
REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES

Report by Chief Executive

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

20 NOVEMBER 2014

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the outcome of the consultation with Community Councils regarding the proposal to close polling places with an electorate of less than 100 voters and reports back on the possibility of using the new games hall at Peebles High School in place of Priorsford Primary Schools as the polling place for Polling District 2A of the Tweeddale East Ward.**
- 1.2 The Council considered the outcome of the required review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations at their meeting on 27 March 2014 and agreed:-
- (a) to consult with local Community Councils - on behalf of their local electorate - on the proposal to permanently close the polling places currently located in Tweedsmuir, Manor, Cappercleuch, Abbey St. Bathans, Cranshaws, Makerstoun, Hownam, Crailing, Edgerston and Hermitage to take effect from the publication of the Register of Electors on 27 February 2015; and
 - (b) that a review be undertaken of the new Games Hall at Peebles High School as a possible polling place to replace Priorsford Primary School, this being subject to suitability.
- 1.3 Manor and Abbey St Bathans have been removed from the review as their electorate has now increased in excess of 100 voters criteria.
- 1.4 The responses received from Community Councils and other interested parties are contained in full in Appendix 1 to the report and, with the exception of Crailing, all are strongly against the closure of their polling places.
- 1.5 With regard to the use of Peebles High School Games Hall contact has been made with the Headteacher and a meeting is being arranged to discuss the suitability of the games hall as a polling place.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Council:

- (a) Considers whether or not to proceed with the permanent closure of any of the polling places currently located in Tweedsmuir, Cappercleuch, Cranshaws, Makerstoun, Hownam, Crailing, Edgerston and Hermitage; and**
- (b) Agrees to delegate powers to the Chief Executive to determine if the polling place for Tweeddale East Polling District 2A should be moved from Priorsford Primary School to the Games Hall at Peebles High School, following a meeting with the Headteacher to assess suitability.**

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 It was reported at the Council meeting in March 2014 that, in terms of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the Council had undertaken a review of its current polling districts, polling places and polling stations. As part of this review, polling places had also been assessed against the number of electors in the polling district. There were at that time 10 polling places with under 100 electors on the electoral roll for that particular district. This has since reduced to 8, as both Manor and Abbey St Bathans have had increases in their electorate which takes them over the 100 threshold. They have therefore been removed from consideration at present. As the proposed closure of these polling places was not included in the original consultation process it was agreed at the March Council meeting that the Community Councils in each of the affected areas be consulted on these proposals before any action to close these polling places was taken.

4 OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

4.1 A total of 9 responses have been received to the consultation and these are copied in full in Appendix 1 to the report. With the exception of the response regarding Crailing, all communities are strongly opposed to the closure of their polling places.

4.2 The main points raised in these responses include:-

- Difficulties for some residents to travel to an alternative polling station
- Voting by post should not be compulsory
- Closure will reduce turnout
- Size of community should not be a factor
- Undemocratic to not allow people to vote locally
- Impact on the viability of more remote village halls
- All services in a rural area are more expensive and savings would be small
- Combine polling places in towns to save money
- Polling districts could be realigned to increase voter number

4.3 In response to some of the points made it is acknowledged that some residents will have to travel further to vote. However, the impact of this will depend on where within the current polling district they reside in comparison with the location of the alternative polling place. Within these areas very few electors live within walking distance of their polling place, are not served by regular public transport services and have to travel for many of their other services. Voting by post is already a well-used alternative in some areas but it is appreciated that some people prefer to vote in person. The appointment of a proxy is also an alternative. It is not possible to comment on whether the closure of a polling place would reduce turnout in advance of a closure. With regard to the suggestion that polling places in towns could be combined would be difficult to implement due to the size of hall and the number of voters who require to be accommodated. The possibility of realigning polling districts might be feasible in some areas but could impact the viability of other polling places and was already considered as part of the recent review of polling places when did combine two polling places in Galashiels. We also moved two polling places from

schools into local halls in our continuing aim to reduce the number of school closures for elections.

5. COST AND STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 5.1 Appendix 2 provides the information previously provided in the March report to Council but updated to take account of current elector numbers.
- 5.2 The percentage of voters in these areas who choose to vote by post on a permanent basis varies from 29% in the Tweedsmuir area to just 6% in the Cranshaws area.
- 5.3 The average percentage of voters who actually voted in person at their polling place over the last 4 electoral events varies from 48% in the Cranshaws area to 63% in the Tweedsmuir area.
- 5.4 The average cost per elector ranges from £12.86 for the Makerstoun area to £24.20 per elector for the Cappercleuch area. Obviously there are a variety of sizes of electorates at polling stations with more than 100 electors so cost per elector varies from area to area but at a larger station with around 600 voters voting in person the cost is around £1 per elector and postal votes cost around £2 each.

6. USE OF PEEBLES HIGH SCHOOL GAMES HALL

- 6.1 Initial information regarding the requirements of a polling place have been provided to the Headteacher at Peebles High School and a meeting with him on site is to be arranged to see if it would indeed be feasible to use the games hall as a polling place. Once this meeting has been held it is recommended that powers be delegated to the Chief Executive to determine whether or not it would be appropriate to move the polling place for Tweeddale East Polling District 2A from Priorsford primary School to Peebles High School Games Hall.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

The proposed changes to be implemented for elections from 2015 onwards will result in a saving of just over £5,000 per election based on current costs. Although this would only be a direct saving to the Council every 4 years the Council has to consider the public pound at all levels of Government.

7.2 Risk and Mitigations

There is a risk that closing polling places will discourage some electors from voting in future. However, all voters will be offered the opportunity of having a postal vote or appointing a proxy voter should they not wish to travel to their replacement polling place.

7.3 Equalities

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and there are some equality implications anticipated. However, there are alternatives available and no voter will be denied their right to vote either by post, proxy or in person.

7.4 Acting Sustainably

There are no anticipated economic, social or environmental effects resulting from these changes.

7.5 Carbon Management

There should be little impact on the Council’s carbon emissions by implementing these changes.

7.6 Rural Proofing

A Rural Proofing checklist has been completed. The checklist does show that there will be some impact on those living in the areas concerned. However, the majority of people living in these areas already depend on the use of cars to obtain many services and alternative methods of voting are available.

7.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

No changes are required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Service Director Strategy and Policy, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Tracey Logan, Chief executive

Signature

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Louise McGeoch	Democratic Services Team Leader 01835 825005

Background Papers:

Previous Minute Reference: Scottish Borders Council 27 March 2014

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Louise McGeoch can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Scottish Borders Council, Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells, Melrose, TD6 0SA Fax 01835 825001 or telephone 01835 825005

APPENDIX 1

Index of Consultation Responses

Name	Polling Place
Upper Tweed Community Council	Tweedsmuir Village Hall
Mrs C Parker, Tweedsmuir	Tweedsmuir Village Hall
Ettrick & Yarrow Community Council	St. Marys Hall, Cappercleuch
Lammermuir Community Council	Cranshaws Village Hall
Floors Makerstoun, Nenthorn & Smailholm Community Council	Makerstoun Village Hall
Kalewater Community Council	Hownam Village Hall
Jed Valley Community Council	Edgerston Village Hall
Crailing, Eckford and Nisbet Community Council	Crailing Village Hall
Hermitage Hall Committee	Hermitage Village Hall

APPENDIX 2

Review of Polling Places– Polling Places with less than 100 electors Updated Electorate Information and costs

Ward	Polling Place	Total Electorate as at 1 November 2014 (Permanent Postal Voters)	Polling Station Electorate	Suggested alternative Polling Place	Distance in miles to new polling place	Average voter turnout over last 4 electoral events	Polling stations costs 2014*	Approx. cost per elector based on average turnout
1. Tweeddale West	Tweedsmuir Village Hall	87 (25)	62	Broughton Village Hall	8	63%	£703	£15.98
4. Selkirkshire	St. Marys Hall, Cappercleuch	50 (11)	39	Yarrow Village Hall	8.5	58%	£605	£24.20
6. Mid Berwickshire	Cranshaws Village Hall	69 (4)	65	Preston Village Hall	7.5	48%	£655	£21.13
8. Kelso & District	Makerstoun Village Hall	97 (14)	83	Smailholm Village Hall	4	53%	£540	£12.86
8. Kelso & District	Hownam Village Hall	61 (5)	56	Morebattle Institute	4	58%	£525	£16.41
9. Jedburgh & District	Eckford Village Hall	93 (14)	79	Crailing Village Hall#	2.5	62%	£610	£12.98
9. Jedburgh & District	Edgerston Village Hall	100 (21)	79	Jedburgh Town Hall	7	58%	£935	£19.48
10. Hawick & Hermitage	Hermitage Village Hall	69 (14)	55	Newcastleton Village Hall	6	49%	£574	£22.95

*Polling station costs are based the cost of polling staff fees, the average cost of stationery and delivery of polling screens (£415) plus the actual cost of hall rental

Although Eckford has the smaller number of electors it is proposed to cease using Crailing Village Hall as it has no disabled access