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## **REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2014**

To: **Council – 18 November 2014**

By: **Madeline Homer, Returning Officer**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **All wards**

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**Summary: To consider the revised Polling Districts and Polling Places Scheme 2014 following the review of Polling Districts and Polling Places.**

### **For Decision**

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#### **1.0 Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 On 9 January 2014, the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party received a report from the Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager outlining the need for a polling district and polling places review, notice of the review and consultation arrangements and timetable of the review.
- 1.2 By 31 January 2015, Council must have undertaken and completed a new review of its polling district and polling places. However, in practice, it is extremely advantageous for the review to be completed prior to the republication of the electoral register on 1 December 2014, in order to avoid the need for repeated republication of the register following the 2014 canvass, and the incorporation of any new electoral arrangements that may flow from the community governance review of Margate This Report outlines the steps the Council has taken to comply with this duty, the consideration of representations made during public consultation and suggests a scheme for adoption by the Council.
- 1.3 Every relevant authority is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts for UK Parliamentary elections and for keeping polling districts under review. For local government elections, the Council may divide its electoral areas (i.e. county electoral divisions and wards) into polling districts, but there is no legal requirement to do so, although it is good practice. Where the Council sub-divides its electoral areas into polling districts this must, so far as possible, mirror the scheme in place for Parliamentary elections.
- 1.4 The Council's current scheme of polling districts and polling places was approved by the Council on 13 October 2011.

#### **2.0 Definitions**

- 2.1 A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area such as a district council ward.
- 2.2 A polling place is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. There is no legal definition of what a polling place is. The polling place can be either designated as tightly as a building in the polling district used for polling or as widely as the entire polling district. It is considered good practice however to designate a polling place as being "at or near" a specific building within the polling district. This allows the Returning Officer to

use an alternative polling place within the polling district should, for any reason, the designated polling place be unavailable at an election.

- 2.3 A polling station is the area, normally a building, where voting takes place. One or more polling stations may be provided within a polling place.

### **3.0 The rules**

- 3.1 When designating polling districts and polling places, the Council must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. Furthermore, unless there are special circumstances that lead the Council to determine otherwise, each parish must be in a separate polling district.

- 3.2 The Council must also seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places it designates are accessible to all electors, including taking into account the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

- 3.3 The designation of polling districts and polling places are matters for which the Council is responsible. The Returning Officer is responsible for providing a sufficient number of polling stations within those polling places.

### **4.0 The review process**

- 4.1 All existing polling stations were evaluated by officers at the European Parliamentary Election using the evaluation checklist provided by the Electoral Commission. Upon completion, officers analysed each individual polling station checklist to ascertain the suitability of the existing polling stations.

- 4.2 Furthermore, feedback generated from the European Parliamentary Election (electors, staff, candidates, agents, elected representatives, etc) was analysed and incorporated into the review. This was in addition to the public consultation undertaken as part of the statutory review.

### **5.0 Public consultation**

- 5.1 The Council gave public notice of the review and consulted the Returning Officer and any such persons it thought would have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons were given the opportunity to make representations and to comment on representations made to the Council by the Returning Officer.

- 5.2 The Council gave public notice of the review in a local newspaper and on the Council's website on 1 July 2014. In addition, the following parties were invited to submit representations including suggestions for the identification of polling districts and alternative polling places and polling stations:

- All district councillors;
- Town and Parish Councils;
- Kent County Council
- Local political party groups; and
- Local organisations with expertise in matters concerning access to premises.

- 5.3 Following this initial consultation period, the Returning Officer made representations to the Council which included information as to the location of both existing and proposed polling places and polling stations. Interested parties were able to make comments on the Returning Officer's representations.

## **6.0 The revised polling district and polling places scheme**

- 6.1 The Returning Officer's recommendations, together with any other representations received, were considered at meetings of the Boundary and Electoral Matters Working Party on 22 October 2014. The revised scheme the Returning Officer and Democratic Services Department had suggested was approved by the Working Party subject to one possible amendment being suggested by the Working Party.
- 6.2 It was suggested that officers look at alternatives for the RE1 polling place (St Lawrence College, College Road, Ramsgate).

### **Playwise (Artwise), St Luke's Avenue, Ramsgate, Kent**

- 6.3 Officers carried out an inspection and assessment of Playwise (Artwise), St Luke's Avenue, Ramsgate.
- 6.4 Although the venue does have sufficient space to accommodate a polling station, officers raised concerns about access to and from the premises. There was a considerable drop from the entrance door (12-14 inches), a ramp was provided but the slope wasn't gentle. The door to proposed station was too narrow for a motorised wheelchair.
- 6.5 Alternative rooms were available but due to the lack of turning space in the corridors and a further two steps (which would require ramps) this wasn't considered suitable.
- 6.6 There were also concerns about the potential turnout at next year's elections as elector traffic flow in and out of the polling station would pose problems due to the narrowness of the rooms and corridors.
- 6.7 Due to access issues and the suspected high turnout at next year's elections it is the officer's recommendation that Artwise is unsuitable as a polling station due to the restrictions in disabled access.

### **St Luke's Church Hall, St Luke's Avenue, Ramsgate, Kent**

- 6.8 Officers contacted the St Luke's Church Hall, St Luke's Avenue with a view to officers inspecting the premises to see if we could use the premises as a polling place.
- 6.9 The hall has informed us that it cannot accommodate us as it has regular bookings throughout the week and the hall is only available in the evenings.
- 6.10 Officers have informed the Chairman of the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party of the outcomes of their investigations and that the scheme of polling districts and places to be recommended to Council will need to be the same as that considered by the Boundary & Electoral Arrangements Working Party on 22 October 2014.
- 6.11 The proposed revised Polling Districts and Polling Places Scheme is attached at **annex 1**.

## **7.0 Location of Polling Places**

- 7.1 Members will note from the attached schedule that all revised polling places are located "at or near" a specific building. This provides the Returning Officer and the Council some flexibility with the situation of polling places. If for example, due to

some unforeseen circumstances, a village hall was not available at an election then the Returning Officer would be able to find an alternative polling place at or near to the original location.

## **8.0 Further Reviews**

8.1 Subsequent compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.

8.3 The Council may undertake reviews of all or some of the designated polling districts and polling places at any time, but must undertake a comprehensive review of each within four years of the previous review.

8.4 For administrative convenience, it would seem desirable to review all polling districts and polling places in a regular five-yearly cycle, regardless of whether or not a particular polling district or polling place has been reviewed for some reason in the intervening period. This will help in ensuring a consistent approach is taken across the Council's area.

## **9.0 Options**

9.1 The Council must adopt a scheme by 31 January 2015; however officers are seeking adoption prior to 1 December 2014. This is to allow the Electoral Registration Officer to carry out boundary changes to the electoral register to reflect the additional/changes to existing polling districts. The revised electoral register has to be published on 1 December 2014.

### **9.2 Option 1**

9.2.1 Council can adopt the proposed revised polling districts and polling places scheme (as recommended by the Boundary and Electoral Matters Working Party) for implementation on 1 December 2014.

### **9.3 Option 2**

9.3.1 Alternatively, Council can suggest an alternative scheme of polling districts and polling places that officers would need to consider.

9.4 Members need to be aware, however, that if there is not a revised scheme in place by 1 December 2014 (when the revised electoral register is published) any subsequent changes Council make to the polling districts will need to be incorporated into a revised electoral register which would then need to be republished at an additional cost (i.e. costs of re-printing, re-distributing and re-advertising the revised register). Such additional republishing costs are not currently budgeted for.

## **10.0 Corporate implications**

### **10.1 Financial**

10.1.1 There will be some limited financial implications due to the increase in the number of ramps and signage suggested. Any additional costs to the Council would be reduced somewhat in so far as those costs could be divided across other elections and that these costs will be contained within existing budgets.

## 10.2 Legal

10.2.1 It is a legal requirement to undertake the review before 31 January 2015. Failure to carry out the review could result in representations being made to the Electoral Commission because the Council failed to carry out the review. This could result in the Electoral Commission directing the Council to amend its current polling districts and polling places.

## 10.3 Corporate

10.3.1 Through the polling district and polling places review Thanet people have been consulted.

## 10.4 Equity and Equalities

10.4.1 The subject of equalities has been considered in great detail during the review, from the initial feedback provided by Presiding Officers at the 2014 European Parliamentary Election, which was based upon template provided by the Electoral Commission which fully address accessibility issues. Detailed findings were included in the briefing note previously circulated to all Members and the reports presented to the Working Party and circulated to others.

## 11.0 Recommendation

11.1 In accordance with the recommendation of the Boundary and Electoral Matters Working Party, Members are recommended to agree Option 1 and adopt the proposed polling districts and polling places scheme for implementation on 1 December 2014 (as set out in Annex 1).

## 12.0 Decision Making Process

12.1 The Council delegated the review of the polling districts and polling places to the Boundary and Electoral Matters Working Party. Upon completion of the review the Boundary and Electoral Matters Working Party must recommend to Council a revised scheme of polling districts and polling places for its determination.

12.2 Council is the decision making body.

Contact Officer:	Glenn Back, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Manager
Reporting to:	Paul Cook, Interim Director of Corporate Resources

### Annex List

Annex 1	District of Thanet District Council – Polling Districts and Polling Places, Revised Scheme 2014
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### Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
Existing Polling District and Polling Places Scheme	<i>Available from Electoral Services</i>

### Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Matt Sanham, Finance Manager (Service Support)
Legal	Steven Boyle – Interim Legal Services Manager & Monitoring Officer