



REPORT TO: SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MORAY COUNCIL ON 2 JULY 2014

SUBJECT: POLLING PLACE ARRANGEMENTS

BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (CORPORATE SERVICES)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to relocate the Polling Place in polling district MM0402 Urquhart from The Royal Oak to the Urquhart Village Hall.
- 1.2 To seek approval for the addition of a new Polling Place in Forres and the splitting of polling district MM0806 Forres West & Altyre to create new polling districts.
- 1.3 This report is submitted to Council in terms of the Council's Administrative Scheme Section II (9) relating to all election matters.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Council approve;**
 - (i) **the relocation of the Polling Place in Urquhart; and**
 - (ii) **the addition of a new Polling Place in Forres and the alteration of the boundaries of the existing polling district MM0806 to create new polling districts which the new Polling Place will serve.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 **URQUHART** - The Elections Office has been informed that the Royal Oak, Urquhart which is currently used as Polling Place to serve the Polling district MM0402 Urquhart, is currently closed as a business. As there is uncertainty over the future of the business and ongoing access to the accommodation as a polling place it is proposed that the Polling Place be relocated from the Royal Oak to the Urquhart Village Hall.
- 3.2 The Elections Office audited St Margaret's Church Hall in the village last year, but due to accessibility issues relating to unmade ground; it is not recommended that this venue be used as an alternative at this time.

3.3 Initial consultation has been undertaken with the hall management at the Urquhart Village Hall and they are in agreement with the proposal and have made the hall available for use for the forthcoming Referendum on 18 September 2014.

3.3 **FORRES** – Forres is currently served by 3 polling places and the distribution of allocated electorate across these Polling Places are outlined below.

Polling District	Polling Place	Number of electorate voting in person, assigned at 1 June 2014	Polling Stations required for the Referendum
MM0804	Forres Tennis Club	734	1
MM0805	Forres House Community Centre	1,441	2
MM0806	Forres Town Hall	4,899	7

The large number of electorate assigned at Forres Town Hall is a result of relocating the Polling Place at Pilmuir Primary School in 2011 and also attributable to the ongoing building of residential housing estates on the Grantown Road. Whilst the Elections Office were aware the Forres Town Hall was reaching capacity, this Polling Place was due to be reviewed in the full statutory Polling Place Review scheduled at the beginning of 2014. This review was delayed due to workload associated with the Local Government By-Election held unexpectedly in January 2014 and as reported earlier this year.

3.4 Initial plans for the Scottish Independence Referendum being held on 18 September 2014 had 6 polling stations allocated within Forres Town Hall. However, following statutory directions issued by the Chief Counting Officer for the Referendum, on 2 May 2014 and subsequent clarification on 4 June 2014, it is clear that the Counting Officer cannot allocate more than around 800 voters per polling station, due to the high turnout expected for this poll.

3.5 Forres Town Hall cannot safely accommodate the 7 polling stations required to cover the assigned electorate (noted above). There is a risk that, due to the high turnout expected for the Referendum, the volume of voters attending will not be effectively, efficiently and quickly served by the polling stations due to overcrowding. This is not in the best interests of the voter which is the Counting Officer's primary concern and responsibility.

3.5 A meeting with the Forres ward elected members was held in June to consider options for future polling places including consideration of the longer term local development plans. With the agreement of the Forres ward members, it is proposed to open Polling Place at The Victoria Hotel Function Suite, Tytler Street. Polling stations will be made available here for the purposes of the Referendum and for polls thereafter, leaving capacity at Forres Town Hall for the future.

3.6 With the designation of a new Polling Place in the existing Polling district MM0806 – Forres West & Altyre will have to be split. This will define the areas that will be covered by Forres Town Hall which currently serves this district

and the creation of a new polling district served by Victoria Hotel Function Suite.

- 3.7 The polling district split proposed is shown in **Appendix 1** and due to the geography has the unavoidable effect of creating two additional polling districts. The new district in the west will serve the Pilmuir and Thornhill west of Grantown Road. The newly created polling districts will be named and numbered as follows for the purposes of the electoral register and identification.

- Amend MM0806 – Forres West & Altyre Rural polling district area, rename as Forres Central, voting at Forres Town Hall
- Add MM0809 – Forres West – voting at Function Suite, Victoria Hotel
- Add MM0810 – Forres Knockomie & Rural voting at Forres Town Hall

The districts have been drawn to encompass approx 1700 in person voters at each Polling Place and leave capacity at Forres Town Hall for the future.

- 3.8 As we are in the middle of the life of the current electoral register and for administration reasons the district numbering will not run in sequence. MM0807 is currently assigned to Rafford and MM0808 assigned to Edinkillie. This anomaly will be corrected when the new electoral register is published in February 2015. This has no effect on the voter.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Moray 2023: A Plan for the Future/Service Plan

There are no implications for the plan arising from these proposals.

(b) Policy and Legal

Section 18 (3) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994) requires each Local Authority in Scotland to designate a polling place for each of its polling districts and to keep these under review.

We have been unable to run a full public consultation on these proposals due to the timescales involved.

(c) Financial implications

There will be additional costs of approx £400 for rental of an additional private venue on polling day which will be paid by the Counting / Returning Officer from the referendum / elections budget; these fees will be reclaimed from the Scotland Office or the Scottish Government dependent on the poll in hand.

No additional staff costs are envisaged. There are currently 3 to 6 polling stations within the Forres Town Hall Polling Place serving MM0806, with the splitting of this district to create additional districts, up to three polling stations and the staff who man it will be moved to the proposed venue.

There will be some publication costs in terms of the statutory notices that will require to be published in local newspapers. This cost will be in the region of £150.

(d) Risk Implications

With regard to current polling arrangement in Urquhart and Forres the risks have been outlined in the report.

For both of the proposed relocations there is a risk of voter confusion in the relocation of Polling Places from one venue to another. This risk will be mitigated by public notices about the change, increased signage at the new venues and the old venue, each and every registered voter receiving a pollcard which details their polling place which will have a highlight box indicating the change, press releases and in Forres a designed press advert which will raise awareness about the location of each polling place and updated information on the website.

(e) Staffing Implications

As noted above in (c)

(f) Property

None arising from this report. Forres Academy and Primary Schools in Forres were considered as venues in preparation of this report but were either dismissed at this time on grounds of disruption to education or geographic or facility constraints.

(g) Equalities

After consultation with the Equal Opportunities Officer it was determined that an Equalities Impact Assessment was not required for this report. By introducing an additional Polling Place in this area this promotes 'equality of opportunity'. In addition, when the venue was audited, it met all the minimum criteria for physical accessibility to the facility for polling.

(h) Consultations

The Forres ward members have been consulted and their views will be made known at the meeting. In addition the Electoral Registration Officer (Grampian Valuation Joint Board), Depute Returning Officer and the Equal Opportunities Officer have been consulted and comments incorporated into this report.

Consultations have been undertaken with the Urquhart Village Hall committee chairman and with the proprietor of The Victoria Hotel, Forres in preparation for this report.

Innes Community Council have been consulted and were sent a letter on 14 May 2014 and to date have not submitted a response. Their view, if submitted, will be made known at the meeting.

Forres Community Council have been consulted and were sent a letter on 18 June 2014 and to date have not submitted a response. Their view, if submitted, will be made known at the meeting.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The relocation and opening of new Polling Places mitigates risk to availability of polling places, ensures that the Counting Officer meets statutory directions in relation to the provision of polling stations within Local Authority designated Polling Places for the Scottish Independence Referendum and future polls, and minimises risks of voter overcrowding in high turnout polls.**

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Background Papers:
Ref:

