



**REPORT TO: SPECIAL MEETING OF MORAY COUNCIL ON WEDNESDAY 16
DECEMBER 2020**

SUBJECT: POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACE REVIEW

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for the revision of arrangements for polling districts and polling places following statutory review.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section II (9) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to all election matters.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that Council approve the proposals to amend the current polling district and polling place arrangements as summarised in Section 4.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Section 18(3) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires each Local Authority in Scotland to designate a polling place for each of its polling districts and to review these within 16 months of 1 October 2013 and every 5 years thereafter.
- 3.2 A polling place is defined as 'a geographical area in which a polling station is located'. There is no legal definition of what a polling place is but it is widely accepted to be a specific building identified for the purpose, which the Local Authority is responsible for determining.
- 3.3 A polling station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district for which the Returning Officer is responsible for determining.

- 3.4 In designating a polling place the Local Authority must demonstrate they have, as far as is practicable, met the criteria set in the legislation and in doing so must:
- ensure all the electors in the constituency 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 for which it is responsible is accessible to disabled electors.
- 3.5 Proposals for polling places and polling districts were drafted taking into account Electoral Commission guidance and criteria, feedback during polls in the last five years, as well as any suggestions or changes submitted during the first round of consultation. The proposals were considered by the Returning Officer who adds comments to the proposals which are then published for a second round of public consultation. This process concluded on 19 November 2020.

4. **PROPOSALS**

- 4.1 The full detail of the proposed amendments to polling districts and polling places are set out in **Appendix A** and are summarised below;

Ward 1	Speyside Glenlivet
MM0102	Amend Polling Place name Grant Community Centre to The Grant Hall
Ward 2	Keith and Cullen
MM0207 / MM0208	Merge polling districts MM0207 / MM0208 into one district and rename MM0207 Keith and District
BM0209	Renumber to BM0208 to reflect merge of polling districts above
Ward 5	Heldon & Laich
MM0503	Replace Lossiemouth Community Centre with Lossiemouth Community Complex Library (proposal withdrawn at end of public consultation and replaced with proposals outlined in para 5.2 and 5.3) to replace with Lossiemouth Football Club Social Club.
MM0504	Realign polling district boundary between MM0503 and MM0504 to accommodate additional electorate at Lossiemouth Town Hall and the new polling place for MM0503
MM0506	Relocate polling place from current shared school site at Alves School, Main Road to Alves Hall

Ward 7 Elgin City South

MM0704 Create new polling district (New Elgin Linkwood) and new polling place at Moray Sports Centre

MM0702 & MM0703 Realign polling place boundaries to allow the creation of MM0704 to the east of New Elgin.

Ward 8 Forres

MM0807 Relocate polling place from Victoria Hotel to Pilmuir Primary School, Sports Hall

MM0805, MM0807 & MM0808 Realign polling district boundaries and transpose district numbering for MM0807 and MM0808 and rename current MM0808 to Forres West and Mundole

4.2 No amendments are proposed to polling districts or places in Wards 3 – Buckie, Ward 4 – Fochabers Lhanbryde and Ward 6 – Elgin City North.

5. CONSULTATION RESPONSES AND PROPOSAL REVISION

5.1 There were limited responses to the public consultation stages. Responses are published as required at www.moray.gov.uk/elections and outlined in **Appendix B** of this report. Responses to the proposals were broadly supportive with the exception of the proposals in Lossiemouth as noted below.

5.2 Proposals relating to the replacement of Lossiemouth Community Centre with a Polling Place within the new Lossiemouth High School community complex was revisited at the end of the second stage of public consultation due to construction delays at the site caused by the pandemic, concerns over distance and access from the car park to the new entrance and requirements for potential social distancing at the next scheduled election. As a result the proposal to use the new Lossiemouth High School was withdrawn and replaced with a new proposal to replace Lossiemouth Community Centre with a Polling Place at Lossiemouth Football Club (LFC) Social Club.

5.3 In order to accommodate the venue at LFC Social Club currently in MM0504, the polling district boundary between MM0503 and MM0504 is proposed to be amended as shown in **Appendix C**. Consideration was given to routes of access for the new polling districts including for rural voters, avoidance of splitting streets to prevent voter confusion and balancing the electorate across the two venues in Lossiemouth. This will create voter capacity at the two Lossiemouth polling places for future expansion in both the RAF base and residential building in MM0503.

5.4 In proposing the change above, the use of the LFC Social Club will be informally reviewed by the Returning Officer and Election Office after use in May 2021 in advance of the Local Government Election in 2022 to address any issues arising.

- 5.5 Due to the late revision to the proposals in Lossiemouth, a third round of local consultation was undertaken with elected members in Ward 5 and the Lossiemouth Community Council. The Community Council raised concerns about the potential impact of distance from particular areas, queries regarding alternative venues and the amendment to the polling district boundaries. The Election Office provided a detailed response to the queries raised and has provided this to the Ward 5 members who will make their views known at the meeting.

6. IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

- 6.1 The amendments proposed in **section 4**, if approved, will come into force on 1 February 2021 at the publication of the electoral register and take effect for all electoral events thereafter, including the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary election.
- 6.2 Public notices of the changes will be published in line with statutory requirements. In addition, these requirements and with a major election scheduled further awareness and communications will be undertaken alongside election awareness materials including but not limited to:
- direct mailing to voters affected by polling district boundary changes locally where appropriate and cost effective,
 - directed press releases, social media reminders and, if appropriate, advertising for affected areas throughout the elections period,
 - promotion of the polling place finder tool on the council's website,
 - additional information on in-person poll cards issued to voters,
 - direction notices on former polling places no longer in use on polling day,
 - additional polling staff employed in large polling places to assist with the direction of voters,
 - additional information for candidates and agents regarding the changes.

7. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

There are no implications for these plans arising from these proposals.

(b) Policy and Legal

Section 18(3) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires each Local Authority in Scotland to designate a polling place for each of its polling districts and to keep these under review. A review must be completed between 1 October 2017 and 31 January 2019 under provisions in Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. This deadline was missed due to election staff absence, resources being diverted to administer an unscheduled European parliamentary election, a local government by-election, an unscheduled

general election and delay due to pandemic lockdown all of which impacted on the preparation of proposals and conduct of the final stage eight week public consultation.

(c) Financial implications

Additional total costs of £1200 are projected for staffing, equipping and rental of an additional private venue at the Moray Sports Centre and an increased cost for moving from a public to private venue in Lossiemouth. Polling place costs are financed from the Returning Officer's accounts per election in a budget assigned by central government for all major national polls, excluding local government. In addition, there will be a requirement to provide additional screening and temporary moveable ramps as equipment for the new polling places. Whilst a capital outlay is estimated at £800, equipment costs over the life of the equipment may be apportioned to each electoral event account and reclaimed from central government.

There is also a requirement to publish statutory notices regarding the amendments which will incur publishing costs as yet unknown but expected to be less than £400 depending on newspapers used. These costs cannot be reclaimed from central government. In addition, other free to use and online portals will be utilised.

Additional advertising or direct mailing (as yet uncosted) will be considered as part of the awareness plans for the Scottish Parliamentary elections preparation for areas where there are significant boundary changes being Lossiemouth, New Elgin and Forres. Some of these costs arising may be attributed to the Scottish Parliamentary Election account reclaim from central government.

(d) Risk Implications

A polling place review must be completed and agreed by the end of 2020 in advance of the Scottish Parliamentary Election, preparation for which is already advanced and the formal election process commencing on 15 March 2021. If the proposals are not agreed, the polling scheme cannot be finalised and necessary changes made to the electoral register by 12 January prior to the full register being published on 1 February 2021. Any further changes to amendments to the proposals at this point, will result in additional workload for the Electoral Registration Office and impact the Elections Office in the arrangements for, and the publication of, the polling scheme for the Scottish Parliamentary election.

(e) Staffing Implications

Additional temporary staffing will be required to service the new supplementary polling place proposed in new polling district MM0704. Appointment of these staff will take place at each electoral event as required, alongside all other appointments.

(f) Property

None arising from this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

Throughout the polling district and polling place review process, issues of accessibility for elderly and or disabled voters are considered. When polling place venues are audited, they are required to meet all the minimum criteria for physical accessibility to the facility for polling.

(h) Consultations

Local Ward Members, the Electoral Registration Office (Grampian Valuation Joint Board), Aberdeenshire Returning Officer and community representatives being Community Councils have been consulted during this review. The consultation was also publicly advertised, any responses have been incorporated into this report.

Two rounds of consultation were undertaken during October – November 2019 and September - November 2020, in relation to this review including a local consultation with the elected members and community council in Lossiemouth in late November 2020.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Following review of current polling place and polling district arrangements and consideration of comments arising from the consultation, it is recommended that Council approve the proposals to amend the current polling district and polling place arrangements as outlined in Section 4.

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Background Papers:
Ref: