



Our Ref: CE/CDMWW/213  
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Allan Bell  
Depute Returning Officer  
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Dear Allan

## **REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES**

In accordance with Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, which requires this Council to conduct a review every four years of all its parliamentary polling districts and polling places, I wish to advise you of my views as Returning Officer.

As you know, it is our practice to keep polling arrangements under regular review and indeed to investigate and respond whenever a suggested alteration is brought to our attention.

In general terms – and this would appear to be borne out by the lack of representations to the contrary – I believe that existing polling district boundaries are reasonably well suited for electoral purposes and, in the main, I feel that venues currently being used as polling places across Aberdeenshire are satisfactory.

However, it is clearly important that a more thoroughgoing evaluation of electoral provision should be undertaken periodically and, therefore, I welcome this assessment of current arrangements. I note also that invitations to respond have been issued widely, including to neighbouring local authorities, all community councils in Aberdeenshire, all MPs, MSPs and MEPs serving the Council area, political group leaders on the Council, as well as local access panels and Capability Scotland, whose particular focus is in ensuring suitable voting provision for electors with a disability.

I am aware of various alternative proposals which have been put forward for consideration and would like to comment on each of these in turn.

Firstly, it has been suggested that current voting arrangements in Turriff should be reviewed as the existing polling place, Markethill Primary School, does not have the ideal capacity for the number of electors which it currently serves. In addition, closure of any school for polling causes inconvenience to pupils, teachers and parents and it has been a long-standing approach of this Council that, wherever suitable alternative venues are available within the polling district, we should designate them as polling places instead of local schools. Bearing the above in mind, I would propose that the single polling district for Turriff should now be divided west and east, and that these should be served by St Ninian's Church in Church Street and St Andrew's Church Hall in Balmellie Road respectively. Both of these venues have the requisite facilities and capacity and are well situated within the newly-created polling districts.

Conversely, a response was received from Huntly Community Council to the effect that consideration be given to amalgamating the two existing polling districts identifying a single polling place. A small number of voters are required to pass one polling place, the Stewart's Hall, to cast their votes at another, the Linden Community Centre. Clearly, this is not an ideal situation and although there are some limitations on available parking around the Stewart's Hall, the venue has sufficient capacity within to accommodate all the voters in Huntly. The Linden Community Centre would, in addition, be able to remain open on the day of any election, thereby reducing inconvenience to residents. All things considered, therefore, it is my belief that, at the very least, it is worth making the change proposed to enable all electors within Huntly to vote at the Stewart's Hall at the Local Government Elections in 2012.

The Chair of Macduff Primary School Parent Council has written requesting that consideration be given to moving the polling place for the Myrus/Macduff Polling District away from the primary school to the adjacent community education centre, which has a separate entrance and car park. With the assistance of the primary school, I believe that it will be quite possible to create an entirely distinct polling place at this location and to ensure that no unauthorised persons are accessing the school or intruding within the curtilage of the polling place. Once again, this change will benefit the majority of local people, not least parents, school pupils and teachers, and is certainly worth testing at the next set of elections. Accordingly, I would recommend also that this change be made.

Fyvie, Rothienorman and Monquhitter Community Council has responded with the view that it would wish to see the currently – designated polling place, Fyvie Primary School, released from electoral use for the reasons specified in respect of other locations. Instead, it is suggested that the polling place might be moved to Glebe House in Fyvie, a church-owned facility which is frequently used for other community purposes and has suitable facilities and capacity to support its designation as a polling place. Notwithstanding that there may be some parking considerations, I believe that this is a venue which could quite readily serve the relevant purpose at elections and would generally find favour with the local

community. As a consequence, I would suggest that it be designated as the new polling place.

The next significant change to which I have given some thought is potentially the most challenging. As a result of representations made by Councillor Ian Mollison, I have looked at current polling provision in Hillside, Portlethen. The part of Portlethen situated on the east of the A90 is served at present by two venues, Portlethen Jubilee Hall and Bourtree Community Hall. However, significant housing development and consequent population increase on the western side of the trunk road at Hillside has given rise to the view that residents there should vote at a polling place in Portlethen itself, rather than at Banchory-Devenick School, where they are currently registered to vote. There is direct access from Hillside to the main part of Portlethen via an underpass and the previously – held safety concerns about crossing the A90 are now largely irrelevant. There are now over 650 electors in Hillside, with further housing developments anticipated in the near future likely to mean an increase of up to 300 more electors in Hillside, as well as more than 200 in Marywell. There is no current suitable facility which would enable all of those in Hillside to vote in their immediate area. Investigation of alternative facilities in Portlethen has, however, provided a potential solution. Portlethen Church Hall is only a short distance from the Jubilee Hall but has a substantially greater capacity. By creating an entirely separate Hillside polling district, and reallocating those voters to Portlethen Church Hall, as well as moving electors in Portlethen North to the Church Hall, I believe that the needs of voters can be best served. Those resident immediately around Banchory-Devenick will continue to vote at the local school, while there would be no need to change arrangements for voters currently voting at Bourtree Hall. My recommendation, therefore, is for the creation of an additional polling district for Hillside, all of whom would vote at the Church Hall, which becomes the polling place also for Portlethen North. Of course, these arrangements would be kept under review, especially if any other venue should become available to the west of the A90 in or near Hillside.

I also understand that adjustments are required to polling arrangements in Longside and Ballogie. The former is rather straightforward, in that the existing polling place, Longside Parish Church Hall, is due for refurbishment works around the time of the Local Government Elections in 2012 and it is suggested that, for an interim period, an alternative venue be identified. The most appropriate location for this would seem to be St John's Episcopal Church Hall, which I know to be suitable and available, so that is my recommended alternative.

The position in Ballogie is slightly different, in that the long-standing polling place, Ballogie Village Hall is believed not to be in regular public use at present. I believe that Birse Hall near Oldyleiper may be an appropriate replacement and I have therefore instructed election staff to visit and assess its suitability as well as to confirm the status of Ballogie Village Hall. Otherwise, the remaining options would probably involve electors travelling to a neighbouring polling district to cast their votes or to consider the siting of a temporary polling station (in the form of a portakabin) within Birse Polling District. The latter option is extremely costly and while electors in Ballogie are entitled to cast their votes in the same fashion as anybody else, the number of those involved (less than 300) does not, to my mind,

justify the anticipated outlay. Accordingly, my proposal is that, subject to confirmation of suitability and availability, Birse Hall should be designated as the new polling place in Polling District WW1605, failing which voting should, for the foreseeable future, take place at Finzean Public Hall. Once again, these arrangements can be kept under review and, should any other facility become available, the necessary steps can be taken.

Lastly, late representations have been received from Strathbogie Community Council (regarding use of Drumblade School) and King Edward & Gamrie Community Council (in connection with the use of King Edward School). I believe that these can best be addressed outwith the timescale for this particular review as both proposals will require site visits, evaluation of alternative provision and local consultation before final proposals are formulated. I therefore intend instructing election officers to progress consideration of these requests, as soon as it is practicable to do so and to report back.

I would suggest that, apart from the above proposals, no other changes are currently made and that the other designated polling places should remain in place. However, I would intend, as at present, that we continue to evaluate the suitability of all polling places on an ongoing basis and, where alternative facilities are brought to our attention, that these be investigated thoroughly.

I hope that the above comments are helpful in the context of this review.

Yours sincerely



**Colin Mackenzie**  
**RETURNING OFFICER**