

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, PLACES AND STATIONS

Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party - Thursday 19 December

Report Author **Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager**

Status **For Recommendation**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **All Wards**

Executive Summary:

The Council is required to undertake a review of its Parliamentary polling districts and polling places between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. The review formally commenced on 29 July and a public consultation was undertaken where the public and interested parties were invited to make submissions, the consultation opened on Monday 2 September and ran until 5pm on Friday 11 October. Comments and alternative proposals for polling stations in BSB Beacon Road ward and BSH Viking Ward were received. The report outlines the responses to these suggestions and asks the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party to recommend the proposals as set out at Annex 2 to the report to Council.

Recommendation(s):

That the proposals for polling districts, places and stations for future elections, as attached at Annex 2 to the report, be recommended to Council.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

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| Financial and Value for Money | The financial implications are contained within the body of the report however, it is worth noting that the cost of the temporary solution identified at 5.2.4 is excessive and will likely not be recoverable, as a result budget would need to be identified if an option other than that proposed as per the attached were selected. |
| Legal | It is a legal requirement to undertake and complete the review and submit the results to the Electoral Commission prior to 31 January 2020. Failure to carry out the review within this timescale could result in representations being made to the Electoral Commission because the Council failed to carry out the review, which could result in the Electoral Commission directing the Council to amend its current polling districts and polling places. |
| Corporate | Whilst it is a legal requirement to undertake a review, undertaking one will be a major contributor to the corporate priority of "Supporting neighbourhoods". In addition the extensive public consultation on the proposals contribute to the "promoting open communications" corporate value. |
| Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty | Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. |

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| | <p>Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td colspan="2">Please indicate which aim is relevant to the report.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.</td> <td style="text-align: center;">✓</td> </tr> </table> <p>Each Polling Place proposed as part of this report has been considered in line with Electoral Commission guidance on a range of issues in respect of accessibility and disabled access. All proposed Polling Places and associated Polling Stations meet the relevant criteria and regulations enabling them to be used for elections.</p> | Please indicate which aim is relevant to the report. | | Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, | | Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it | | Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. | ✓ |
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| CORPORATE PRIORITIES (tick those relevant)✓ | |
| A clean and welcoming Environment | |
| Promoting inward investment and job creation | |
| Supporting neighbourhoods | ✓ |

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| CORPORATE VALUES (tick those relevant)✓ | |
| Delivering value for money | |
| Supporting the Workforce | |
| Promoting open communications | ✓ |

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 This paper reports the outcome of the consultation carried out in respect of the Polling District and Polling Place Review and asks the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party to recommend to Council a schedule to Polling Districts and Polling Places for approval.

2.0 Background to the Review

- 2.1 The Council is required to undertake a review of its Parliamentary polling districts and polling places between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020.
- 2.2 When undertaking a review the authority must:
- seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in its area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
 - seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every Polling Place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled;
 - have regard to the accessibility of disabled persons of potential Polling Stations in any place which it is considering designating as a Polling Place or the designation of which as a Polling Place it is reviewing;
 - ensure that the Polling Place for a Polling District must be in an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district;

- consider that the Polling Place for a Polling District must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the Polling Station.

3.0 The Review

- 3.1 All existing polling stations were evaluated by Officers at both the European Parliamentary and the District and Parish Elections using the evaluation checklist used by the Electoral Commission. Upon completion, Officers analysed each individual polling station checklist to ascertain the suitability of the existing polling stations.
- 3.2 In addition where Democratic Services felt they had insufficient details as a result of the checklist above, further visits were undertaken by officers. All of the collated information was then used to create the proposals to be consulted upon.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 A public consultation was undertaken where the public and interested parties were invited to make submissions, the consultation opened on Monday 2 September and ran until 5pm on Friday 11 October. The following stakeholders were invited to make submissions:

- All 56 Members of Thanet District Council.
- The seven Kent County Councillors for the Thanet District.
- The two MPs covering the Thanet District.
- The 11 Parish Council's covering the Thanet District.
- Disability Groups, including the Kent Disability Forum, the Disability Drop in Centre, Kent Rise 4 Disability, Kent Association for the Blind, Age UK Thanet and Ageless Thanet.
- The local Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Green, UKIP and Thanet Independents political parties.
- Residents Associations
- All current polling stations
- Thanet Police
- Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council and Kent County Council.

- 4.2 The consultation was also advertised on the Council's website and through its social media channels and was also covered in the local press and on regional television news. A schedule of current Polling Districts and Polling Places with the proposed amendments by the Returning Officer was made available to all parties who were consulted and a map outlining the location of the polling districts and places together with the polling stations used at the May 2019 local elections was available on the Council's dedicated polling review webpages. In addition, Democratic Services also designed a google form to make responding to the consultation easier and this was also available on the Council's dedicated review webpage.

- 4.3 Democratic Services received 20 responses in total and these are summarised at Annex 1 to the report.

5.0 Themes within the responses

- 5.1 There were no comments suggesting alternative polling Districts. There were positive comments regarding a number of polling stations and it is not felt that these comments require any formal recommendations. Of the 20 responses nine were critical of the choice of using St Andrews Church for the polling station for polling district BSB and

have suggested a variety of alternatives. A further three were received that were critical of the choice of Queens Road Baptist Church in polling district BSH and have suggested an alternative venue.

5.2 BSB, Beacon Road - St Andrews Church Hall, Reading Street, Broadstairs

5.2.1 The nine submissions received criticising the choice can be summarised as follows:

- Lack of parking facilities in the area.
- Discriminates against those without a car.
- Difficult to get to for elderly or disabled voters.
- Inappropriate as a double station.
- Poor internal lighting.
- Confusing layout of the polling station.

5.2.2 After further discussions and investigations by the Electoral Services Team we can make the following responses to the point raised:

- It is acknowledged that the polling station does not have a dedicated car park, however that is the case for many stations. There is an ample amount of parking on the surrounding streets, as confirmed by the Parish administrator.
- The hall used for this polling station is of a large size and more than adequate for use as a double station. It was also, at its last inspection found to have satisfactory lighting.
- The new station is only 175 metres from the edge of the polling district and approximately 550 metres from the middle of the St Peters estate, this is not considered to be an excessive distance for people to travel. Alternatives to physically attending the polling station are also available in the form of postal or proxy votes.

5.2.3 The following places were proposed as alternatives :

- Use of St Peters House
- Use of the Cabin Cafe
- Requisition of the former Westover Free Church building
- Use of a temporary polling station somewhere on the St Peters estate

5.2.4 After further discussions and investigations by the Electoral Services Team we can make the following responses to the suggestions made:

- St Peters House has been contacted via Kent County Council about the possibility of using part of it as a polling venue. To date the Electoral Services team have had no response from St Peters House.
- Electoral Services have contacted the owners of the Cabin Cafe and they have confirmed that they are not willing to allow the use of their building as a polling station.
- Requisition of the former Westover Free Church is not possible, as the building is currently in a condition that makes its use as a polling station unsuitable.
- Democratic Services have investigated and compiled a total estimated cost of siting a temporary polling station on Westover Gardens. The cost would be £3800 per election. This consists of Portakabin hire, ramp hire, delivery fees, generator hire, toilet hire and health and safety equipment hire. A number of submissions have stated that electoral costs are reclaimed from a national pot. This is correct for nationally run elections i.e. Parliamentary, however it is not the case for local elections, where the authority that candidates are being elected to pays. As a result those authorities are entitled to query unnecessary expenditure, including the costs of polling stations. To give further context the total spend on polling stations for the 2019 European elections was £12,061.50. Spending an additional £3800 on polling stations will increase the risk of other authorities declining to pay for what they see as unreasonable costs.

5.2.5 In addition to the points discussed above, Democratic Services have also undertaken to search for alternatives to the Westover Free Church station. These have included conversations with both Cherry Court residential home and visiting the shops. Neither of these would be suitable as polling stations. Democratic Services have also considered and undertaken a visit to the Scout Hut in the grounds of Callis Grange School, however permission from the school was refused and so it is not able to be used.

5.2.6 **Conclusion Regarding BSB, Beacon Road - St Andrews Church Hall, Reading Street, Broadstairs**

To retain use of the St Andrews Church Hall, Reading Street as the polling station for the BSB polling district.

5.3 **BSH, Viking - Queens Road Baptist Church, Queens Road, Broadstairs**

5.3.1 The three submissions received criticising the choice can be summarised as follows:

- Poor access for car users and lack of parking.
- Insufficient number of polling stations in the polling district.
- Not located centrally.
- Facilities won't be as good as the new Pierremont Hall offices.
- The Baptist Church is not the civic hub of the town.

5.3.2 After further discussions and investigations by the Electoral Services Team we can make the following responses to the point raised:

- Whilst it is correct that there is no parking outside of the polling station, there are car parking spaces running the length of Broadstairs High Street which is immediately adjacent to the station. In addition Crofts Place is a 63 space pay and display car park less than 100 metres from the station.
- The number of polling stations within a polling district is determined by the number of electors within the polling district, a polling station should not accommodate more than 3000 electors. BSH currently has 2960 electors of which 513 are absent voters there by making the ratio of polling stations within the ward correct. Therefore there is no need for additional polling stations in the polling district.
- The polling station is more centrally located within the polling district than the previous station at Pierremont Hall, which is in the extreme corner of the polling district.
- It is difficult to judge the facilities at this polling station against those at Pierremont Hall, as at the time of writing Pierremont Hall is closed and still under renovation and so not available to be used as a polling station.
- Whether a polling station is considered a civic hub is not a relevant consideration.

5.3.3 The following were proposed as alternatives:

- Pierremont Hall

5.3.4 After further discussions and investigations by the Electoral Services Team we can make the following response to the suggestion made:

- At the time of writing Pierremont Hall is closed and still under renovation and so not available to be used as a polling station. However this would not preclude from an inspection taking place at a future date once it is open and this may result in a change being made in the future.

5.5.3 Conclusion regarding BSH, Viking - Queens Road Baptist Church, Queens Road, Broadstairs

To retain use of the Queens Hall Baptist church, Queens Road, Broadstairs as the polling place and station for the BSH polling district. In addition to review Pierremont Hall once all works have been completed.

6.0 The rest of the review

6.1 There were a number of other changes that had been proposed as part of the review. These being the change of both polling stations in the Salmestone ward. There were no responses to the public consultation regarding these changes. A full list of all of the proposed polling places and stations is available at Annex 2 to the report.

6.2 Recommendation

That the proposals for polling districts, places and stations for future elections, as attached at Annex 2 to the report, be recommended to Council.

7.0 Next Steps

7.1 The Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party may wish to make recommendations to Council with regard to the polling stations selected. This report will then be considered by the full Council on 5 December 2019, where it will be asked to agree the list of polling places and stations for use in 2019/23. Once agreed the list and all the necessary papers will then be sent to the Electoral Commission.

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| Contact Officer: | Nicholas Hughes, Committee Services Manager |
| Reporting to: | Madeline Homer, Returning Officer |

Annex List

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| Annex 1 | Summary of consultation responses |
| Annex 2 | List of proposed polling places and stations. |

Background Papers

| Title | Details of where to access copy |
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| None | |

Corporate Consultation

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| Finance | Matthew Sanham, Financial Services Manager |
| Legal | Estelle Culligan, Head of Legal and Democratic Services |

