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**THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL****MINUTES**

**At a meeting of the Regulatory Services Committee held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Wednesday, 6 December 2023 from 7.30 - 8.10 pm.**

**Present: Councillors -**

Tony Humphreys (Chair)  
Sarah Nelmes  
Raj Khiroya  
Ciaran Reed  
David Coltman  
Matthew Bedford  
Stephen Cox  
Chris Mitchell

**Officers in Attendance:**

Katharine Simpson Committee and Electoral Services Manager  
Cameron MacLean Interim Committee Services Manager

**RG21/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Roger Seabourne, Ian Morris, and Narinder Sian (Cllr Chris Mitchell substituted for Cllr Sian).

**RG22/21 MINUTES**

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2023 and authorised the Chair to sign them as a correct record.

**RG23/21 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**RG24/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**RG25/21 POLLING PLACE REVIEW**

The Committee considered a report of the Returning Officer summarising the outcome of the statutory review of polling places in the Three Rivers area.

Katharine Simpson, Committee and Electoral Services Manager, presented the report. During her presentation, Ms Simpson stated that the Council's Elections Team wished to place on record its thanks to the staff and parents of those schools that were used as polling stations.

In concluding her presentation, Ms Simpson stated that there was one additional recommendation that she wished the Committee to consider viz. given that a general election would be called within the next 12 months, that it be recommended to Full Council that, should a polling station not be available at short notice, that the Returning Officer have delegated authority to designate a suitable alternative venue as a polling station.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points were raised.

- a) Regarding the additional recommendation that the Returning Officer be given delegated authority to designate alternative venues as polling stations, it was proposed, and **Agreed** by Ms Simpson, that any exercise of the Returning Officer's delegated authority, if approved by Full Council, would be conducted in consultation with Ward Councillors.
- b) Polling stations that were not within the corresponding polling district were selected on their geographical proximity to the polling district, the preference being for those polling stations to be as near to the boundary of the polling district as possible.
- c) Because there would be a general election this year, it was proposed that now was not the time to start changing polling stations as residents would be familiar with the venues that were currently used as polling stations.
- d) Regarding the use of Arnetts Hill School as a polling station, and the desire not to use schools as polling stations if possible, any alternative venue for a polling station would have a consequential detrimental effect in terms of the proximity of polling stations to the polling district for residents in Rickmansworth Town Ward and Penn & Mill End Ward.

Therefore, it was preferable to continue with the use of Arnetts Hill school as a polling station.

- e) Regarding the use of Christchurch in Chorleywood North and Sarratt Ward, it was noted that there were four separate polling stations within the building and that, during a general election when voter turnout was higher than for other elections, the polling station could become busy. However, the elections officers who had managed the venue as a polling station for many years had not expressed any concerns about its suitability as a polling station, and there had been no concerns expressed by voters about the venue's ability to accommodate four polling stations.
- f) Regarding the proposal that, without mitigating circumstances, no more than 2,250 voters should be allocated to a single polling station, it was noted that there were three polling districts, Chorleywood South and Maple Cross; Penn and Mill End; and Gade Valley, which had polling places (Maple Cross Club, Barn Lea Hall and Tannerswood, respectively) which had two polling stations at each polling place, each polling place serving an electorate of less than 2,000 voters. Therefore, it would be possible to reduce the number of polling stations at each of these three polling places to one polling station per polling place.
- g) Given the requirements for voters to show an appropriate form of identification before being allowed to vote, it was proposed that there should be no reduction in the number of staff at polling stations.
- h) Members were of the view that, because there would be a general election this year, there should be no changes to the current arrangements for voting in the district. Further, as the next 5-year Review ("the Review") of polling places within the district may coincide with the next but one general election, the Review should be brought forward by a year. This would allow any changes to polling districts and polling stations to be made a year ahead of a possible general election.
- i) Regarding the suggestion that there should be a stand-alone polling station at Chandler's Cross, it was proposed that consideration be given, not now but later, to the provision of a polling station near to Chandler's Cross, including the possible use of a marquee as a polling station.

Venues for a polling station at Chandler's Cross included the Church of the Ascension (The Tin Church), Bemond, or the marquee at the Cart & Horses Public House on the border of Bucks Hill and Commonwood. It was, however, acknowledged that it may not be possible to use either of these venues as a polling station for assorted reasons.

- j) It was noted that reviews of district wards and polling places could be conducted on an individual basis and not as part of the statutory 5-year review of polling places. Accordingly, officers would welcome suggestions from Members of venues that could serve as polling places and/or polling stations.
- k) Regarding the number of polling stations at a polling place in relation to the number of electors, it was proposed that there be no change to the current position for the purposes of a general election but that consideration be given to possibly reducing the number of polling stations at Maple Cross Club, Barn Lea Hall and Tannerswood for local elections, in accordance with the number of electors within the respective polling districts.
- l) It was proposed that the Committee's Work Programme include, for next year, a review of the Arnetts Hill School polling station and Sarratt Village Hall.
- m) It was proposed that, rather than conducting reviews of polling places and polling stations according to a timetable, it would be better if this were done whenever a suggestion was made as to where an existing polling place and/or polling station could be moved.
- n) Given the requirement to provide identification when voting, it was proposed that it would be perverse to reduce the number of staff at polling stations.

It was noted that the number of staff, including Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks, at polling stations was determined in accordance with guidance issued by the Electoral Commission. Accordingly, officers would check the proposed number of staff at the District's various polling stations to confirm that they were in accordance with the guidance issued by the Electoral Commission.

As there were no further comments, the Chair referred Members of the Committee to the recommendations set out in the report.

It was proposed that, as well as recommending that the Returning Officer, in consultation with Ward Members, be given delegated authority to decide on alternative polling station venues, that this also be done in consultation with Election Agents.

**RESOLVED:** To –

- 1. Note the outcome of the Polling Place Review consultation;
- 2. Endorse the continuation of the current arrangements for polling places; and
- 3. Recommend to Council that –
  - a) Authority be delegated to the Returning Officer to:
    - i. Make any necessary amendments to polling places to enable changes to be made at short notice should a polling place not be available at the time an election was called;
    - ii. Such delegated authority being necessary to ensure that the Council could meet its statutory obligations in respect of elections; and
  - b) Any exercise of delegated authority by the returning officer in this regard to be done in consultation with –
    - i. Local Ward Councillors; and
    - ii. Election Agents.

**CHAIR**