

Representation of The People Act 1983, As Amended

- **Section 18C - Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**
- **Schedule A1 – *The authority must consult every Returning Officer for every parliamentary election held in a constituency which is wholly or partly in its area and every such Returning Officer must make representations to the authority.***

I note that the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places. The Act requires local authorities to undertake the next compulsory Review within the period 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive) and every five years thereafter.

While new to the post of Returning Officer, I am informed by my Election Team that following the Midlothian Council Elections in 2017 and the UK General Election 2017 that they are unaware of any electoral dissatisfaction regarding the location of Polling Places.

However, I understand that there continues to be complaints arising from the use of school premises on the basis that it impacts on children's education and often parents have to arrange child care on an election day. Accordingly, I note that Midlothian Council's Corporate Management Team has agreed that the Review's remit include minimising the use of school premises which have to be closed on polling days, provided that there are no significant additional financial implications for the Council.

The Electoral Commission, in issuing Performance Directions, reinforced the requirement **that the designation of polling places be made on the basis of the needs of the elector**. I endorse this requirement and my comments to the Midlothian Review proposals are made on this basis.

Electoral Commission Guidance also stresses the importance that the needs of electors with a disability are met in so far as practicable. In regard to the current Scheme, all the buildings used for polling purposes, with the exception of Lasswade Primary School, are accessible by people with a disability by the main polling entrance - albeit in some cases with a temporary ramp fitted. I therefore welcome the proposal in the new Polling Scheme that the use of Lasswade Primary School for polling purposes ceases.

I/...

I now wish to comment on each of the proposed changes from the current Polling Scheme as follows:

Ward 1 – Penicuik

- At the By-Election held in 2018, electors at Polling District MS1B - Cornbank Primary School and also MS1C - Cuiken Primary School voted at The Penicuik Centre. This arrangement worked well and allows the two primary schools to remain open on polling days. I welcome the proposal to merge the two Districts and for electors to use The Penicuik Centre.

The Polling District will be named MS1B.

Ward 2 - Bonnyrigg

- Currently MN2C - Lasswade Primary School is the only Polling Place in Midlothian where electors with a disability access the Polling Stations via a separate entrance from other electors. This is clearly unsatisfactory and the proposal to merge MN2B and MN2C with all electors voting at Lasswade Community Campus is therefore welcome.

The Polling District will be named MN2B.

- Electors at MN2D will continue to use Bonnyrigg Primary School as I note that the proposals include using only the Community Rooms with access via a separate entrance for electors which will enable the school to remain open on polling days.
- The proposal that the substantial new house building identified in the Housing Land Audit (2018) Site – HS12, be accommodated in the adjacent existing Polling District MN2G – Burnbrae Primary School is sensible as the school has capacity in the School Gym (where voting takes place) to take these additional electors. On polling days the school can operate normally except from not having use of the Gym.

Ward 3 – Dalkeith

- I welcome the proposal that electors at MN3B - King's Park Primary School, vote at St John's & King's Park Church which will allow the school to remain open on election days – this is, of course, subject to MN5A electors transferring to Edinburgh College – see Ward 5 below.
- The proposal to merge Polling Districts MN3C - Cowden Pavilion and MN3D - St David's RC Primary School with all electors voting at Dalkeith Miners Club is welcome as it will allow the primary school to remain open on election days and also allow all electors in the Woodburn area to vote at one central location.

The Polling District will be named MN3C.

Ward 4/...

Ward 4 – Midlothian West

- I note that electors at MS4B - Glencorse Primary School, will merge with MS4C - Mauricewood Primary School and all will vote in the Community Rooms within Beeslack High School.

Subject to satisfactory parking arrangements being made for voters, including a row of the car park being reserved for them, plus additional external temporary barriers being erected to segregate voters from school pupils, I would support this proposal.

The Polling District will be named MS4B.

- I note that electors at MN4E – St Matthews Primary School will now vote at Rosewell Pavilion. This will allow the school to remain open on polling days and I therefore support this proposal.
- I support the proposal at Loanhead to merge MN4G and MN4H. Both polling districts previously voted in a congested area at the former Paradykes Primary School. I note these electors will now vote at the more suitable new Loanhead Centre. As access is being taken via the public entrance and through the Library to the school gym - where voting will take place - this will allow the school, apart from the gym, to operate normally on polling days.

The Polling District will be named MN4G.

Ward 5 - Midlothian East

- The opening of the Newbattle Community Campus (and the closure of Mayfield Leisure Centre) provides the opportunity to merge three Polling Districts MN5B – St David's Primary School; MN5C – Lawfield Primary School; and MN5D – Mayfield Leisure Centre. This new large polling district will hopefully mirror the successful use over the past few years of The Lasswade Centre in Bonnyrigg. I would support this proposal.

The Polling District will be named MN5B.

- For many years electors in Polling District MN5A have required to travel to King's Park Primary School to vote. This building is outwith the polling area and I therefore welcome the proposal to relocate the Polling Place to the Edinburgh College in Eskbank, especially given the recent large amount of new house building in Eskbank.

This will also mean that, provided polling District MN3B (see electoral ward 3 above) is also relocated to St John's & King's Park Church, the Primary School will now remain open on Polling Days.

Ward 6/...

Ward 6 – Midlothian South

- I note and support the proposal to merge MS6C - Newbattle Community Learning Centre with the nearby MS6D - Newtongrange Church Hall. The resultant enlarged electorate can be accommodated within Newtongrange Church Halls.

The Polling District will be named MS6C.

- I note that new and projected house building at the southern end of Gorebridge is being accommodated by enlarging the Polling District served by Birkenside Pavilion. The existing electors to the south of Lady Brae Road who currently vote at MS6E - Gorebridge Leisure Centre, will transfer to MS6F - Birkenside Pavilion. The additional electors will easily be accommodated at the 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, I agree 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.

The Electoral Registration Officer has coded this small area of land as Polling District MS6H.

As stated previously, this is a consultation and the Electoral Commission, in issuing Performance Directions, have reinforced the requirement **that the designation of polling places be made on the basis of the needs of the elector.**

I note that, in terms of Electoral Commission Guidance, Council Officers are currently carrying out a rigorous appraisal of the existing designated polling place accommodation in Midlothian to ensure that the various premises continue to be/are fit for electoral purposes. I understand that to date the survey has not identified any major concerns. However, if it does, I would ask that I be informed of issues arising in order that I may respond appropriately during the current consultation period.

Finally, I would also request that Midlothian Council forward to me any representations/observations made during the Review in order that I can comment on them as appropriate.

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Returning Officer

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