilisation works by Island Roads access to my polling station has been restricted. {REDACTED} I now have to drive past two other polling stations – Niton and Whitwell and down the dangerous St Lawrence Shute to vote. This also applies to several other properties in St Lawrence to the west of the road closure.”

- 6.2 Commentary: Given the proximity of this area to the boundary with the Chale, Niton and Shorwell electoral division there are 6 residential properties affected, of which 4 have registered electors, numbering 10 in total. Of those 10 electors, 6 have postal votes, so any change would only be for the benefit of four electors.

RECOMMENDATION: No Action.

- 6.3 Ryde West is currently divided into two polling districts, each served by its own polling station. One of these, The Sherbourne Centre, is now closed and in a poor state of repair, whilst the other, Ryde Heritage Centre in Ryde cemetery, has attracted some comment over the years due its location, lack of lighting on the access paths, and the distance that staff must walk to access the toilet facilities.

It is proposed to merge the two polling districts together into one, which will be served by a single polling station at Ryde Family Centre in Pell Lane. The Family Centre has parking, good disabled access and is reasonably central to the area. Enquiries have been made of the centre, and they are more than happy to be used as a polling station, subject to a reasonable degree of notice. The existing Councillor for the area, Ian Stephens, has also given his verbal support to this proposal.

RECOMMENDATION: Merge the two polling districts in Ryde West and move the polling station to Ryde Family Centre.

6.4 A very helpful response was also received from Sight For Wight, which whilst not making any comments on any particular polling district boundary or location did include an offer to produce a short training video for polling station staff which includes advice for identifying when a person may have a visual impairment, how to approach them with an offer of assistance and some general “Do’s and Don’ts”. The Acting Returning Officer has taken up this kind offer, and we hope to be able to use it as part of the training programme for polling station staff ahead of the scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2024.

7. Proposals

7.1 Members will be aware that current scheme of polling districts and polling places was last considered by the Isle of Wight Council in November 2020, and was necessitated by the need to amend a number of polling districts due to the introduction, in 2021, of revised electoral divisions for the Isle of Wight Council, resulting from the implementation of The Isle of Wight (Electoral Changes) Order 2020.

7.2 The scheme introduced in 2021 worked well, and other than the proposal to combine the two polling districts which serve the Ryde West electoral division into one, no further changes to the scheme are proposed.

7.3 As a result of the foregoing, it is recommended:

THAT the Isle of Wight Council adopts the scheme of polling districts and polling places as set out in Appendix 2 (attached). This resolution is to be effective for the purposes of proceedings preliminary or relating to any election to be held on or after 1 February 2024.