

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, PLACES AND STATIONS

BEAWP	14 January 2025
By	Ingrid Brown, Head of Legal and Democracy and MO
Key Decision	No
Decision classification	Unrestricted
Ward:	All Wards

Purpose of the Report

This report allows the Boundary and Electoral Arrangements Working Party (BEAWP) to review the results of the consultation as part of the review of polling districts, places and stations and the proposed list of polling stations. The BEAWP can then make recommendations on to Full Council to

Recommendation(s):

That the proposals for polling districts, places and stations for future elections, as attached at Annex 1 to the report, be recommended to Council.

1. Summary of Reasons

- 1.1 The Council is required to undertake a review of its Parliamentary polling districts and polling places between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025, in accordance with Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

2. Background

- 2.1 When undertaking a review of the Parliamentary polling districts and polling places 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. Relevant Issues

The Review

- 3.1 All existing polling stations were evaluated by Officers at the 2024 General Election 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 Electoral 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 that were consulted upon.

Consultation

- 3.3 A public consultation was undertaken where the public and interested parties were invited to make submissions, the consultation opened on Monday 25 November 2024 and ran until 5pm on Monday 9 December 2024. 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 with constituencies covering the Thanet District.
 - The 11 Parish Council's covering the Thanet District.
 - Disability Groups.
 - The local Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Green and Thanet Independents political parties.
 - Residents Associations and other local bodies
 - All current polling stations
 - Thanet Police
 - Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council and Kent County Council.
- 3.4 The consultation was also advertised on the Council's website and through its social media channels. 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 2024 general election was available on the Council's dedicated polling review webpage.
- 3.5 The Council received 22 responses in total and these are summarised at Annex 2 to the report.
- 3.6 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 22 responses, 12 did not contain any comments. Three were regarding Beacon Road ward, two were regarding Viking ward and one each was regarding Salmestone and Newington

wards. The remaining three responses were comments that were not directly relevant to alternative arrangements.

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

3.7.1 Three submissions were received regarding Beacon Road Ward. They can be summarised as follows:

- If possible there should be an alternative polling station elsewhere in the ward rather than using St Andrews Church as a double polling station.

3.7.2 The following places were proposed as alternatives:

- The Shed, Northdown Industrial Estate
- A temporary polling station on land in the Beacon Road estate.
- Former Church Hall in Linley Road.

3.7.3 After discussions and investigations by the Electoral Services Team we can make the following responses to the points raised:

- Electoral Services understands that St Andrews Church Hall accommodating two polling stations within the building is not ideal and in future would like to be in a position to find another venue more centrally.
- Electoral Services have contacted venues on the industrial estate (including The Shed) in the past and no one has been able to provide us with an alternative venue. We are in the process of trying to find contact details for the new owners in order to approach them regarding the old church building in Linley Road. However even if they were found, given time needed to re-open the building, it would not be possible to include this building as part of this current review.
- Electoral Services have previously investigated the estimated costs of siting a temporary polling station on Westover Gardens on the Beacon Road estate. In 2019 the costs were estimated at nearly £4000 per election. To give context the total spend on polling stations for the most recent set of elections was £16,292. Spending a quarter of the total polling station budget on one polling station would significantly increase the risk of the Elections Claims Unit who oversee Election spending declining to pay for what they see as unreasonable costs.

3.8 BSG Viking - Crampton Function Hall, Crampton Tower Museum, The Broadway

3.8.1 Two submissions were received regarding Viking Ward. They can be summarised as follows:

- Crampton was ideal.
- Access was difficult and the ground uneven and hard to walk on.
- No alternative suggestions were made.

3.8.2 After discussions and investigations by the Electoral Services Team we can make the following responses to the points raised:

- The Elections team understands the concerns regarding the uneven surface to Crampton Tower. The team is endeavouring to find a more suitable venue within the Viking Ward. However, the only possible venue within the polling district that we had been able to find was St Mildred's School, after contacting the school but unfortunately they were unable to accommodate us with an available room to use as a polling station .
- The Sarah Thorne Theatre was inspected as a possible alternative station to Crampton Tower. Whilst it was a good hall with all amenities, unfortunately it was outside the Viking Ward and therefore unsuitable.

3.9 **MP2 Salmestone - Lesters, Ramsgate Road, Margate**

3.9.1 One submission was received regarding Salmestone Ward. It can be summarised as follows:

- You should be able to vote near to your home as the Hartsdown Football Ground is too far from the ward.
- Lester's Public House was suggested as an alternative venue.

3.9.2 After discussions and investigations by the Electoral Services Team we can make the following responses to the points raised:

- The Elections team understand the frustration regarding having to travel to Margate Football club to vote.
- Unfortunately it is not possible to have a double station in Lester's, as is the case in St Andrew's Church (mentioned above) this is because it is not big enough to accommodate the whole of Salmestone Wards electors, of which there are around 4000. This is the reason the ward was split and two stations are used.
- We have contacted Salmestone School as an alternative to Margate Football Club and they have agreed there could be a possibility they could accommodate us in the future thus bringing the polling station closer to the middle of the ward. Arrangements are being made to view the school early in the New Year. We have also contacted St Gregory's School but are awaiting a reply.

3.10 **RI Newington - Newington Community Centre, Princess Margaret Avenue, Ramsgate**

3.10.1 One submission was received regarding Newington Ward. It can be summarised as follows:

- Only having a single polling station in the ward is to the detriment of those that do not live near to the single station and this is suggested as a reason for poor turnout.
- The Windmill public House was suggested as an alternative location.

3.10.2 After discussions and investigations by the Electoral Services Team we can make the following response to the points raised:

- Unfortunately the suggestion made to use The Windmill Public House as another polling station in the Newington Ward is not possible as this is outside

of the Newington Ward. Newington Community Centre is a large venue suitable for accommodating two polling stations to serve the whole of the Newington ward.

- 3.11 Electoral Services after reviewing all the comments and suggestions will not change the current suggested polling station. Electoral Services will however commit to continue searching for new polling stations and investigating any possible new ones. In addition these suggestions will also be added to the work of selecting new polling stations for the revised Council wards as a result of the ongoing LGBCE review.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Alternative locations for polling stations can be suggested and recommended to Full Council, however these should be appropriate and meet the criteria to make them a valid suggestion. This may result in any new suggestion needing an inspection by the Electoral Services team, this in turn could delay the process. Any delay would increase the risk of not completing the project by the legal deadline of the end of January 2025.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the Council to undertake a consultation in relation to the proposed list of polling districts, places and stations. The Act requires that the Council follows its own consultation protocol if it has one. Thanet District Council does not have a consultation protocol and as such was allowed to undertake a consultation as it deemed appropriate, details of which are outlined in paragraphs 3.3 - 3.6.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Finance and Resources

- 6.1.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, with regards any changes to future provision, consideration would need to be given to the fact that significant increase would increase the risk of the Elections Claims Unit who oversee Election spending declining to pay for what they see as unreasonable costs

6.2 Legal and Constitutional

- 6.2.1 The BEAWP is being asked to consider this report which includes details of the results of the statutory consultation and make recommendations to Council. The legislation relevant to this matter is as referred to in the body of this report, the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. The Council is required to give the necessary regard to the results of consultation and this report demonstrates that proper consideration has been given to all the results of consultation.

6.3 Council Policies and Priorities

- 6.3.1 This report relates to the following corporate priorities: -

- To work efficiently for you

6.4 Risk

- 6.4.1 The timescales for the completion of the project are tight and there is significant risk of not meeting those and the Council acting unlawfully if the timetable is not adhered to.

6.5 Climate Change and Biodiversity

- 6.5.1 There are no Climate Change or Biodiversity implications to the report.

7. Equality, Equity and Diversity Implications

- 7.1 The meeting needs to have due regard to their public sector equality duty, which is the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and consider the potential impact decisions and actions on each of the protected characteristics.
- 7.2 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.

8. Crime and Disorder Implications and Community impact

- 8.1 There are no Crime and Disorder implications to the report.

Annexes

Annex 1 - proposals for polling districts, places and stations for future elections
Annex 2 - Consultation Response Summary with Comments

Background Papers

Consultation Responses

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