

Polling Districts and Places Review 2020

Consultation Details and Summary of Responses

1. Background:

1.1 The Report to Council outlines the background which has led to this review taking place, which is the result of the implementation of the Order made by The Local Government Boundary Commission which will reduce the number of Isle of Wight Council electoral divisions to 39 and will result in significant changes to some boundaries.

1.2 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 B, 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 an Official Notice in the Isle of Wight County Press on the Council notice board, and via a webpage on iwight.com)
- Town and Parish 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 those with disabilities, via e-mail

3. Summary of Responses.

3.1 General comments where the responder 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 two Parish Councils, three elected members of the Isle of Wight Council, and from one Local Constituency Party.

4. Parish and Town Councils.

4.1 Very few comments were received as a result of the consultation, and of the two Parish and Town Councils which responded, both were content with the proposed arrangements, although Niton and Whitwell Parish Council expressed disappointment at the omission of “Whitwell” from the title of the proposed Chale, Niton and Whitwell Division.

5. IOWC Elected Members

5.1 Three elected members of the Isle of Wight Council made representations, and one of those was happy with the proposed arrangements.

5.2 The second response related to the provision of polling stations in the Parkhurst and Hunnyhill Division, and noted that access to the Isle of Wight College by foot is *“restricted by the St Mary’s junction. I imagine most who do so use the underpass if coming from roads off Hunnyhill and from the southern ‘prison estates’. Use of a facility more easily accessible would be welcome.*

Those who do not walk will usually drive, and often because of the distance to travel. Addressing that can be done in two ways (at least): first, ensuring there is available parking; second by reducing the need to drive. With the latter in mind, consideration to having a second polling station further north would be welcome; this would allow more people to consider walking.

I am mindful that there are very few facilities of the type typically used, and I expect that there is a desire to avoid using temporary cabins.”

5.3 The third response related to the Mountjoy and Shide Division, and noted that *“If we leave the polling station at the St John’s Church Hall it is not within the Ward.”*

6. Other Responses.

6.1 One Local Constituency Party submitted a response, which helpfully corrected a couple of minor typographical errors in the original draft of the Scheme of Polling Places and Districts, and which also made the following comments.

6.2 Brighstone, Calbourne and Shalfleet: *“The proposed Shalfleet East polling district (D7) should be renamed as Shalfleet Village, in order to*

differentiate it from the wider area of Shalfleet East Ward (of Shalfleet Parish Council) which covers two polling districts (D6 (Newbridge) and D7).” Note: This minor alteration has already been made by the Returning Officer.

6.3 East Cowes: *It would be better if the polling districts in the East Cowes electoral division (L) were referred to as East Cowes North #1 (L1) and East Cowes North #2 (L2), to reflect the fact that together they make up the area of the East Cowes North Ward (of the Parish of East Cowes). The proposed use of East Cowes South as the name for the L2 polling district within this wider East Cowes North Ward is confusing, and should be changed as we have suggested. Note: This minor alteration has already been made by the Returning Officer*

6.4 Mountjoy and Shide: *The proposed polling station (St Johns Church Hall) for the new Mountjoy & Shide electoral division (S) / polling district (S) is outside of the division’s boundaries. Whilst this situation unavoidably exists elsewhere on the Island, we consider that it would be preferable if the polling station for Mountjoy & Shide was in a more central and accessible location – and certainly within the division if possible.*

St Johns Church Hall has little available parking; nor do the nearby streets – which is an important consideration given that some voters may find walking back up St Johns Road difficult. We would ask that consideration is given to the possible use of The Church of the Latter-Day Saints building on the corner of Shide Road and Chestnut Close, which has a large car park to the rear. Another possible location is the 1st Newport Scout Hall in Woodbine Close, which also has car parking available. We understand that the latter has previously been used for a parish council by-election, and both of these suggested locations are within the division’s boundaries, so would be suitable in this regard. The Church of the Latter-Day Saints building would be preferable out of the two, from a highways / access perspective.

6.5 Nettlestone and Seaview: *Nettlestone & Seaview electoral division (T) should be split into two polling districts (T1 and T2), each with their own polling station. The two villages are distinct communities and having just one polling station – particularly now it has reverted to a central position within Seaview (rather than a location between the two communities, as Seagrove Pavilion was) – is unacceptable for voters in Nettlestone.*

St Peter’s Church, Undercroft (as proposed) is suitable as a polling station for the Seaview polling district, and Nettlestone Primary School should be reinstated as the polling station for the Nettlestone polling district (making use of the outbuilding at the top of the school area, to minimise the possibility of the school having to close on polling day). The previous polling district boundaries should apply.

6.6 Totland and Colwell: *We note that a polling station has not yet been identified for the polling district of Colwell (JJ2), which aligns with the Freshwater Colwell Ward (of the Parish of Freshwater). We would like to suggest Colwell Baptist Church on Colwell Road as a suitable venue for this polling station.*

7. Proposals.

7.1 Members will recall that as a result of the review carried out during 2019, and approved by Council in September 2019, that the two polling districts in Nettlestone and Seaview were amalgamated, with electors using one reasonably centrally located polling station at Seagrove Pavilion.

7.2 However, on the day of the General Election in December 2019, which was admittedly beset with poor weather, it transpired that the access road leading from the main highway to the building itself was not suitable, given the volume of vehicles which needed to access the site to allow electors to reach the polling station. This resulted in electors on foot and in vehicles having to share the same, somewhat muddy, access road, and it was reported that the carpet in the venue was damaged by the mud.

7.3 At its meeting of 20 January 2020, Nettlestone and Seaview Parish Council resolved “that the Clerk should write to the Returning Officer and formally request that the Pavilion is no longer used for Elections and also that the Clerk should contact the Seagrove Pavilion Trust and request they withdraw its services as a polling station.”

7.4 There are no other venues in the immediate area of Seagrove Pavilion, and given this feedback, and the comment received during the review, it is considered that the most reasonable course of action is to restore the two polling districts as they existed prior to December 2019.

7.5 The polling station for the Seaview area can revert to St Peter’s Church Undercroft, which was used prior to the amalgamation, and to Nettlestone Primary School which serves the Nettlestone area. Whilst the use of a school as a polling station is not ideal, it is anticipated that only a partial school closure will be necessary, as there is an externally sited Portacabin which can be used as the actual polling station.

7.6 Two comments were received in relation to the location of the polling station for the Mountjoy and Shide electoral division. Whilst the boundaries of the polling district will not be affected by the location of the polling station, it is accepted that, wherever possible, the polling station should be inside the area which it serves, and the Returning Officer has proposed that the 1st Newport Scout Hall be used, if available.

7.7 One submission made reference to the potential provision of a polling station for the northern part of the new Parkhurst and Hunnyhill division, and commented on the difficulty that this might present due to a lack of suitable locations.

7.8 The northern part of that particular electoral division has been without a dedicated polling station since the former Methodist Church on the corner of Noke Common closed around 30 years ago. Over the years, efforts have been made to find a suitable alternative, but there are none, and since the closure of the Methodist Church, the whole division has been a single polling district, with the polling station located to the south of the district, where the bulk of the electorate resides.

7.8 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 B (attached). This resolution is to be effective for the purposes of proceedings preliminary or relating to any election to be held on or after 6 May 2021. This scheme includes the separation of the Nettlestone and Seaview area into two polling districts, each served by their own polling station.

No further comments were received.