

POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

Governance Committee – 13 March 2014

Report of Chief Officer for Legal and Governance

Status: For Decision

Also considered by: Council – 1 April 2014

Key Decision: No

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Fleming

Contact Officer(s) Ian Bigwood – Ext. 7242

Recommendation to Governance Committee: That the polling scheme shown as appendix A be approved.

Recommendation to Council: That the polling scheme shown as appendix A be approved.

Reason for recommendation: a review of polling districts and polling places is required by law to be carried out by 31st January 2015.

Introduction and Background

- 1 District councils are required to complete a review of polling districts and polling places ahead of each five yearly Parliamentary General election; the deadline for completion of this particular review is 31st January 2015. The Electoral Commission recommends that this review should be undertaken outside other busy periods of the electoral timetable and should be effective with the publication of the next revised register of electors on 1st December 2014.
- 2 District councils are required to divide their area into polling districts for the purpose of elections and to designate polling places for these polling districts. The aim should be to provide a polling place for every polling district that is easily accessible to all electors, including those with disabilities. Each parish has to have a separate polling district.
- 3 In Sevenoaks, we have taken the view over the years that we should avoid the use of school premises wherever possible because of the potential disruption to schooling. As a result, at the May 2013 elections only four schools were used as polling places and in each instance the school was able to continue as near normal. Also, when selecting new venues, consideration must be given to the assured availability of the premises even at short notice.

- 4 Wherever possible at polling places that have access issues, polling staff direct voters to an alternative entrance or set up ramps (where appropriate) in liaison with the caretaker of the premises.
- 5 As part of this review, the Returning Officer (RO) for the Sevenoaks District is required to comment upon the existing polling stations (i.e. the room or building where polling takes place) and upon any new proposals. Generally, the RO considers that no more than 1800 electors should be allocated to one polling station as it would be administratively difficult for the usual team of polling staff (comprising one presiding officer and two poll clerks) to handle more than this number. However, on the occasion of polling for multiple elections on the same day (as in 2011 and again in 2015), the RO always reviews staffing levels.

The Process to Date

- 6 The review commenced on 25th November 2013 and notice was given in the following ways:
 - Publishing a notice in each of the 3 parliamentary constituencies comprising the Sevenoaks District
 - Entry on the District Council's website
 - Local news release
 - Letter to all elected representatives covering the Sevenoaks District Council area (except parish councillors)
 - Letter to all parish councils
 - Letter to local political associations
- 7 The notice (appendix B) invited electors within the Sevenoaks District and all the above consultees to submit representations by 28th February 2014. Persons or bodies making representations were requested to give alternative places that may be used for polling.

Options (and Reasons for the Recommendation)

- 8 Appendix A contains details of electorates by polling district, the proposed polling place and reason for the choice and details of the number of polling stations at each polling place. Consideration has been given to any forthcoming developments in the Sevenoaks District that might affect electorates over the next few years. As with all new developments of any significant size, the impact will be kept under constant review. There is no need to wait until the next five yearly review before taking action.

- 9 Bough Beech Polling District

Polling for Bough Beech residents has been held at Chiddingstone Village Hall since the closure of the Wheatsheaf Inn. This temporary arrangement will continue for 2014 pending more information as to the future of this building. If there is no long term solution by the autumn of 2014, then this polling district will be merged with Chiddingstone Village polling district with effect from the publication of the revised register of electors on 1st December 2014.

10 Dunton Green Polling District

The electorate of this polling district is approaching the threshold for a second polling station or an additional polling place. However, for 2014, the present arrangement of one polling station will be sufficient to deal with the likely turnout at this May's European Parliamentary election. Further study will be made ahead of the 2015 elections.

11 (Edenbridge) Spitals Cross Polling District

The newly built Eden Centre provides better polling facilities than the present venue of the Fircroft Tenants Association building and will be used for the first time at the European Parliamentary election.

12 (Sevenoaks) Holly Bush Polling District

St. John's C.E.P. School is no longer available to use as a polling venue. Walthamstow Hall is not available for this use. St. John's Church Hall provides good facilities and has been used as a polling place in the past. This change will be effective from the European Parliamentary election.

13 (Swanley) Birchwood Polling District

We have run out of polling venues in this polling district (3 having fallen by the wayside in recent years) and we are now suggesting that this polling district merges with White Oak polling district with effect from the publication of the revised register of electors on 1st December 2014. Birchwood electors will have to vote at the White Oak Bowls Centre at future elections, starting with the European Parliamentary election in May 2014.

14 West Kingsdown – Hever Polling District

The new West Kingsdown Village Hall is near completion and will be available for polling purposes with effect from the May 2015 elections (for May 2014 we have to continue to use the Pavilion/Library); we will be able to have two polling stations at this venue which is warranted by the number of electors.

Representations

15 Representations have been received as follows:

- The Tonbridge & Malling Constituency Association of the United Kingdom Independence Party supports the District Council's proposals in respect of the Tonbridge & Malling constituency;
- Edenbridge Town Council supports the change of polling venue from the Fircroft Tenants Association building to the Eden Centre; and
- Westerham Town Council supports the existing polling arrangements for Westerham and Crockham Hill.

Key Implications

Financial

The proposed changes to polling arrangements may lead to a small saving in hire charges.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

There are no legal or human rights implications in this report.

There is a statutory obligation on district councils to conduct reviews of polling districts and polling places every five years. The present review has to be carried out between 1st October 2013 and 31st January 2015.

Equality Impacts

District councils are required to divide their area into polling districts for the purposes of elections and to designate polling places for these polling districts. The aim should be to provide a polling place for every polling district that is easily accessible to all electors, including those with disabilities.

Conclusions

There have been many reviews of polling arrangements over the years, often as a result of boundary changes or the implementation of policies, e.g. alternatives to schools and an increase in the provision of polling places to encourage turn-out. In between, a constant watch is kept on providing the best facilities available. Not surprisingly, therefore, this review proposes a minimum of changes; some have been enforced due to the non-availability of venues and some due to better facilities being available at alternative venues.

Appendices

Appendix A – polling scheme

Appendix B – notice of review

Background Papers:

[Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places \(Parliamentary Elections\) Regulations 2006](#)

[Representation of the People Act 1983](#)

[Electoral Commission Guidance](#)

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