

**SPECIAL COUNCIL
18 FEBRUARY 2021**

**POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER, TEES VALLEY COMBINED
AUTHORITY MAYORAL AND BY-ELECTIONS – MAY 2021**

Councillor Johnson, Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director - Paul Wildsmith, Managing Director

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To request that consideration be given to:-
 - (a) changes to a number of polling places (commonly known as polling stations) to be used at the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral (TVCAM) Elections, and any by elections scheduled to be held on Thursday 6 May 2021; and
 - (b) delegating to the Assistant Director Law and Governance (the Returning Officer), the power to change the location of polling places in the event that a designated polling place is no longer available or suitable.

Summary

2. The Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, places a duty on all local authorities in England and Wales to undertake and complete a review of all of the polling districts, polling places and polling stations in its area every four years. The last Polling District, Polling Place and Polling Station Review was held in 2018 at which the attached list of Polling Places was approved (**Appendix 1**).
3. When booking the polling places for the elections scheduled to be held in May 2021 Officers were made aware that a number of the polling places were unavailable on polling day for various reasons.
4. As a result of the requests received and the unavailability of a number of polling places, work has been undertaken to find alternative polling places in the affected polling districts / wards.

Recommendation

5. That Council be requested to:-

- (a) note and approve the following changes to polling places, commonly known as polling stations, for all elections scheduled to take place on 6 May 2021, namely:-
 - (i) College Ward (Polling Districts COA, COB and COC) to vote at the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College Sports Pavilion, Abbey Road Playing Field, Abbey Road, Darlington, in place of the classrooms in the main Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College building;
 - (ii) Hummersknott Ward (Polling Districts HKA and HKB) to vote at Salutation Hall, Salutation Road, Darlington, in place of Carmel College;
 - (iii) North Road Ward (Polling District NRA) to vote at Darlington Elim Pentecostal Church, Bowman Street, Darlington, in place of St. Thomas Aquinas Church Hall;
 - (iv) Park East Ward (Polling Districts PEA) to vote at the Friends Meeting House, Skinnergate, Darlington, in place of St. Augustine's Parish Centre;
 - (v) Park West Ward (Polling District PWC) to vote at Darlington Baptist Church, Grange Road, Darlington, in place of St. Augustine's Parish Centre; and
 - (vi) Sadberge and Middleton St George Ward (Polling Districts SMA and SMC) to vote at Bishopton Village Hall, Bishopton, in place of Great Stainton Church Hall.
- (b) delegate to the Assistant Director Law and Governance (the Returning Officer), in consultation with Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio, Group Leaders and relevant Ward Members, the power to change the location of polling places in the event that a designated polling place is no longer available or suitable.

Reasons

6. The recommendations are supported for the following reasons, namely to:-

- (a) comply with the requests received from Carmel College and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College to use alternative premises and to find alternative venue(s) for those polling places that are unavailable; and

- (b) allow further changes to be made to the approved list of polling places should they be unavailable or unsuitable.

**Paul Wildsmith
Managing Director**

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Lynne Wood: Extension 5803

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	There are no issues relating to health and wellbeing which this report needs to address.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues relating to carbon impact.
Diversity	All polling places have been assessed to ensure that they are accessible for voters who have a disability.
Wards Affected	The proposals have implications on the College, Harrowgate Hill, Hummerksnott, North Road, Park East and Park West Wards.
Groups Affected	The proposals do not affect any specific group.
Budget and Policy Framework	The report does not change the Council's budget or Policy framework but needs to be considered by Council
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an executive decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	There are no links.
Efficiency	There are no efficiency proposals identified as part of this review.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Polling District, Polling Place and Polling Station Review

7. The Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, places a duty on all local authorities in England and Wales to undertake and complete a compulsory review of all of the polling districts, polling places and polling stations in its area within a prescribed period. The last review was completed in 2018, approved by full Council at its meeting held in November 2018 and implemented at the Local Elections held in May 2019. The list of Polling Places approved as part of that review is attached at **Appendix 1**.
8. Local authorities must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling place does not materially affect the convenience of the electors. A polling place must be within the polling district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate somewhere outside of the polling district, for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified.
9. Local authorities must also comply with certain access requirements, and they must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances, and ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled. .

2021 Elections

10. The Coronavirus Act 2020 and the Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 postponed all elections scheduled to be held between 16 March 2020 and 5 May 2021 (including casual vacancies) to 6 May 2021.
11. The Elections scheduled to take place in May 2020 were the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the Tees Valley Combined Authority Mayoral (TVCAM) Elections and these elections will now take place on 6 May 2021. There is currently one casual vacancy in the Red Hall and Lingfield Ward, following the resignation of Councillor Sam Howarth, which will also take place on 6 May 2021 together with any further by-elections that may be called by 29 March 2021.

12. Polling places were informed of the revised date of the election when the original bookings were cancelled in April 2020, however, a number of polling places have subsequently informed Officers that they are unavailable on 6 May 2021, for various reasons (stated below). As a result, alternative polling places need to be identified for use at the elections taking place on 6 May 2021.
13. As part of the preparations for the elections taking place on 6 May 2021, further guidance may be received regarding the use of polling places or polling places may subsequently become unavailable. As a result of the timescales involved with the elections it may not be possible to consider changes at a meeting of full Council and as such, it is requested that the Assistant Director Law and Governance (the Returning Officer), be given delegated authority, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member and Ward Members, to approve any further changes to polling places.
14. The polling places that Officers are aware of that currently require to be changed, together with the alternative options available, are detailed below.

College Ward - Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College (QESFC)

15. The Principal of Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College (QESFC) has raised concerns in respect of using the usual classrooms in the main College building as polling stations, on this occasion, due to Covid-19, and the systems that have been put in place to keep students and staff safe while they are in the College. Following discussions with Officers, an alternative to using the usual classrooms has been identified and proposed – that being the use of the QESFC Sports Pavilion, Abbey Sports Field, Abbey Road, Darlington.
16. The access to the usual polling places which are located within the main College building, is via Abbey Road. The Sports Pavilion is not part of the main College building but is still situated on Abbey Road (as shown on the plan attached at **Appendix 2**). The Pavilion has level access, has on site and on road parking nearby and is deemed a suitable alternative to using the classrooms in the QESFC main building. A map is attached at **Appendix 2** showing the current and alternative polling places.
17. All the polling districts for the College Ward (COA, COB and COC) currently vote at the QESFC.

Hummersknott Ward - Carmel College

18. The Principal of Carmel College has requested that the College be no longer used as a polling place. The whole ward currently votes at this polling place (Polling Districts HKA and HKB).
19. The polling station is usually located in John Caden Hall, which is separate from the rest of the College, and as such, has always previously allowed the College to remain open during polling day. The Principal has raised a number of safeguarding concerns, in respect of the continued use of the hall as a polling station. In addition to those concerns, the hall is currently being used for

teaching, as a result of Covid-19, and should the hall be used as a polling station, it would likely meant that the College would have to close for the day.

20. During the last review in 2018 no objections were raised by the College in respect of its continued use as a polling station, and as such, no alternative venues were sought, however, in response to the concerns raised two possible alternatives have been identified in the ward, namely Hummersknott Academy and Salutation Hall. As Hummersknott Academy would likely have the same concerns / issues as Carmel College and may have to close, this alternative has been discounted.
21. Salutation Hall, Salutation Road is at the southern end of the ward in terms of the residential area. The Hall has been inspected, has level access and is suitable to be used as a polling place. There is no designated parking at the venue but there is adequate on-street parking nearby. A map is attached at **Appendix 3** showing the current and proposed alternative polling places.

North Road Ward (Polling District NRA) - St Thomas Aquinas Church Hall

22. Officers have been informed that St Thomas Aquinas Church Hall will be unavailable on Polling Day. An alternative Polling Place has been identified in Polling District NRA, namely Elim Pentecostal Church, Bowman Street, Darlington. The church has been inspected and is suitable to be used as a polling place and although there are steps to the front of the property, there is level access to the side of the building. A map is attached at **Appendix 4** showing the current and proposed alternative polling places.

Park East Ward (Polling District PEA) - St. Augustine's Parish Centre

23. Officers have also been informed that St. Augustine's Parish Centre will be unavailable on Polling Day as building work is scheduled to take place at that time. Currently Polling Districts PEA (Park East Ward) and PWC (Park West Ward) vote at the Parish Centre.
24. A number of potential alternatives have been identified and considered which are located in Polling District PEA, as detailed below and shown on **Appendix 5**, namely:-
 - (a) Bondgate Methodist Church Hall – the hall was considered however it is currently closed and unavailable;
 - (b) Crown Street Library – this is a Council building, has level access, however, it has limited on-street parking and it is located at the eastern edge of the Polling District, away from the main residential area.;
 - (c) Dolphin Centre –the Pease Suite could be used as a polling place, however, it is currently being used as a welfare room as part of the Community Testing facility;

- (d) Friends Meeting House, Skinnergate – this would be a suitable alternative polling place and it is located close to the main residential area of the polling district. The building has been inspected and although there are steps up to the main entrance, there is level access to the side / rear of the building. There is limited parking to the rear of the premises and has on-street parking available before 10.00 a.m. and after 4.00 p.m.;
- (e) St. Cuthbert's Church Hall – there is no direct access from the street to the hall - access is either through the church yard or via the lane which has had issues with anti-social behaviour in the past and is not well lit; or
- (f) Town Hall – although space could be provided in the Civic Reception of the Town Hall, this may cause disruption to staff, both Council and Department for Education, entering the Town Hall. There is very little on-street parking and it is situated at the eastern edge of the of the polling district, away from the main residential area.

25. The Friends Meeting House on Skinnergate (Option D) is the preferred option for Polling District PEC, due to its proximity to the main residential area of the polling district. A map is attached at **Appendix 5** showing the current polling place and Options A to F as detailed in paragraph 24 above.

Park West Ward (Polling District PWC) - St. Augustine's Parish Centre

26. Polling District PWC (Park West Ward) currently votes at the same Polling Place as Polling District PEA, and as detailed in paragraph 23 above, St. Augustine's Parish Centre (as shown on **Appendix 5**) is unavailable on polling day. There are a number of alternatives available in the polling district as detailed below. St. Augustine's RC Primary School is in the polling district and has been used as a polling place in the past, and as they are likely to have to close, and may have concerns around Covid-19, the use of the school has been discounted.

27. The other options available for Polling District PWC are:-

- (a) to move it to the same polling place as Polling District PEA (Friends Meeting House, Skinnergate) (as shown as Option D on **Appendix 5**);
- (b) Darlington Baptist Church, Grange Road – the Church is in Polling District (PWC) and it has been inspected. It has level access, off road parking and is a suitable alternative polling place (as shown as Option B on **Appendix 6**); or
- (c) to move the polling district to the All Saint's Millennium Centre, Ravensdale Road where the other two Park West Polling Districts (PWA and PWB) currently vote (as shown as Option C on **Appendix 6**).

28. The preferred option for Polling District PWC is the Darlington Baptist Church, as it is located in the polling district and is the closest to the main residential area of the polling district. Maps are attached at **Appendices 5 and 6** showing the current and proposed alternative polling places.

Sadberge and Middleton St. George Ward (Polling District SMA and SMC) – Great Stainton Church Hall

29. Officers were informed prior to the postponed elections in 2020 that Great Stainton Church Hall had been sold and would be unavailable for future elections. As there are no suitable alternative venues in Great Stainton for a Polling Place it is proposed, to move Polling Districts SMA and SMC to Bishopton Village Hall. Bishopton Village Hall is already being used as a polling place and can accommodate the additional polling districts.

Financial Implications

30. There are no financial implications for the Council in the proposed changes to the polling places as any costs incurred can be claimed back from the Government.

Equality Considerations

31. Equality considerations have been taken into consideration when proposing alternative polling places to ensure that there is a level access to the property and that no voter will be disadvantaged. Should that level access be via an alternative access appropriate signage will be in place to direct voters accordingly.

Consultation and Communications

32. The Leader, Deputy Leader, Group Leaders and Ward Memberes have been consulted on the proposals.
33. Electors will be notified of any changes to their polling stations on their polling cards and information will be included on the Council's Website, One Darlington Magazine and social media on the run-up to polling day.

Appendix 1

Proposed Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

Polling District	Polling Place Address	Post Code
BFA (D)	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington*	DL2 2GF
BFA (S)	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington*	DL2 2GF
BFB	West Park Academy, Alderman Leach Drive, Darlington	DL2 2GF
BFC	Darlington Railway Athletic Club (Snooker Room), Brinkburn Road, Darlington	DL3 9LF
BLA	King William Street Community Centre, King William Street, Darlington	DL1 4YS
BLB	Rydal Academy, Rydal Road, Darlington	DL1 4BH
BLC	Rydal Academy, Rydal Road, Darlington	DL1 4BH
BLD	St. John's Church of England Academy, Fenby Avenue, Darlington	DL1 4UB
CKA	Holy Family R. C. Primary School, Prior Street, Darlington	DL3 9EN
CKB	'Little Learners', Mount Pleasant Primary School, Newton Lane, Darlington	DL3 9HE
CKC	The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Eggleston View, Darlington	DL3 9SH
COA	Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Vane Terrace, Darlington	DL3 7AU
COB, COC	Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Vane Terrace, Darlington	DL3 7AU
EAA	Geneva Road Evangelical Baptist Church, Geneva Road Darlington	DL1 4HS
EAB	Firthmoor Community Centre, Burnside Road, Darlington	DL1 4SU

EAC	Pilmoor Green Community Centre, West Moor Road, Darlington	DL1 4LN
HCA	Heighington Village Hall, Heighington	DL5 6QX
HCB, HCE, HCF	Walworth Castle Hotel, Walworth	DL2 2LY
HCC, HCD	Summerhouse Village Hall, Summerhouse	DL2 3UD
HCG	St. Mary's Church, The Green, Piercebridge	DL2 3SH
HCH, HCI	High Coniscliffe Church Hall, The Green, High Coniscliffe	DL2 2LR
HCJ, HCK	Whessoe Village Hall, Harrowgate Village, Darlington	DL1 3AA
HCL	Brafferton Village Hall, Brafferton	DL1 3LB
HHA	Whessoe Village Hall, Harrowgate Village, Darlington	DL1 3AA
HHB	Harrowgate Hill Working Men's Club, Salters Lane North, Darlington	DL1 3DT
HHC	D.S.R.M. Social Club, Longfield Road, Darlington	DL3 0HX
HKA	Carmel College, The Headlands, Darlington	DL3 8RW
HKB	Carmel College, The Headlands, Darlington	DL3 8RW
HSA	Haughton Children's Centre, Salters Lane South, Darlington	DL1 2AN
HSB	Haughton Children's Centre, Salters Lane South, Darlington	DL1 2AN
HSC	St. Anne's Church Hall, Welbeck Avenue, Darlington	DL1 2DR
HUA	Linden Court, Linden Drive, Hurworth Place	DL2 2DL
HUB	Hurworth Primary School, Westfield Drive, Hurworth	DL2 2ET
HUC, HUD, HUE	The Reading Room, Neasham, Darlington	DL2 1PH
MOA	Mowden Junior School (Staff Room), Federation of Mowden Schools, Conyers Avenue, Darlington	DL3 9QG
MOB	Mowden Junior School (Staff Room), Federation of Mowden Schools, Conyers Avenue, Darlington	DL3 9QG

NGA, NGB	Corporation Road Community Primary School, Corporation Road, Darlington	DL3 6AR
NGC	Borough Road Nursery School, Borough Road, Darlington	DL1 1SG
NRA	St. Thomas Aquinas Church Hall, North Road, Darlington	DL1 2PU
NRB	Rise Carr College, Eldon Street, Darlington	DL3 0NS
NRC, NRD	Northwood Primary School, Pendleton Road South, Darlington	DL1 2HF
PEA	St. Augustine's Parish Centre, Larchfield Street, Darlington	DL3 7TF
PEB	Borough Road Nursery School, Borough Road, Darlington	DL1 1SG
PEC	St. Columba's Church and the Clifton Centre, Clifton Avenue, Darlington	DL1 5EE
PED	The Coleridge Centre, Coleridge Gardens, Darlington	DL1 5AJ
PEE	Skerne Park Youth and Community Centre, Coleridge Gardens, Darlington**	DL1 5AP
PIA	Willow Road Community Centre, Willow Road, Darlington	DL3 6PZ
PIB	Willow Road Community Centre, Willow Road, Darlington	DL3 6PZ
PIC, PID	Reid Street Primary School, Reid Street, Darlington	DL3 6EX
PWA, PWB	All Saint's Millennium Centre, Ravensdale Road, Darlington	DL3 8DT
PWC	St. Augustine's Parish Centre, Larchfield Street, Darlington	DL3 7TF
RLA	Red Hall Community Centre, Headingley Crescent, Darlington	DL1 2ST
RLB	St. Herbert's Church Hall, Yarm Road, Darlington	DL1 1BD
SMA, SMC	Great Stainton Church Hall, Glebe Road, Great Stainton	TS21 1NB
SMB	Bishopton Village Hall, Church View, Bishopton	TS21 1HB

SMD, SMF	Sadberge Village Hall, Sadberge	DL2 1SB
SME, SMG, SMH	St. Anne's Church Hall, Welbeck Avenue, Darlington	DL1 2DR
SMI	Middleton St. George Women's Institute Hall, Neasham Road, Middleton St. George, Darlington	DL2 1LD
SMJ	Middleton St. George Women's Institute Hall, Neasham Road, Middleton St. George, Darlington	DL2 1LD
STA	St. James the Great Church Hall, Barton Street, Darlington, (Entrance on Grey Street)	DL1 2LD
STB	Eastbourne Sports Complex, Bourne Avenue (off Hundens Lane), Darlington	DL1 1LJ
WHA	Whinfield Primary School, Augusta Close, Darlington	DL1 3HT
WHB	Whinfield Primary School, Augusta Close, Darlington	DL1 3HT