

POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

Electoral Arrangements Committee – 27th March 2012

Report of the: Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Corporate Resources

Status: For Decision

Executive Summary:

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs Bracken

Head of Service Head of Legal – Mrs Christine Nuttall

Recommendation to Electoral Arrangements Committee

(a) The Bull Beefeater & Swanley Premier Inn be used as the polling venue for the Birchwood polling district.

Reason for Recommendation: this is the last outstanding item of the review of polling districts and polling places carried out in 2011.

Introduction

1. At the previous Electoral Arrangements Committee Councillor Mrs Hunter offered to contact the owners, Whitbreads, at a more senior level to see whether they might reconsider their opposition to the use of The Bull Beefeater & Swanley Premier Inn, London Road, Swanley as a polling venue.
2. A site visit was arranged at which the Manager of the premises agreed to the use of the first floor training room as a polling station. Access would be through reception and via a lift or stairs and a short distance along a corridor. Whilst this is not an ideal layout for electors (polling venues rarely are), it was felt to be superior to recent venues because it was situated within the Birchwood polling district.
3. Local Member Cllr Mrs Sargeant is fully supportive of the proposal whilst local Member Cllr Ball agrees that it is worth giving the venue a try in the absence of a better alternative.
4. It is proposed to use the venue for the first time at the inaugural election of a Police & Crime Commissioner on 15th November and a review of it's suitability will be carried out after the poll.

Key Implications

Financial

The likely charge for the use of this venue is £120 which compares favourably with the costs of other polling venues.

Community Impact and Outcomes

The aim should be to provide a polling place for every polling district that is easily accessible to all electors, including those with disabilities. Whilst access is not ideal the new venue provides a better option for the majority of Birchwood electors.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

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

Resource (non-financial)

Staff input has been required to investigate alternative polling arrangements and will be required in order to keep polling arrangements under constant review.

Value For Money and Asset Management

Whenever there is a perceived lack of polling facilities within a polling district, suggestions are made by interested parties for the use of a temporary building. This involves the delivery and setting up of a “portacabin” containing furniture, ramp access, toilet facilities and a generator to provide electricity; there is also the security of these temporary structures to consider. Enquiries of neighbouring authorities indicate a cost of well over one thousand pounds for the use of each “portacabin”. It is important on cost grounds, therefore, to try to find alternative solutions.

Conclusions

5. 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.

Risk Assessment Statement

- Legislation requires district councils to carry out four yearly reviews. 2011 was a review year and this report concludes the process. There appears to be no legal sanction if the deadline for completion of the review by the end of 2011 has not been met. In any event, polling venues are kept constantly under review regardless of when the four yearly review is held.
- Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (inserted by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) states

“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;

the authority must 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”

Background Papers:

Electoral Administration Act 2006

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places
(Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006

Representation of the People Act 1983

Electoral Commission Circular EC28/2007

Contact Officer(s):

Ian Bigwood – ext. no.7242

Dr. Pav Ramewal
Corporate Resources Director