

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Officer – Regulatory and Regeneration****Council: 20 December 2023**

Subject: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Council of the response to the consultation on the review of polling districts and polling places and to seek approval of the final polling scheme.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council agrees:
- (a) to adopt the scheme of polling districts and polling places as detailed in the Appendix 1 to this report;
 - (b) to authorise the Returning Officer to identify suitable alternative polling places in advance of any given election should that polling place no longer be available to the Council, as outlined in Appendix 1 to this report; and
 - (c) to authorise the Returning Officer to determine a suitable polling place for those voters in the Glasgow City Council area, who will form part of the new UK Parliamentary Constituency of West Dunbartonshire.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 30 August 2023, the Council approved the arrangements for conducting the review and accordingly copies of the Returning Officer's representations were sent to all elected members, the local MP, MSPs, and a range of local community organisations including those which represent disabled, elderly people and other equality groups, for comment. The deadline for submission of responses to the consultation was 13 November 2023.

4. Main IssuesPolling Districts

- 4.1 In 2018, the Council agreed that some minor changes be made to polling district boundaries arising from the Boundary Commission for Scotland's Review of Local Government Wards. Maps showing the existing polling district boundaries for each Ward can be viewed on the Council's website at the following address:

<https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/council/voting-and-elections/polling-district-and-polling-place-review-2023/>

- 4.2** The Chief Executive who is for the purposes of elections, the Returning Officer is satisfied with the current polling district boundaries and has proposed that no changes be made to the polling districts as part of this review.

Polling Places

- 4.3** In 2020, the Council conducted an interim review of its polling places and polling districts and agreed to use a number of new venues as polling places thus reducing the number of schools included in the previous scheme. These new venues included: the Carman Centre, Renton, in place of Renton Primary School; the Cutty Sark Centre, Bellsmyre in place of the Bellsmyre School Campus; and Bonhill Church (Angus Room) in place of Bonhill Primary School. The Council also agreed to the use of the Hub Community Centre, Clydebank in place of Kilbowie Primary School, subject to concerns by a disability group being addressed but the Hub was not used in subsequent elections as the centre was being used as a Covid Vaccination Centre. Also, the Angus Room in Bonhill Church was not used during the pandemic as it was not possible to operate a one-way system in the Angus Room due to lack of space. The other new venue which was added in 2020 was West Kirk Church Hall, Westbridgend, which was deemed suitable for use and had a one-way system in place during the pandemic.
- 4.4.** The Returning Officer is aware that there are a number of existing polling places which may not be available for use as polling places in the future due to Council savings options and external factors such as the Church of Scotland review of its properties. The election office has identified the following properties which may be affected: Bonhill Church (Angus Room), West Kirk Church Hall, West Dumbarton Activity Centre, Bowling Community Hall, Glenhead Community Centre and Parkhall Library.
- 4.5** The Returning Officer is of the view that as long as these venues are still available, they should be used as polling places but it is prudent to identify alternative venues should the situation change. A table of alternative premises proposed by the Returning Officer is shown on the final page of Appendix 1. Comments were invited on both the proposed list and the list of alternative polling places. Since commencing the consultation, the Council has agreed that the Glenhead Community Centre be leased and therefore the lease will include a clause that the Centre will continue to be available as a polling place in future years. However, the Centre may not be available while refurbishment works take place and accordingly an alternative venue has been proposed.

UK Parliamentary Boundary Review

- 4.6** The UK Parliament has now approved the recommendations of the Boundary Commission, which means that a small part of the Glasgow City local authority area will form part of the new West Dunbartonshire County UK Parliamentary Constituency for future UK Parliamentary Elections. It is

understood that the City of Glasgow Council will carry out a review of its polling scheme in 2023 and in so doing will identify a suitable polling place for those additional voters transferring to West Dunbartonshire County Constituency. However, if it can accommodate the increased numbers, these voters could be directed to vote in St. Margaret's Church Hall. Failing that, the Election team will inspect the polling place recommended by Glasgow City Council prior to use and, if deemed suitable, will proceed on that basis.

Impact of New Housing in West Dunbartonshire

- 4.7** An assessment of the impact on the polling scheme of the number of new properties being built in West Dunbartonshire has been undertaken with the assistance of officers from the Council's Planning Section. While there are a number of new housing developments planned and/or being proposed throughout West Dunbartonshire, there are only a few of significant size to have a major impact on the proposed polling scheme. The Queens Quay development will be the most significant with approximately 570 new houses scheduled to be built over the next five years. It is proposed that the additional electors from this area will vote in Waterfront Church Hall which has an additional hall with the capacity to cope with up to four additional polling stations. There are a number of other smaller housing developments which may have some impact of the polling scheme, the details of which are contained in the individual comments on each polling place in Appendix 2.

Feedback from consultation

- 4.8** Local Elected Members were consulted and all comments received are shown in Appendix 3. Where possible, Members views have been taken into account in the proposed list of polling places, which is evident from the re-introduction of the Leven Suite, Abbotsford Hotel, Dumbarton and The Hub Community Centre, Clydebank. However, some Members have expressed concerns on the proposed alternative venues for Bowling Hall and West Kirk Church Hall and have suggested the use of portacabins as an alternative. The Returning Officer is of the view that portacabins should only be used as a last resort. Experience has shown that they are very uncomfortable for staff who have to work for up to 16 hours in a confined space which is difficult to keep warm, especially during a winter election. In addition, in order to allow wheelchair access, special ramps have to be built and even then it is a very tight space to allow a wheelchair user to manoeuvre and vote.
- 4.9** One member of the public responded to the consultation and made the comment that they live closer to another polling place than the one they are currently designated to vote in. Unfortunately, this situation is unavoidable where a polling place is near the boundary line. In this instance, the voter lives nearer Dalreoch United Free Church than St Michael's Church Hall.
- 4.10** No comments were submitted by local and regional MSPs, the local MP or on behalf of any local or national political party.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no direct implications for employees of this Council although many employees work in our polling places but this is not mandatory and is at the discretion of management.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** The only elections funded by the Council are the Local Government Elections and any Local Government by-elections which may occur from time to time. The proposals within this report do not increase the number of polling places and therefore the proposals have no direct impact on costs. However, Some Members have indicated in their initial comments that they would prefer using mobile polling stations (portacabins) in favour of some of the alternative venues proposed by the Returning Officer and accordingly there would be an additional cost involved as these units are more expensive to hire than community halls.
- 6.2** There are no procurement implications for the Council arising from this report.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** 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.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** The Council must ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place within its area is accessible to electors who are disabled. All polling places used in West Dunbartonshire are accessible and no new polling places have been added as a result of this review. A copy of the Equality Impact Assessment which was carried out in respect of the review is attached as Appendix 4.

9. Consultation

- 9.1** Officers from legal and finance have been consulted on the content of this report.
- 9.2** The formal public consultation process commenced on 2 October 2023 and concluded on 13 November 2023. All comments received from the elected members and the public have been included in this report.

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1** This report does not have a direct impact on the Council's Strategic priorities.

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Date: 14 November 2023

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Appendices:

1. Proposed list of polling places and districts.
2. Returning Officer's comments on individual polling places.
3. Summary of comments submitted by West Dunbartonshire elected members.
4. Equality Impact Assessment.

Background Papers: Returning Officer's Representations.
<https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/council/voting-and-elections/polling-district-and-polling-place-review-2023/>

Wards Affected: All