14 SEPTEMBER 2007
NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Friday, 14 September 2007.

e  Cllr L R Puttock (Chairman)
p  Cllr A E J Shotter (Vice-Chairman) (in the Chair)

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Officers Attending:

Mrs M Dunsmore, A Hetherington and Mrs P Stevens, and, for part of the meeting, Mrs R Rutins.

13. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2007, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No declarations of interest were made by members in connection with any agenda items.

15. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.
16. POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW – APPOINTMENT OF WORKING PARTY AND REQUEST FOR DELEGATION TO COMMITTEE (REPORT A).

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a requirement for all authorities to complete a review of the polling districts and polling places within their areas by 31 December 2007.

The review commenced early in August with representations being requested by 28 September. In order that any changes to the polling districts that might be agreed may be incorporated in the revised version of the register to be published on 1 December 2007, the review needed to be completed by 23 November at the latest.

To assist in meeting the deadlines of the review, the Committee considered the establishment of a Working Party to consider any representations received in response to the polling districts and polling places review and make any recommendations to the Committee.

The designation of polling districts was a matter for the Council, while polling places were a matter for the Executive. Under the current arrangements, any changes to the polling districts needed the approval of the full Council.

RESOLVED:

(a) That a Working Party comprising five members of the Committee be appointed with the following terms of reference:

   To consider and make recommendations to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee on representations received in response to the review of polling districts and polling places required under the provisions of Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

(b) That the membership of the Working Party comprise three Conservative and two Liberal Democrat Group members, namely Cllrs Beck, Puttock, Shotter, Mrs Smith and S Wade.

RECOMMENDED:

That it be recommended to the Council that authority be delegated to the Committee to agree any changes to the polling districts that it considers appropriate following consideration of the representations received in response to review of polling districts required under Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.
50. **MINUTES.**

**RESOLVED:**

That, subject to in Minute Nos. 37 & 38, the reference to Cllr Mrs Robinson’s interest reading Spectrum Housing Group and not Spectrum Housing Association, the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2007, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.
51. CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Heron to his first meeting of the Cabinet as Environment Portfolio Holder. The Chairman thanked Cllr Thierry for the work that he had undertaken during his time in that position, particularly for the new ideas he had introduced. He was well respected throughout the community and had also been Chairman of Project Integra.

The Chairman and Cabinet also thanked Mr C Malyon, Director of Resources, who was leaving the Council to take up a new challenge in the private sector. The Chairman said that Mr Malyon had always been very helpful and had provided sound advice. He had an excellent reputation with all members of the Council. Cllr Mrs Robinson, as Leader of the Liberal Democrats, also thanked Mr Malyon for his support and advice. All members wished Mr Malyon the very best of luck for the future. Mr Malyon replied thanking members for their good wishes.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllrs Mrs Robinson and Vickers declared interests in Minute No. 59.

53. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

54. POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW – DESIGNATION OF POLLING PLACES (REPORT A).

In the light of the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review currently taking place, the Cabinet considered arrangements for the designation of polling places.

RESOLVED:

That the polling places in New Forest District be designated as the whole of the polling district within which they are situated.
15 OCTOBER 2007
NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
POLLING DISTRICTS WORKING PARTY

Minutes of a meeting of the Polling Districts Working Party held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 15 October 2007.

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Officers Attending:

Mrs M Dunsmore, Miss T Harwood and Mrs R Rutins.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Puttock be elected Chairman of the Working Party for the ensuing year.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest in connection with any agenda item.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

4. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES (REPORT A).

The Working Party discussed the representations received in response to the review of polling districts and polling places required under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

It was noted that polling places were a matter for the Cabinet, while polling districts were issues for the General Purposes and Licensing Committee. While the Working Party’s remit strictly covered only polling districts, polling districts and polling places were inextricable and views on polling places would be expressed as well.

Members were disappointed at the low response rate to the review from Councillors and Town and Parish Councils but considered that this could be indicative that there was general satisfaction with the current arrangements, as well as resistance to change.
The Working Party reviewed those polling stations identified being the lowest used:-

Fritham Free Church, Fritham – In addition to low usage, this polling station was not fully accessible. A portacabin could be used but would be very expensive. Alternative venues were difficult to identify. It was agreed that the local nursing home be approached.

Reading Room, Hinton Admiral and the Caravan Wootton Farm Road, Wootton – Usage at both was low and neither provided disabled access. However, both were well established polling stations and Brockenhurst Parish Council had requested the retention of the caravan at Wootton. However, they felt that the cost of the polling station should be borne by residents of the District as a whole. No response had been received from Bransgore Parish Council with regard to the polling station at Hinton Admiral.

Exbury Club, Exbury – this was a very expensive venue, with a charge of £250 for the day but it appeared that there were no alternative venues. It was reported that Cllr Vickers was exploring some avenues in conjunction with the parish and town councils.

Members recognised that there was a need to balance individuals’ democratic right to convenient access to polling stations against costs. The number of postal voters within wards and polling districts should also be taken into account in determining the need for polling stations. It was agreed that information on numbers of postal voters be brought to the next meeting when the issue of low use polling stations would be examined further.

With regard to the particular views expressed by District Councillors, the Working Party considered the following:

**Fawley – Comments by Cllr Dundson**
The Working Party favoured the establishment of a new polling station at St Francis Church Hall. The views of the local members and of the Parish Council on whether the whole, or only part of, FD polling district, should vote there instead of at Blackfield Baptist Church would be sought.
The Working Party did not support the establishment of a new polling station at the Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre.

**Hythe and Dibden – Comments by Hythe and Dibden Parish Council**
Members discussed the representations made regarding the use of the Waterside Primary School in the Hythe West and Langdown Ward. The Parish Council had received a number of complaints that the school was not a convenient place to vote for residents in this ward. The Parish Council had suggested that the Community Centre was a more central and logical location for voters. However, this venue had been approached in the past and there was limited space at the Centre. This was therefore not an option.

Other alternative venues in Hythe were discussed and Members made suggestion that the Grove be approached as a possible venue. It was agreed that this option be explored with local members and the Clerk to the Parish Council.

**Pennington – Comments by Town Councillor Mrs Vernon-Jackson**
It was reported that initial discussions had revealed that the Manager of the Lymington Health & Leisure Centre would favour a polling station being established
at the Centre. Members supported this suggestion which would be further explored before the next meeting.

**Totton & Eling – Comments by Cllr Alan Weeks**

Members supported Cllr Weeks’ view that, subject to the venue being suitable, the Testwood Baptist Church Hall in Salisbury Road be used for Totton East voters instead of Oakfield Primary School. They discussed whether part of TD should vote there and part of TD at the Totton and Eling Community Centre, rather than at the Salmon Leap. They also supported the suggestion that the Calmore Village Hall be discontinued for Totton North (TF) voters and that these voters vote instead at the Calmore Community Centre.

The views of local members and the Totton & Eling Parish Council would be sought.

Members supported, as a matter of principle, discontinuing use of schools as polling stations, if suitable alternative premises were available. They recognised the difficulties of recruiting polling station staff, in particular presiding officers, as the role was becoming increasingly complex with the introduction of new legislation.

The Working Party considered various methods of voting including postal voting and electronic voting which if felt would become more popular mechanism in the future.

**RESOLVED:**

(a) That the officers explore the possible use of the Nursing Home at Fritham an alternative polling venue in place of Fritham Free Church;

(b) That the officers explore the possibility of using an alternative room within the Fountain Court Hotel as the polling station;

(c) That Fawley Parish Council and the local members be consulted for their views on the usage of Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre and St Francis Hall as polling premises in the Fawley, Blackfield and Langley Ward;

(d) That discussions take place with Hythe & Dibden Parish Council and local members on the possible use of the Grove as a potential polling station in place of Waterside Primary School; and the voters to vote thereat;

(e) That the Lymington Health & Leisure Centre be pursued as an alternative venue to the Pennington WI Hall;

(f) That, subject to the building being suitable, Testwood Baptist Church be utilised as a polling station instead of Oakfield Primary School;

(g) That Totton and Eling Town Council and local members be consulted on discontinuing use of the Salmon Leap as a polling station and reallocating Totton East voters to the Testwood Baptist Church and the Totton & Eling Community Centre; and

(h) That Totton and Eling Town Council and local members be consulted on the reallocating Totton North voters currently voting at Calmore Village Hall to the Calmore Community Centre.
5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting take place on Thursday, 8 November 2007 at 10.00am.

CHAIRMAN
Minutes of a meeting of the Polling Districts Working Party held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 8 November 2007.

p Cllr L R Puttock (Chairman)

Councillors:

| e  | G C Beck                   |
|    | p  | Mrs B Smith               |
| p  | A E J Shotter              |
|    | p  | S S Wade                  |

Officers Attending:

Miss T Harwood, Mrs M Dunsmore and Mrs R Rutins.

6. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2007, having been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest in connection with any agenda item.

8. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

9. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES (REPORT B).

Officers reported back on their investigations following the suggestions given by Members at the last Working Party meeting, in particular: -

Furzedown and Hardley – Officers had contacted the Fountain Court Hotel to investigate whether the Hotel could offer an alternative room for easier disabled access. The current disabled entrance could only be accessed through the reception and bar area of the Hotel. Unfortunately, the Hotel had advised Officers that there was no an alternative room available. Members agreed that as there was no suitable alternative, the venue should be retained, however requested that suitable signage to the disabled entrance be displayed.

Hythe West and Langdown – At the request of the Working Party Officers had met with representatives of the Parish Council to discuss the possibility of establishing a new polling station at the Grove in place of the Waterside Primary School which it
was felt was inconveniently located for residents. The facilities at the Grove were more than adequate for the use of a polling station. Members generally agreed that the central location of the venue and its close proximity to shops, bus stops, the ferry and car park would be more convenient to voters.

Pennington – Following the suggestion from a local member regarding the use of the Lymington Health & Leisure Centre as an alternative polling station to the WI Hall, members of the Working Party had asked Officers to investigate this option. The Centre Manager had indicated that he would welcome a polling station at the Centre. The Working Party therefore happy to recommend that an additional polling station be created at the Leisure Centre.

Holbury and North Blackfield – the Working Party discussed the suggestion made by Cllr Dunsdon regarding the creation of a new polling station at the Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre, to serve part of FE polling district. The Working Party generally felt that as the ward already had three polling stations there was adequate provision and to increase this number was not appropriate for the urban nature of the area. The Working Party understood the logic behind the suggestion, that an additional station might encourage more people to vote however, felt that on balance, the costs attached to creating an additional polling station would be too high to be justified, especially in light of the fact that the Blackfield Baptist Church was already well used by voters.

The Working Party was supportive of the suggestion to create a new polling station at St Francis Church Hall in Langely. However they were not in agreement with Cllr Dunsdon’s suggestion that the FD voters be split between St Francis Church and Blackfield Baptist Church. The Working Party was mindful that both ward members were in support of the new polling station and felt that splitting FD voters between two polling stations would create unnecessary confusion.

The Working Party suggested that should local members wish to pursue the idea of creating an additional polling station at Blackfield Neighbourhood Centre that they should undertake further investigation as to where local voters were voting, against the numbers on the unmarked register in order to make a factual case to justify the change in the numbers of polling stations in this ward.

Members discussed the increasing costs of running elections in light of the Governments directive to try and increase voter turnout. Following the recent elections under the new legislation, Officers had investigated the impact of cost on other comparable authorities, who had indicated that cost had increased up to 60%. It was estimated that it cost approximately £4 per vote. Members considered that more work should be done to highlight the cost of elections to the Government. The Working Party agreed that a report should be submitted to the January General Purposes and Licensing Committee outlining election costs.

Totton East Ward – following an approach made by Testwood Baptist Church, the Working Party, at its last meeting requested officers to inspect the premises and were pleased to note that the venue was ideal. The Working Party favoured the use of the Church premises as a polling station instead of Oakfield Primary School as members felt that the use of schools as polling stations was inconvenient.

The Working Party was in favour with the suggestion from Cllr Weeks that use of the Salmon Leap be discontinued. Members considered that two polling stations within this ward were sufficient in light of its urban nature. The suggestion that Salmon Leap voters be reallocated to the Testwood Baptist Church and the Totton & Eling Community Centre was agreed.
Totton North Ward – the Working Party considered the proposal from Cllr Weeks that use of Calmore Village Hall for Totton North voters be discontinued and that all Totton North voters be assigned to Calmore Community Centre. It was considered that that the polling station was not well used and voters might prefer to travel to the Calmore Community Centre rather than the Village Hall. The proposal was supported by the Working Party as they felt that the Village Hall was in poor location and had limited parking. As the Village Hall was also used as a polling station for voters in the Ashurst, Copythorne North and Netley Marsh ward the Working Party felt that attempts should be made to find an alternative polling station to serve these voters as well.

The Working Party discussed a number of low usage polling stations identified by the Returning Officer. Members expressed a general concern regarding the costs per voter at these stations. However, considered that in some cases they served small and rural communities and the percentages of use showed that they were adequately used.

The Working Party was mindful that further statistical analysis should be undertaken on general turnout at each of the stations before a final decision could be made regarding the future use of each of the stations. The Working Party therefore considered that the position with regard to these polling stations should be reassessed following the next Parliamentary election when more evidence of usage could be obtained.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Fountain Court Hotel be retained as a polling station for FI Furzedown and Hardley Ward and that the Returning Officer ensure that disabled access is clearly signed;

2. That the use of the Waterside Primary School be discontinued in order that a new polling station at the Grove be established creating a new polling district for the northern part of HK and assigning HK voters to the Grove and that HI voters also be reassigned to the Grove from the Community Centre;

3. That a new polling station be established at Lymington Health and Leisure Centre with LG and LH voters being assigned to this station and that LF voters remain at Pennington WI Hall;

4. That a new polling station be established at St Francis Church Hall, Langley with FD polling district being assigned there;

5. That a new polling station be established at the Testwood Baptist Church Hall and that the use of Oakfield Primary School be discontinued and that voters in TC be assigned to the Testwood Baptist Church Hall;

6. That the use of the Salmon Leap as a polling station be discontinued and that TD voters be reassigned to the Testwood Baptist Church Hall and the Totton & Eling Community Centre;

7. That the use of Calmore Village Hall as a polling station for TF be discontinued and that TF polling district be merged with TG and TH voting at Calmore Community Centre;
8. That the use of low usage polling stations continue, but that the future of these stations be re-examined following the parliamentary elections; and

9. That a report be submitted to the January General Purposes and Licensing Committee outlining election costs.

CHAIRMAN
Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Friday, 16 November 2007.

p Cllr L R Puttock (Chairman)
p Cllr A E J Shotter (Vice-Chairman)

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Officers Attending:

Mrs M Dunsmore, A Hetherington, M Powell and, for part of the meeting, A Michel, Miss T Harwood and Mrs R Rutins.

21. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2007, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllr M S Wade in minute No. 24.
Cllrs M S Wade and Mrs Wyeth in minute No. 28.

23. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.
24. **EXPENDITURE PLANS 2008/09 – 2011/2012 (REPORT A).**

Cllr M S Wade declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a member of his worked for the authority and there was some discussion regarding employee pensions. He left the meeting during discussion of the item.

The Committee reviewed the expenditure plans for the period 2008/09 to 2011/12 and proposals for bids and savings.

In considering the revenue expenditure plan bids, some members felt that the bid for the Enforcement Officer was vital in assisting the Council in undertaking its enforcement duty under the Licensing Act 2003. Members supported this bid and hoped that it would be successful.

Some members queried the large contribution that the Authority made towards pension costs.

**RESOLVED**

That it be recommended to the Cabinet: -

(i) That the proposed revenue expenditure bids and savings as set out in Appendix 2 to Report A to the Committee be agreed, and that, in particular, the bid for the Enforcement Officer be strongly supported; and

(ii) That the proposed fees and charges as set out in Appendix 3 to Report A to the Committee be agreed.

25. **REVIEW OF THE LICENSING POLICY (REPORT B).**

The Committee considered the revised statement of Licensing Policy. The Policy had been published on 7 January 2005 and had to be reviewed by the Council every 3 years.

Members considered the minor changes to the Policy and felt that the document was well written and more succinct than the previous policy. Members congratulated officers on the success of the document.

**RECOMMENDED:**

That the Statement of Licensing Policy be approved for publication on 7 January 2008 and that the advertisement of details of the Policy be agreed prior to that date.

26. **ENFORCEMENT OF NFDC LICENSING FUNCTIONS (REPORT C).**

The Committee considered the provision of licensing enforcement facilities and the progress being made under the Licensing Act 2003.
The Committee discussed the public’s awareness and the impact on the quality of life of local residents, as well as the impact of the Gambling Act 2005.

Members discussed the importance of having sufficient levels of enforcement under the licensing regime and felt that steps needed to be taken to ensure that this was at an appropriate level to safeguard the quality of life for local residents.

Members considered current legislation and the powers of the Council to prohibit drinking in the streets. The Licensing Act 2003 had not made provision for Licensing Authorities to control public drinking. However, premises licences could be revoked if the premises were causing public nuisance.

Members were mindful that the smoking restrictions under the Health Act 2005 might increase the incidences of drinking in public places. The Police and Accredited Community Safety Officers had powers to remove individuals from the streets if they were causing antisocial and disorderly behaviour.

Members recognised that few premises in the New Forest were able to supply alcohol after midnight.

**RESOLVED**

That the Committee strongly endorses the expenditure plan bid for the provision of an Enforcement Officer.

27. **POLLING PLACES AND POLLING DISTRICTS REVIEW (REPORT D).**

The Committee considered the recommendations of the Polling Districts Working Party on the representations received in response to the review. The designation and future use of polling stations were also considered for recommendation to the Returning Officer.

The Working Party had also considered the future of low usage polling stations with high unit costs. The Working Party had recognised that these polling stations in were fairly well used in percentage terms and served distinct communities. The station at Fritham in particular was rarely used, however there was no alternative station within close proximity. This station was also in one of the wards affected by the death of a candidate and the delayed election had impacted on the turnout. With these factors in mind, members felt that the future of these stations should be examined following the next parliamentary election when comparisons of usage would be more meaningful.

Members thanked the Elections team for all their hard work especially in light of the demands placed on the team following recent legislative changes.

**RESOLVED:**

*That the recommendations outlined in paragraph 3 to Report D to the Committee be approved.*