

Review of Scheme of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019 for implementation after 2 March 2020**Report by Dr Grace Vickers, Chief Executive****1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1** The Council is asked to agree a new Scheme of Polling Districts and Polling Places after taking into consideration the representations received, including those of the Returning Officer.

Please note that, if agreed by Council, the new scheme can only be introduced after 2 March 2020 due to the procedures which need to be put in place in liaison with the Electoral Registration Office.

2 Background

- 2.1** The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Places. It requires local authorities to undertake a compulsory Statutory Polling District and Polling Place Review within the period 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020 inclusive and every five years thereafter.

- 2.3** The public consultation period of the Review commenced on 14 August 2019 and has now been completed.

- 2.4** As part of the review process local authorities must:-

- Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
- Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable the polling places are accessible to those who are disabled; and
- When considering or reviewing the designation of a polling place, have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

- 2.5** Accordingly, the Electoral Commission guidance stresses the importance that the needs of electors with a disability are met in so far as practical.

2.6/...

- 2.6** Due to considerable feedback from parents, it was agreed at CMT on 8 August 2018 that part of the review should include minimising the amount of schools used as Polling Places that are required to be closed to pupils on Polling Days provided there are no significant additional financial implications to the Council. The proposals noted below achieve the aim of non-closure of any schools used on Polling Day.

3 Public Consultation

Prior to the commencement of the public consultation process (14 August 2019) the initial observations of the Midlothian Parliamentary Constituency Returning Officer were sought and her response is shown at **Appendix I** to this report.

- 3.1** Annexed to her report is the Proposed Scheme of Arrangements for Polling Districts and Places in Midlothian.
- 3.2** Subsequently the Review entered the consultation period. In addition to press advertisement, social media posts and details being posted on the Council's website, stakeholders including all Midlothian Councillors, the MP for the Midlothian Constituency, the Constituency MSPs, Community Councils and all Political Parties at a national level, were informed of the Review. Capability Scotland were also invited to comment.
- 3.3** The consultation process ended on 25 September 2019 during which time 58 email responses were received plus several social media comments which are detailed in full for your consideration at **Appendix II** to this report.

In summary:

- **Ward 1** – 8 comments specific to Ward 1 were received, 7 of which were positive and 1 negative;
- **Ward 2** – 4 comments specific to Ward 2 were received, 2 of which were positive and 2 neutral;
- **Ward 3** – 12 comments specific to Ward 3 were received, 10 positive, 1 negative and 1 neutral;
- **Ward 4** – 4 comments specific to Ward 4 were received, 3 positive and 1 negative;
- **Ward 5** – 12 comments specific to Ward 5 were received, 7 positive, 4 negative and 1 neutral;
- **Ward 6** – 1 comment specific to Ward 6 was received which was negative; and
- **General Comments** – 22 general comments were received, 11 positive, 2 negative and 9 neutral.

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In total 58* email comments were received, 62% of which were positive, 16% negative and 22% neutral (the comments have been treated as neutral as they do not refer to the terms of the review).

**(5 of the comments were joint for Wards 3 and 5)*

4 Polling Districts and Places

4.1 Ward 1 - Penicuik

It is proposed to merge Polling Districts MS1B and MS1C into one Polling District to be known as MS1B. All electors in this district will vote at The Penicuik Centre which means that the schools previously used – Cornbank Primary School and Cuiken Primary School - will not be used and will therefore remain open on Polling Days.

8 comments were received following the public consultation, 7 of which were in favour of the proposals. The only negative comment received related to the position of the two schools being located at the high point of Penicuik whereas the Penicuik Centre is lower down in the centre meaning some electors would have further to walk.

Proposed Polling Places at Ward 1 – Penicuik are as follows:

Polling Place	Polling District	No of Polling Stations	No of Electors at Polling Station
North Kirk of Scotland	MS1A	3	2,976
The Penicuik Centre	MS1B	3	2,802
Penicuik YMCA/YWCA	MS1D	2	1,485
Ladywood Leisure Centre	MS1E	2	1,995

4.2 Ward 2 - Bonnyrigg

It is proposed to merge Polling Districts MN2B and MN2C into one Polling District to be known as MN2B with all electors in this district voting at the Lasswade Community Campus. This means that the previously used Lasswade Primary School will not be used and will therefore remain open on Polling Days.

Electors at MN2D will continue to use Bonnyrigg Primary School as the school can remain open to pupils whilst being used as a polling place by using the Community Rooms with a separate entrance.

Electors at MN2G will continue to use Burnbrae Primary School using only the gym and entering/exiting through a side entrance which enables the school to remain open on Polling Days. The gym is also able to accommodate additional electors when the new housing at HS12 is complete.

4 comments were received following the public consultation, 2 of which were in favour of the proposals and 2 neutral – it would seem that the 2 neutral comments did not fully appreciate that the Council would not be closing any schools even when used as polling places. Please see Appendix II Public Responses under tab “Ward 2” for full comments.

Proposed/...

Proposed Polling Places at Ward 2 – Bonnyrigg are as follows:

Polling Place	Polling District	No of Polling Stations	No of Electors at Polling Station
Lasswade Pavilion	MN2A	1	493
The Lasswade Centre	MN2B	7	7,108
Bonnyrigg Primary School	MN2D	2	1,916
Burnbrae Primary School	MN2G	2	1,933

4.3 Ward 3 - Dalkeith

It is proposed that electors at MN3B will vote at St John's and King's Park Church instead of King's Park Primary School which will allow the school to remain open on Polling Days. This is dependent, however, on voters at MN5A moving to vote at Edinburgh College (Midlothian Campus).

It is proposed to merge Polling Districts MN3C and MN3D into one Polling District to be known as MN3C. All electors for MN3C will vote at Dalkeith Miners Club which means that the previously used St David's Primary School will not be used and will therefore remain open on Polling Days.

12 comments were received following the public consultation, 10 of which were in favour of the proposals, 1 negative and 1 neutral. The 1 negative comment was in relation to moving electors in Ward 3 from King's Park Primary School to Edinburgh College as it was felt that this was a longer commute for some and as people would probably drive to the college it would not sit well with sustainable policies. The neutral comment relates to the Council's use of King's Park School in the past.

Proposed Polling Places at Ward 3 – Dalkeith are as follows:

Polling Place	Polling District	No of Polling Stations	No of Electors at Polling Station
Danderhall Leisure Centre	MN3A	3	2,347
St John's & Kings Park Church	MN3B	2	1,732
Dalkeith Miners Club	MN3C	4	3,423
Dalkeith Campus	MN3E	2	1,475

4.4 Ward 4 – Midlothian West

It is proposed to merge Polling Districts MS4B and MS4C into one Polling District to be known as MS4B. All electors for MS4B will vote in the community rooms within Beeslack High School which will allow the school to remain open to pupils on Polling Days. This means that the schools previously used – Glencorse Primary School and Mauricewood Primary School - will cease to be used and will therefore remain open on Polling Days.

It is proposed that Electors at MN4E, St Matthew's Primary School, will now vote at Rosewell Pavilion, which means the school will cease to be used as a polling place therefore allowing the school to remain open on Polling Days.

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It is proposed to merge Polling Districts MN4G and MN4H into one Polling District to be known as MN4G. All electors at MN4G will vote at The Loanhead Centre and, although as part of this exercise, polling stations will be set up in Paradykes Primary School gym, the school will remain open to pupils on Polling Days as a separate entrance from the school will be used.

4 comments were received following the public consultation, 3 of which were supportive of the proposals and 1 negative. The negative comment relates to not using St Matthew's Primary School as it is felt that the use of the school as a polling place promotes the school. However, use of the school as a polling place would be inconsistent with the desire to keep all schools open on Polling Days.

Proposed Polling Places at Ward 4 – Midlothian West are as follows:

Polling Place	Polling District	No of Polling Stations	No of Electors at Polling Station
Bilston Primary School	MN4A	2	1,640
Beeslack Community High School	MS4B	2	1,610
The Glencorse Centre	MS4D	1	334
Rosewell Pavilion	MN4E	2	1,355
Roslin Community Hall	MN4F	2	1,268
The Loanhead Centre	MN4G	4	4,034

4.5 Ward 5 – Midlothian East

It is proposed to merge three Polling Districts – MN5B, MN5C, MN5D – into one Polling District to be known as MN5B and all electors will vote at Newbattle Community Campus. This means that the schools previously used - St David's Primary School and Lawfield Primary School will cease to be used and will therefore remain open on Polling Days.

Electors in MN5A have previously been required to travel to King's Park Primary School. It is now proposed that these electors will vote at Edinburgh College (Midlothian Campus) which is within the Ward boundary. This allows King's Park Primary School to remain open on Polling Days (dependent on voters at MN3B moving to vote at St John's and King's Park Church).

12 comments were received following the public consultation, 7 of which were in support of the proposals, 4 were negative and 1 neutral. One of the negative comments related to moving electors in the Mayfield and Easthouses area to the Newbattle Campus as it is felt this was not walkable for most electors and would discourage people from voting. Several community facilities sited nearby to the Newbattle Campus were suggested as alternatives (noted in the appendix II) but it should be noted that all these facilities are within private ownership which adds the risk of not being available (particularly at short notice) (see para 5.2) and the hire of these venues will also attract a fee which of course is a financial implication to the Council. It is therefore proposed still to recommend the proposal as per the consultation.

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The other 3 negative comments related to moving electors from King's Park Primary School to Edinburgh College (Midlothian Campus). It is felt that this may discourage voters as it is further to go for some voters and there is also no direct bus service.

Proposed Polling Places at Ward 5 – Midlothian East are as follows:

Polling Place	Polling District	No of Polling Stations	No of Electors at Polling Station
Edinburgh College (Midlothian Campus)	MN5A	3	2,404
Newbattle Community Campus	MN5B	6	5,843
Cousland Village Hall	MN5E	1	259
Pathhead Pavilion	MN5F	1	1,002
Fala Village Hall	MN5G	1	174

4.6 Ward 6 – Midlothian South

The consultation proposes the merger of Polling Districts MS6C and MS6D into one Polling District so that all electors will vote at Newtongrange Church Hall and the use of Newbattle Community Learning Centre will cease. A comment was received from an elector requesting that Newbattle Community Learning Centre be kept open as a polling place to serve electors on that side of the village and also to not increase parking around the Newtongrange Church Hall which can be problematic. Having considered these issues however it is still proposed to merge Polling Districts MS6C and MS6D.

It is proposed that the projected house building at the southern end of Gorebridge will be accommodated by enlarging Polling District MS6F where electors vote at Birkenhead Pavilion. Also, existing electors to the south of Lady Brae who currently vote at MS6E (Gorebridge Leisure Centre) will be moved to MS6F and will now vote at Birkenhead Pavilion.

A small area of land in the Housing Land Audit (2018) - HS12 which is zoned for future housing - is just outwith Ward 2 - Bonnyrigg and located in Ward 6 – Midlothian South. If it is developed, the new electors there would currently require to vote at the remote Temple Village Polling Place. Accordingly, it is proposed that, for elector convenience, such electors should vote at Burnbrae Primary School in Ward 2 – it would, of course, require to have a separate ballot box for Council Elections to ensure votes for different wards are kept separate.

1 negative comment was received following the public consultation. It requested that the Newbattle Community Learning Centre continue to be used as a polling place for people living in that vicinity – please see paragraph 1.

Proposed/...

Proposed Polling Places at Ward 6 – Midlothian South are as follows:

Polling Place	Polling District	No of Polling Stations	No of Electors at Polling Station
North Kirk of Scotland	MS6A	1	29
Temple Village Hall	MS6B	1	338
Newtongrange Church Hall	MS6C		3,630
Gorebridge Leisure Centre	MS6E	5	4,753
Birkenside Sports Pavilion	MS6F	1	794
Middleton Village Hall	MS6G	1	327
Burnbrae Primary School	MS6H	N/A	None at moment

4.7 General Comments

There were 22 general comments made which covered all 6 Wards. 11 of these were positive and in favour of the proposals, 2 negative and 9 neutral. The 2 negative comments both relate to the safety of children attending the schools we propose to use for polling whilst keeping the school open for education purposes by using a separate entrance/exit. Concern was expressed regarding strangers being in and around the school and the increase in traffic whilst children made their way to and from school.

The neutral comments were in the main expressing frustration at schools being used in the past and going forward. There was also a suggestion that polling be carried out at the weekend, this is, however not within the gift of the local authority.

5 Report Implications

5.1 Resource

The overall number of Polling Places will reduce by 7 and it is not anticipated that there will be any significant additional resource implications to the Council.

5.2 Risk

Conducting this Review and implementing the recommendations will ensure that the Council meets its statutory duty in respect of reviewing its Scheme of Polling Districts and Polling Places.

Many of the premises used for polling purposes are in Council ownership and this mitigates the risk of venues becoming unavailable or unsuitable for polling purposes at short notice.

There is a greater danger that privately owned premises may become unavailable at short notice than Council owned premises. Accordingly, the increase in use of premises in private ownership will also increase the risk of resource implications eg – last minute hire of portakabins to replace unavailable private ownership polling places and reprinting and delivering poll cards intimating amended polling arrangements.

5.3/...

5.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:-

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☒ None of the above

5.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Not applicable

5.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Not applicable

5.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Consultation has been carried out on this review of Polling Places and Districts in accordance with the Electoral Administration Act 2013, and guidance contained in the Electoral Commission Circular – *Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations*.

5.7 Equalities

An Integrated Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached as Appendix III to this report.

5.8 Sustainability

There are no sustainability issues arising from this report.

5.9 IT Issues

There are no IT issues arising from this report.

6 Recommendations

I recommend that the Council:-

- (a) Adopt the Proposed Scheme of Polling Districts and Places as outlined at the Annex to Appendix 1;
- (b) Agree to carry out the statutory procedures, in liaison with the Electoral Registration Officer, to publish the revised Scheme of Polling Arrangements to take effect after 2 March 2020; and
- (c) Remit to the Chief Executive to continue to liaise with political representatives for Scheme revisions.

28 November 2019

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Background Papers:-

- Public Consultation Documents;
- Electoral Commission Circular - Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations;
- Electoral Register for the Midlothian Council local area published by the Electoral Registration Officer (Lothian Valuation Joint Board)