
REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2011

To: **Electoral Matters Working Party**

Main Portfolio Area: **Performance**

By: **Mark Avis, Electoral Services Officer**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **All wards**

Summary: This briefing paper summarises the work undertaken by the Democratic Services Department and the Returning Officer on the review of polling districts and polling places 2011, the representations that were received during the public consultation and seeks Members views in respect of further action.

For consultation

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 On 19 May 2011, Council 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 To facilitate the polling districts and polling places review it was recommended to Council that the detailed work be delegated to a cross-group working party.
- 1.3 Having considered the report, Council agreed to the following recommendation:
- “That an Electoral Matters Working Party be constituted to consider all representation received during the polling districts and polling places review, and to make recommendations thereon to Council on 13 October”.

2.0 Work to date

- 2.1 The Council gave public notice of the review in a local newspaper and on the Council's website on 1 June 2011. In addition, the following parties were invited to submit representations by 1 July 2011 including suggestions for the identification of polling districts and alternative polling places and polling stations:
- All district councillors;
 - Town and Parish Councils;
 - Local political party groups; and
 - Local organisations with expertise in matters concerning access to premises

3.0 The review process

- 3.1 Democratic Services staff undertook a complete assessment of all Thanet District Council's polling places and polling stations.
- 3.2 All existing polling stations were inspected in person. All polling stations were assessed on whether they complied with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and whether they fulfilled the requirements suggested by the Electoral Commission when checking the suitability of polling stations.
- 3.3 Where existing polling stations were not DDA compliant or did not meet the requirements as suggested by the Electoral Commission, Officers have recommended alternative polling stations for public consultation and consideration by the Electoral Matters Working Party.

4.0 Inappropriate polling stations

- 4.1 The Democratic Services Department and Returning Officer have identified a number of existing polling stations which, at the time of the last review, were the most suitable on offer despite minor drawbacks but have now recommended alternative polling stations.

Salmestone (Yoakley) MP1 and Salmestone (Westwood) MP2

At the time of the last review of polling districts and places it was agreed that the Salmestone Ward should be split into two polling districts and the following polling places would be used:

- Mobile polling station sited at Yoakley Square
- Mobile polling station sited at the Orb Public House, car park

Following discussions with the landlords of Lesters and the Orb it was agreed that we could use their premises instead of hiring mobile polling stations.

After the 2009 Euro elections it was agreed that The Orb was not a suitable polling station and it was the decision of the Returning Officer that the two polling places should be sited within Lesters.

However, for the referendum on the alternative vote, the Chief Counting Officer for the Referendum issued a direction limiting the number of electors per polling station to 2,500 electors. As a consequence, Lesters was no longer suitable because it could not accommodate the required number of polling stations.

Finding suitable premises at such short notice posed problems. The only alternative at the time was Salmestone Grange. Democratic Services visited the premises and had some reservations about disability access/issues (as it is a 12th Century building) but recommended to the Returning Officer that it should be used on that occasion due to the lack of alternative venues.

As part of this review of polling districts and places, Democratic Services has contacted both Salmestone Primary School and St Gregory's Roman Catholic School

to arrange site inspections. Both schools agreed to the site visits and have shown their willingness to be used as polling stations.

Having considered both premises in terms of accessibility, parking facilities, location within polling district, outside lighting and disability access it is the recommendation of Returning Officer and officers that Salmestone Primary School be designated as polling place for the Salmestone (Yoakley) MP1 and Salmestone (Westwood) MP2 polling districts.

5.0 Polling Stations not available in the future

- 5.1 During its assessment of all polling places and polling stations the Democratic Services Department discovered a few polling stations that were no longer available/would not be available in the future and therefore sought alternative polling stations.

St Peters (Bromstone) BSF

Officers have been informed that the Kent Innovation Centre building is currently at 77% occupation. The aim is to have 100% occupancy. If that level of occupancy were achieved, then the rooms we use as a polling station would not be available.

In seeking an alternative, officers carried out an inspection and assessment of Canterbury Christchurch University, Broadstairs Campus, Northwood Road, Broadstairs as an alternative polling station.

Having considered the premises in terms of accessibility, parking facilities, location within polling district, outside lighting and disability access it is the opinion of officers that Canterbury Christchurch University would make an excellent polling station. However, the Campus Events Co-ordinator has advised us that the rooms may not always be available.

With this in mind the Returning Officer and officers recommend that the Kent Innovation Centre, Thanet Reach Business Centre, Millennium Way, Broadstairs be designated as polling place for the St Peters (Bromstone) BSF polling district until it is no longer available, after which Canterbury Christchurch University, Broadstairs Campus, Northwood Road, Broadstairs should be designated as the polling place (subject to availability).

Central Harbour (Station) RG

The Ramsgate Youth Centre (Concorde) has been included in Kent County Council's list of youth centres "earmarked" for closure. Currently, this proposal is at the consultation stage with a decision being made mid September. Democratic Services have been informed that if the centre is closed, that closure is likely to happen June/July 2012.

In seeking an alternative polling place, officers carried out an inspection and assessment of Salvation Army Hall, High Street, Ramsgate.

Having considered the premises in terms of accessibility, parking facilities, location within polling district, outside lighting and disability access it is the recommendation of Returning Officer and officers that the Ramsgate Youth Centre (Concorde) be designated as polling place for the Central Harbour (Station) RG polling district until it is no longer available, after which the Salvation Army Hall, High Street, Ramsgate should be designated as the polling place.

6.0 Merger of existing polling districts

- 6.1 Due to changes in Parliamentary boundaries Manston now falls wholly in North Thanet Parliamentary constituency therefore VMAN (Manston North) and VMAS (Manston South) polling districts are to be merged to form VMA (Manston).

7.0 Representations received

- 7.1 During the initial consultation stage a total of three representations were received regarding alternative polling places/stations to Thanet District Council's existing ones.

Councillor Iris Johnston – Salmestone (Yoakley) MP1 and Salmestone (Westwood) MP2

Councillor Iris Johnston submitted representations on the unsuitability of Salmestone Grange as a polling station suggesting that it should never be used again (Annex 1).

This has been dealt with under para. 4.1 in this briefing paper and as such no further action is required.

Broadstairs Town Council – Viking (Dumpton Gap) BSH

Mr Roy Dextor, Town Clerk to Broadstairs and St Peters Parish Council submitted representations suggesting the use of its Council Chamber instead of using Park Hall within Pierremont Park as a polling station as it could not always guarantee its availability and that Park Hall was also "earmarked" for demolition (Annex 2).

Officers carried out an inspection and assessment of the Council Chamber, Pierremont Hall, Pierremont Park, Broadstairs.

Having considered the premises in terms of accessibility, parking facilities, location within polling district, outside lighting and disability access it is the recommendation of the Returning Officer and officers that the Council Chamber, Pierremont Hall, Pierremont Park, Broadstairs be designated as polling place for the Viking (Dumpton Gap) BSH polling district.

Note however, Broadstairs Town Council has agreed to provide access ramps to Pierremont Hall during elections, as access to the building is via steps.

Councillor Bill Hayton – Bradstowe BSD

Councillor Bill Hayton submitted representations on the suitability of Holy Trinity Church Hall, Church Road, Broadstairs. Councillor Hayton's concerns were that elderly voters were finding it difficult to manage the steps into and out of the doorway (Annex 3).

Democratic Services were aware of this problem back in May where an elector had fallen over the step and hurt themselves. Democratic Services had always intended to find a more suitable polling station.

Officers carried out an inspection and assessment of Queens Road Baptist Church, Broadstairs.

Although the Baptist Church was excellent in accessibility, location within polling district, outside lighting and disability access it failed on providing parking facilities as there is no dedicated parking. Officers had a five minute walk when a parking space was eventually found. Due to this officers are not recommending the Queens Road Baptist Church, Broadstairs as a polling place.

Officers carried out an inspection and assessment of the Broadstairs Youth and Leisure Centre, Albion Street, Broadstairs.

Having considered the premises in terms of accessibility, parking facilities, location within polling district, outside lighting and disability access it is the recommendation of the Returning Officer and officers that the Broadstairs Youth and Leisure Centre, Albion Street, Broadstairs be designated as polling place for the Bradstowe BSD polling district

8.0 Location of Polling Places

- 8.1 Members will note from the attached schedule (Annex 4) that all revised polling places are located at or near a specific building.
- 8.2 This provides the Returning Officer and the Council some flexibility with the situation of polling places. If for example, due to some unforeseen circumstances, the Westgate Community Centre 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.

9.0 Further reviews

- 9.1 The polling districts and polling places must be kept under review between major reviews. Changes to polling districts and polling places can be made at any time, and not just at the times for a full review.

10.0 Next Steps

- 10.1 The initial consultation period finished on 1 July 2011 and this briefing note is based on these findings.
- 10.2 The Returning Officer has recommended the proposals set out in Annex 4 which includes information as to the location of both existing and proposed polling places and polling stations. Interested parties will be able to make comments on the Returning Officer's representations in the second phase of the consultation period.
- 10.3 The second phase of the consultation of the Returning Officers proposed polling places and polling stations is to end on 2 September. Any representations received during the second phase of the public consultation will be made available to Members via email on Monday 5 September 2011.
- 10.4 It is up to the Electoral Matters Working Party to make any comments on the proposed polling places and polling stations and recommend a scheme to Council.
- 10.5 Members have received this report well in advance of the first meeting of the Electoral Matters Working Party and they are advised to inform Democratic Services Department of any suggestions for amending the proposed new scheme as soon as possible so that Officers can inspect and assess premises well in advance of the first Electoral Matters Working Party meeting.
- 10.6 The Electoral Matters Working Party is scheduled to meet on:
- Thursday 8 September 2011
 - Thursday 27 September 2011*

Contact Officer:	Glenn Back, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager
Reporting to:	Harvey Patterson, Corporate and Regulatory Services Manager

Annex 1	Email from Councillor Mrs Johnston
Annex 2	Email from Mr Roy Dextor, Town Clerk to Broadstairs and St Peters Town Council
Annex 3	Letter from Councillor Hayton
Annex 4	Review of Polling District and Polling Places 2011

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	None at this stage
Legal	None at this stage

* may only be necessary if there are issues unresolved from 8 September 2011