
REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

Report by Chief Executive

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

31 OCTOBER 2019

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the outcome of the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations and seeks approval for various changes to be made.**
- 1.2 At its meeting on 28 March 2019, the Council agreed to undertake a review of its current polling districts, polling places and polling stations. Since then, consultation has been carried out with all stakeholders and contacts for all polling places have been notified and asked to complete a detailed questionnaire to assess their suitability for continued use. A public consultation was also carried out via the Council website. While polling places are in a variety of venues across the Borders, overall they are in reasonable condition, fit for purpose and supported by their local community.
- 1.3 In light of the responses received and the review of the existing polling places and polling districts a small number of changes are being proposed. These changes mainly involve the tweaking of polling district boundaries in response to requests from electors and communities. It is recommended that these changes be implemented when the new Register of Electors is published in December 2019. There is one change to a polling place proposed for implementation at a later date

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Council:

- (a) notes the responses received to the consultation from the various stakeholders, as detailed in the report and Appendix 1;**
- (b) agrees to minor amendments to polling districts within Ward 1, Ward 4, Ward 7 and Ward 11 as shown on the maps at Appendix 2 to take effect when the new Register of Electors is published on 1 December 2019; and**
- (c) agrees that the Gymnasium at Peebles High School be replaced as a polling place if a suitable alternative becomes available.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At its meeting on 28 March 2019, with regard to the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the Council agreed to undertake a review of its current polling districts, polling places and polling stations. As part of this review a consultation process required to be undertaken to seek the views of all stakeholders on the existing situation and to ask for any suggested changes which could be made.
- 3.2 The consultation process ended on 7 October 2019 and had been widely publicised including directly to Councillors, Community Councils and disability groups. Public consultation has also been carried out via Citizens Space on the Council's website.

4. OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 4.1 A total of 86 responses were received to the website consultation and these are summarised in Appendix 1 to the report. The majority support the retention of their existing polling place with a few exceptions which are detailed below.
- 4.2 11 Councillors and 3 Community Councils responded. There were no requests to change polling places with one community council suggesting an amendment to their polling district boundary.
- 4.3 One group representing those with a disability responded supporting the change of polling place in Ward 2 within Peebles.

5. REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES

- 5.1 All polling places have been visited regularly by Polling Station Inspectors during recent elections so no separate visits were carried out during this review. However, contacts for each polling place were sent a detailed questionnaire to assess their continuing suitability and to ascertain if there were any future plans for the buildings. While polling places are in a variety of venues across the Borders, overall they are in reasonable condition and fit for purpose with the few exceptions detailed below.
- 5.2 Abbey St. Bathen's Village Hall is in very poor condition and the Community is about to build a replacement. There will be a period of time when the hall is unavailable but there is a church hall nearby which can be used until the new hall is constructed.
- 5.3 Complaints have been received regarding the access for disabled voters to the Gymnasium at Peebles High School and it is acknowledged that the location is not ideal. Polling places should be located within the polling district they serve and the current issue is the lack of a large enough venue on that side of the river in Peebles. Priorsford Primary School was previously used but this required the school to close each time there was an election so we discontinued its use as a polling place. A suggestion has been received to use the new Baptist Church which is currently being constructed in Cleland Avenue. We have been in contact with the Church, which will be known as "The King's Barn", and they are happy for us to consider using it as a polling place in the future. It is likely that the first

elections which could be held there will be the Scottish Parliament Elections in May 2021.

6. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS

- 6.1 While the Council cannot amend Ward boundaries, they are charged with setting the polling districts within each Ward. Since the last review and during this review we have received requests from voters and from one Community Council to change polling district boundaries to allow people to vote at a more convenient polling place. These are as follows:-
- (a) Ward 1 (Tweeddale West) - Move the boundary between polling districts 1D and 1J to allow voters who currently vote at Eddleston to vote in the Burgh Hall, Peebles which is much closer. This will affect approximately 14 voters and has no impact on either polling place.
 - (b) Ward 4 (Selkirkshire) - Move boundary between polling districts 4G and 4F to accommodate 1 property separated from the rest of the Market Place, Selkirk. This is an administrative change to correct an error as the property is already included on the Register for 4F.
 - (c) Ward 7 (East Berwickshire) - Move boundary between polling districts 7I and 7K to allow voters who currently vote in Chirnside to vote in Allanton which is much closer. This will affect approximately 40 voters and will increase the viability of Allanton Village Hall as a polling place (currently 170 voters).
 - (d) Ward 11 (Hawick & Hermitage) - Move the boundary between polling districts 11G and 11H to reflect the Community Council boundary and allow voters who currently vote in Newcastleton to vote at Hermitage. This will affect approximately 72 voters and will increase the viability of Hermitage Village Hall as a polling place where voter numbers are very low (currently 64 on the register). This amendment was requested by the Upper Liddesdale Community Council.
- 6.2 Plans showing the current and proposed boundaries are contained in Appendix 2 to the report. Should the proposed changes to polling districts be approved, the affected voters will be advised after the new Register of Electors is published on 1 December 2019.

7 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

The changes to be implemented for December 2019 will have no costs other than officer time to make the necessary amendments to the voters roll and on-line maps showing electoral boundaries.

7.2 Risk and Mitigations

No risks have been identified. The changes are seen as positive in that people may be encouraged to vote if their polling station is closer to their home.

7.3 Equalities

No adverse equality implications are anticipated. All stakeholders had the opportunity to comment as part of this review and no issues of equality

were raised. No voter will be denied their right to vote by any of the proposed changes.

7.4 Acting Sustainably

There are not any anticipated to be any economic, social or environmental effects resulting from these changes.

7.5 Carbon Management

There will be no impact on the Council’s carbon emissions by implementing these changes. However, if people do not have to travel as far to vote there may be an overall reduction.

7.6 Rural Proofing

A Rural Proofing checklist is not required.

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 Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR, the Clerk to the Council, Electoral Registration Officer and Corporate Communications 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: Consultee responses and Polling Place Survey documents

Previous Minute Reference: Scottish Borders Council 28 March 2019

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 - Comments Received via website consultation

PD	POLLING PLACE	COMMENTS
1B	Graham Institute West Linton	<p>Is your polling station easy to locate? Yes</p> <p>Is it convenient to your home address? Yes</p> <p>Is there sufficient parking? Yes</p> <p>Do you think the building is suitable for use as a polling station? Yes</p> <p>Is there disabled access if required? Yes</p> <p>Once inside the building is it easy to access the voting area? Yes</p> <p>Are there premises within your polling district which we could use that would be more suitable? No</p>
1B	Graham Institute West Linton	<p>I think the hall is very good but it is very large and expensive plus takes a lot to heat and light - might be better for elections and indeed the meetings with elected officials to use the village centre?</p>
1B	Graham Institute West Linton	<p>easy to locate</p> <p>convenient</p> <p>access for all is possible</p> <p>good building which is suitable for this use</p>
1J	Peebles	<p>Peebles polling station is relatively easy to access using a wheelchair. Parking is on the street nearby but the closest disabled parking spot is often occupied. The inside of the polling station is easy to manoeuvre around and has suitable booths for wheelchair users</p>
1J	Peebles	<p>I am registered blind and a guide dog owner access into the building is good. There is always someone inside to guide me to the table. The ballot paper is not accessible for me. I still have to get a sighted person to show me.</p>
2A	Peebles High School	<p>Ideal</p>
2A	Peebles High School	<p>Good use of existing facilities</p>
2A	Peebles High School	<p>Parking can be tight but there is plenty outside peak times</p>
2A	Peebles High School	<p>The premises meets all of my requirements and is always very efficiently run. I would not like it to be changed.</p>

2A	Peebles High School	<p>Peebles High School as a polling station: my husband is forced to use a postal vote because he cannot access the polling station: he feels strongly that disabled people should be seen to participate in full in community life – including voting in person - and the polling station is not accessible for him and for other disabled people. He is a disabled driver and needs to park within a very short distance of the polling station. He is not the only disabled would-be user of this polling station, we have spoken to other disabled people there who had tried to get in. The main access has stairs outside without a handrail: inside there are stairs and what many people with poor mobility would find a long walk. Handrails should be present on BOTH sides of all sets of stairs intended for disabled access.</p> <p>The disabled entrance is a narrow gap beside the stairs – it does not appear to be wide enough for wheelchair access: my husband is not able to use a wheelchair and doesn't have one, but he does have a motability car.</p> <p>The disabled entrance is at the rear of the building: there is room to park, but when we arrived the gate was padlocked. There was no way to contact anyone to gain access.</p> <p>I complained to the returning officer about the disabled access – this was the 4th election in a row when I have had to complain about unacceptable disabled access of this polling station. SBC is aware of this problem as I written to them before. I left my email address with the returning officer, who promised to email me with a response, but she has not done so. I can provide you with photos of the access as it was on polling day.</p>
2A	Peebles High School	Don't think it's appropriate to be using the school when it's full of children.
2B	Traquair Village hall	Polling station is fine for us, easy to access and good parking.
2D	Innerleithen memorial hall	The memorial hall is a good location, easy for most to access I think. I don't think there is anywhere else which would be better. I walk but there is parking available.
2D	Memorial Hall Innerleithen	Polling Station is easy to reach and centrally located. Large space available. All at street level so good access
2D	Innerleithen	Excellent Location albeit on the large side.
2F	Clovenfords - Caddonfoot hall	This polling station is only accessible by car. There is no public transport. It cannot be walked to safely - there is no pavement and it is situated on a road with a 60mph speed limit. The school in Clovenfords, or the local pub, would be more suitable.

2F	Caddonfoot hall	Building is suitable with good disability access and car parking. I am happy to continue using this venue although you really need a car to get there safely. Might be the time to consider moving it to Clovenfords village to allow most people to walk to vote. Something for community council to consider so everyone's opinion could be heard. I would prefer it in the village but I understand that others may not.
3A	Macfie Hall, Heriot	It is excellent for everything.
3E	Baptist Church Hall Galashiels	Well placed, easy access and parking always available nearby.
3E	Baptist Church Galashiels although for the EU elections it was the Focus Centre	Have no complaints about the Baptist Church
3G	St Peters Church	The church is suitable for use as a polling station
3G	St Peter's Church, Galashiels	Easily accessible for all voters.
3G	St Peters Church	No comment left
3H & 3I	St Johns Church, Hawthorn Road, Galashiels	Not many parking spaces however I usually walk.
4C	Yarrow Feus	Very accessible with ample parking and very pleasant surroundings
4E	Philiphaugh School	It's easy to find and easy to park. Disabled access into the building looks to be ok. Easy to find where to go.
4E	Philiphaugh Community School, Selkirk	It is absolutely adequate for a polling station. It's a community school and covers all the hints on your list.
4E	Philiphaugh Community School	Polling station is very suitable for the purpose of voting
4F	Selkirk Parish Church Hall	This polling station is easy to locate and very accessible however, there is limited parking available outside so most people walk from the nearby Sainsbury's car park or high street which isn't as straight forward for disabled people.
4G	Selkirk Victoria hall	It's the best location for the polling station. It's central and convenient
4G	Victoria Hall, Selkirk	There is usually both the parish church hall and the Victoria hall in use and they are on opposite sides of the same street you may say directly in line with each other. Now the Victoria hall has a large area and it is very difficult to see how they could not combine the two polling stations into there. Saving at least the cost of hire if not the cost of staffing.

4G	Victoria Hall Selkirk	I have no complaints or recommendations regarding the Victoria Hall being used as a polling station, in fact it is quite suitable. My complaint is that Selkirk Parish Church hall is also being used as a polling and it is less than 50 metres from the Victoria Hall which is large enough to accommodate both polling stations. Cutting down the use of one hall and probably several staff in one area my not save very much, but if this is copied over the whole region and country it could save a large sum
4G	Victoria Halls, Selkirk	Easy to locate, convenient, disabled access, parking close by, doesn't need regular users to vacate premises (as school polling stations do). I think it is suitable as a polling station
4J	Midlem	The polling station is perfectly satisfactory.
4K	Bowden village hall	Perfect venue for our village.
4K	Our village hall in Bowden	All very good
4K	Bowden Village Hall	Perfect facilities. Easy access.
4L	Newtown Community Wing	Convenient for me. Ample parking. Perfectly suitable with good disabled access. Voting area easily accessed. No need to change.
5B	Lauder Public hall	Parking is sometimes a problem outside the station. The polling station is big enough and suitable for the purpose
5D	Earlston Church Hall	The Church Hall itself is fine as it's on the High Street and access is easy. The downside is that there is no easy parking. You also have to run the gauntlet of party representatives which is uncomfortable
5F	Tweedbank	Perfect for all above points for the community.
5F	Tweedbank community Centre	Excellent venue wheelchair accessibility
5H	Melrose	Convenient suitable hope it stays at corn exchange
6C	Longformacus	Convenient, easy to locate & importantly it is an accessible venue which is familiar to many local residents It is important that we maintain access to small rural polling stations giving remote rural residents the opportunity to place their votes in person at the conclusion of any campaign. They also provide a degree of social inclusion on voting days Similar comments apply to other places; Abbey St Bathans, Cranshaws, Preston, Gordon, Westruther

6C	Longformacus but comments apply to other small rural places such as Cranshaws, Abbey St Bathans, Gordon etc	Good & well located in a place familiar to the local community Easy to locate, park & enter Considerable community expense has been spent here (and at Cranshaws) to make a safe, accessible space at the heart of community life Rural polling places should be supported so that residents can vote close to home and in-person at the end of a campaign they also offer social inclusion & tackle isolation as the centre of much social activity on polling days
6E	Volunteer Hall, Duns	Volunteer Hall is the most suitable place.
6F	Gavinton	Easy to locate, just round the corner, plenty parking, good building, disabled access, easy to find way about. There's a larger venue in Duns, I don't see the need to host small venues when there's one in the neighbouring town. So wasting money manning lots of different stations. If folk are not happy they can get a postal vote, simple solution.
6H	Greenlaw memorial hall	It is important to have local polling stations - there is easy access to this polling station with nearby parking for those who cannot walk far. If I had to rely on buses to get to my nearest polling station this would make it more difficult to vote
6K	Eccles village hall	Located within walking distance for most villagers. Easy access. Plenty space inside.
7E	Reston village hall	The polling station is easily accessible and close to my home. It is easy to access polling booths and it is wheelchair accessible.
7G	Eyemouth community centre	Great facility, central location
7G	Eyemouth community centre	It is easy to locate, It is convenient to my home address, There is not sufficient parking , It is suitable for use as a polling station, there is disabled access, Once inside the building it is easy to access the voting area. The only other building I could suggest that would be suitable would be the Assembly hall in the old Eyemouth High School
7I	Chirnside community centre	Convenient, easy access and clear
7I	Chirnside community centre	Community Centre is probably best location for a polling centre in the village
7I	Chirnside community centre	No comment left
8A	Stichill Village Hall	Easy to access Close to home Disability friendly Ease of use No need to travel far
8A	Stichill Hall	I hope this will continue as My nearest polling station, I can walk there.

8C	Smailholm Village Hall	Smailholm Village Hall is an excellent polling station and meets all the criteria listed above.
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	Nearby, convenient, easy parking and where we are used to going.
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	The answer to all the above questions except the last one is YES - the hall is ideally placed in the centre of the village at a three road junction, it is well signed, has a simple layout, all on one level, is fully accessible, with toilets, and has an ample parking area.
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	Excellent location - at the heart of the village, so most of us can walk. Those who do need to drive can do so knowing there is ample parking. The hall itself is clean, bright and spacious enough to make voting a pleasant experience.
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	There are quite a number of elderly residents in Smailholm who would find the hall more convenient than having to travel elsewhere to vote.
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	This venue is easy and convenient with plentiful parking. Im happy to continue to use this venue for voting.
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	The hall is easy and convenient with plentiful parking spaces. I would like to continue to vote at this venue.
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	Very convenient Loads of parking Good access for all Easy to get to voting booths Toilets there too. Good privacy
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	I find Smailholm Village Hall is an ideal location - convenient with plenty of parking space, a well-appointed building with all necessary facilities, good heating and light, including disabled access and toilet; it is also easy to find the voting area in the main hall.
8C	Smailholm village hall	It is very convenient. I suspect that if I had to vote elsewhere, I would use a postal vote instead.
8C	Smailholm Village Hall	There are no better alternative premises within my polling district. Apart from its closeness to my home, it has all the facilities that could be required. The Hall is easily visible and accessible from the road. It has plenty of space for parking. Specific spaces for disabled parking plus disabled access to the building and the voting area. The interior is light, has a good heating system and there are toilets by the entrance hall.
8C	Smailholm	Parking available. Plenty space. Easily accessible.. toilets. Walking distance for me.
8E	Borders Ice Rink - Kelso	Borders Ice Rink is a good location.
8E	Kelso Ice Rink	Close and convenient. Ample parking for those who need it. Roomy enough for privacy

8F	Tait Hall Kelso	Local polling station meets all criteria.
8G	Usually by post but Abbey Row, Kelso	Parking can be an issue.
8J	Wauchope Hall Yetholm	It is perfectly situated in Town Yetholm, suitable for the catchment area of Yetholm and District. Disabled access good, parking can be limited but this is no worse than if there is a function on in hall.
8J	Wauchope Hall Yetholm	Yes, fantastically run
9A	St Boswells Village Hall	Easy to find, convenient, especially coming by bus. Very suitable, disabled access, plenty of room; nowhere else better in St Boswells.
9C	Roxburgh	No comment left
9D	Helton Village Hall.	It is not convenient for my home address and I think that it is ridiculous that I am in the Jedburgh ward when I am less than a mile out of Kelso.
9I	Jedburgh Town Hall	It is convenient and serves the purpose adequately
9I	Jedburgh Town Hall	I don't think there are any issues. Whilst doors are not automatic for those who would require them, from my experience there is always a person in attendance at the entrance that would be able to open the doors into the actual hall from the foyer.
10B	Burnfoot Community Hub Hawick	Ideal location at moment unless a change of use for the room comes in
10E	Hawick Youth Centre	I have no difficulties making my vote.
10E	Hawick youth centre	Poor parking On a hill Out of town
10F & 11E	Guide hut, Trinity, Hawick	Building is clean and well kept, easy to find and access, disabled friendly also. Parking can be an issue but that street is always like that.
10H	Southdean	This location ticks all the boxes
11B	Teviothead village hall	All of the above, it is ideal for us and fit for purpose