

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council: 21 December 2011

Subject: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2011

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To advise the Council on representations received in relation to the proposed Scheme of Polling Districts and Polling Places for parliamentary elections.
- 1.2 To inform the Council of the outcome of investigations into suggested polling places by elected members at the previous Council meeting and to recommend adoption of a final scheme.

2. Background

- 2.1 The previous review of Polling Districts and Polling Places by this Council was completed and published in December 2007. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires that every local authority must complete a further review of each polling district and place in its area before the end of the period of four years starting with the completion of the previous such review.
- 2.2 In terms of the above legislation, Councils must ensure that all electors in parliamentary constituencies within their areas have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable, and that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place within the area is accessible to electors who are disabled.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 31 August 2011, the Council approved the arrangements for conducting the review and accordingly copies of the Returning Officer's representations were sent to all elected members and a range of local organisations, which represent disabled and elderly people, for comment. The deadline for submission of representations was 4 October 2011.
- 2.4 At its meeting on 26 October 2011, the Council considered the Returning Officer's representations and agreed:-
 - (1) *to approve the preferred scheme of polling districts; and*
 - (2) *to continue the approval of polling places to the next meeting of the Council to allow officers to investigate alternative polling places within the Mountblow, Dumbarton Road and Whitecrook areas of Clydebank, which should include consideration of Centre 81 and Dalmuir Community Learning and Development Centre.*

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Only two responses have been received from external bodies; one from the One Thirty Club and one from Old Kilpatrick Community Council, both of which supported the proposed polling scheme and places. However, some representations were made by elected members at the Council meeting in October which required further investigation.

Councillor Patrick McGlinchey – Mountblow area

- 3.2** Councillor McGlinchey expressed concern on the issue of voters in the Mountblow area who would need to go to Dalmuir Barclay Parish Church Hall to vote and it was agreed that officers should try to identify alternative venues in the Mountblow area to reduce the distance they have to travel.
- 3.3** Officers have visited the area and have looked at two possible locations for a polling place in Mountblow.
- 3.4** The first option is the derelict community centre which is located on Melbourne Avenue. To date, officers have been unable to access the community centre to assess its condition but have concluded that it is not suitable for a number of reasons. The community centre, which is in the centre of Mountblow, was proposed as a polling place in 2007. At that time, the Access Panel was consulted and the Secretary indicated that it would not be suitable as a polling place as it was too small; Mountblow falls within two polling districts WC07 and WC08, which have a total of 1461 registered voters, and therefore ideally the polling place would need to be big enough to host two polling stations. Even if only voters from WC07 were asked to vote in a venue in Melbourne Avenue, it would still need 2 polling stations as there are 1069 voters within that polling district. It would also mean that some voters in WC07 who reside at the foot of the hill would be asked to travel further to the polling place than they do at present.
- 3.5** The second alternative would be to locate two portacabins in the two parking bays on Melbourne Avenue (not far from the community centre). However, our previous experience of using portacabins for polling places is that they are very unpopular with voters, polling staff and the Access Panel; they are very tight for space and very difficult to keep warm in cold weather. Both portacabins, which cost approximately £2000 each to hire, would be positioned very near the main road, which is a busy bus route and therefore there would be a risk of danger to the public. The voters could be controlled by crowd barriers but the situation would be far from ideal. In addition, there is the added risk that the portacabins could be vandalised or broken into overnight which could impact on the integrity of the election.
- 3.6** For the reasons detailed in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 above, it is recommended that Dalmuir Barclay Parish Church hall be used for voters in the Mountblow area until such times as more suitable accommodation can be identified.

Councillor Marie McNair – Dalmuir Community Learning and Development Centre

- 3.7** Councillor McNair suggested that officers should investigate the feasibility of using the Dalmuir Community Learning and Development Centre (C&LD) as a polling place to reduce the travel distance of those voters who reside within polling district WC23. The Dalmuir C&LD Centre is located in the middle/north of WC23.
- 3.8** The Dalmuir C&LD Centre is a very well used centre which has a number of community activities and groups which take place on a Wednesday and Thursday, including an out of school care group. The front entrance (main entrance to the building) has a disabled ramp and is close to the Social Room which would be the room of choice if the centre were to be used as a polling place. However, for security purposes, it is normal that the whole building be closed to the public on the Wednesday evening and Thursday (Day of the Poll) which could cause a lot of disruption and inconvenience to users of the Centre and in particular parents who rely on out of school care services.
- 3.9** The only way to use the Centre as a polling place and keep it open to the public would be to use the Conference Room to the rear of the premises and lock it off from the rest of the building. However, there is only one external entrance and exit which is served by a steep set of stairs at present; a ramp would need to be built to ensure adequate access for disabled and elderly people. It has been estimated that the ramp would cost approximately £3000 to build. Another issue would be the lack of adequate lighting to the rear of the premises. This problem is further exacerbated by the uneven ground at the rear of the premises (car park area with no footpath). Another issue is that the room would be served by a single entrance and exit and therefore the doors would need to be kept open thus making it uncomfortable for election staff working in the room from 7am to 10 pm.
- 3.10** Given the issues raised in paragraph 3.9 above, it is not recommended that room to the rear of the centre be used. Therefore if the Council agrees that the centre should be used as a polling place then all users will need to be informed that the centre will be closed on Wednesday evening and all day Thursday. At present, the furthest point to travel to Dalmuir Barclay Parish Church for voters residing within polling district WC23 is slightly less than one mile and this journey would be reduced to approximately half a mile if the Dalmuir C&LD Centre is used as a polling station.

Councillor Gail Casey – Use Centre 81 as an additional polling place in the Whitecrook area.

- 3.11** Councillor Gail Casey suggested that officers should investigate the possibility of using Centre 81, Braes Avenue, Clydebank, as an additional polling place in the Whitecrook area of Clydebank due to the distance which some voters had to travel to the existing polling place in St Margaret's Church Hall, Sinclair Street, Clydebank.

- 3.12** The location of Centre 81 and the design of the building would make it an ideal venue as an additional polling place in the Whitecrook area. However, the Centre is not owned by the Council and the Centre 81 management are not prepared to close down access to the centre to their regular users for the purposes of the poll. This being the case, Centre 81 cannot be considered as a polling place.
- 3.13** As Centre 81 was not available for use, Officers also investigated the possibility of using the Clydebank East Community Learning and Development Centre (known as the Whitecrook Community Centre) as an additional polling place. However, it is located relatively close to St Margaret's Church Hall and therefore the distance, which voters with the furthest distance to travel, would need to travel would only be reduced by 0.1 mile. In terms of the relevant legislation, it is considered that this would not be sufficient to justify having two polling places in the one polling district. Furthermore, if this change were to be implemented in time for the Local Elections in May 2012, it would mean that the Electoral Registration Officer would ideally need to split the register for Polling District WC25 for publication on 1 December 2011. Clearly, this would not be possible given the timescales involved.
- 3.14** Given the issues raised in paragraph 3.12 and 3.13 above, it is recommended that all voters in Polling District WC25 should continue to vote in St. Margaret's Church Hall. However, over the longer term, officers will give further consideration to the issues raised within the Whitecrook area with a view to reducing travel distances to voters.

4. People Implications

- 4.1** There are no implications for employees of the Council.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** At present, all of our designated polling places have disabled access. There are potentially financial implications of adopting new polling places which require improved access as only 50% of funding is met by the Scotland Office in preparation for an election. The costs involved with the hiring of portacabins and building temporary ramps have been highlighted earlier in this report.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** As previously stated the Council is required by statute to complete the review within the required timescales. Failure to do so could result in reputational damage to the Council. All polling places are inspected with a view to identifying and eliminating avoidable hazards and polling staff are provided with check lists to ensure that such hazards are identified and dealt with early.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1** As stated in paragraph 2.2. of this report, the Council must ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place within the area is accessible to electors who are disabled. Furthermore, organisations representing disabled people and the elderly have been invited to comment on the Returning Officer's representations. This year only two comments were received and this has been recorded in paragraph 3.1 above.

8. Strategic Assessment

- 8.1** The Council is required by statute to carry out this review and therefore must do so. However, the purpose of the review does fit with the Council's Strategic Priorities in that it asks the Council to consider the impact of the proposed polling scheme on vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled with a view to making improvements to service delivery. At the previous meeting of Council, elected members made officers aware of some such issues within their wards which have been investigated and responded to within this report.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1** It is recommended:-

- (a) that the Council considers the issues surrounding the use of the Dalmuir C&LD Centre as a polling place for voters residing within Polling District WC23 and makes a decision thereon;
- (b) that, subject to the decision at (a) above, the Council agrees to approve the scheme of polling districts and places as detailed in the appendices to this report; and
- (c) that the Council agrees to note that due to the further investigations required to finalise the scheme, it will not be possible for the Returning Officer to publish the final scheme on 1 December 2011 as previously agreed and therefore the Council agrees that the final scheme should be published no later than 31 December 2011.

Joyce White
Chief Executive

7 November 2011

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Appendices:

- (1) Summary of Existing and Proposed Polling Places and Polling Districts for the West Dunbartonshire County Constituency.
- (2) Details of Proposed Places together with the Returning Officer's and Elected Members' Representations.

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Background Papers:

Report to Council on 26 October 2011 on the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2011

Letter from One Thirty Club.

Letter from Old Kilpatrick Community Council.