

Classification: Public

Key Decision: Yes

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Report to Council
Date: 25 February 2020
Reporting officer: Chief Executive
Subject: Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

Purpose and summary of report:

To report on the outcome of the review of polling district, polling places and polling stations in Gravesham

Recommendations:

That having taking into account all representations received, Council approves the revised schedule of polling districts and polling places be adopted with immediate effect.

1. Summary

- 1.1 Every relevant authority is responsible for dividing its administrative area into polling districts for the purposes for parliamentary elections and to designate a polling place for each district, and to keep these arrangements under review
- 1.2 Under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the council must undertake and complete a review of the polling districts and polling places in the Gravesham district at least once every four years, and a compulsory review must have been completed by 31 January 2020.
- 1.3 The review has now been completed and Council is asked to approve the polling districts and polling places scheme as detailed in Appendix 2 to this report.

2. Introduction and Background

Designating Polling Districts

- 2.1 A Polling District is the geographical sub-division of an electoral area, eg UK Parliamentary constituency, a ward or an electoral division.
- 2.2 The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts for UK Parliamentary elections and for keeping the polling districts under review.

- 2.3 Although there is no requirement to sub-divide local government electoral wards into polling districts, it is recognised good practice to do so. When doing so, every effort must be made to ensure that the polling district scheme for Local Government elections mirrors as closely as possible that agreed for Parliamentary elections.
- 2.4 When designating polling districts, the council must seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 2.5 The council must designate a polling place for every polling district in the District, unless the size or other circumstances of the polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electorate. The council must also keep the polling places under review.
- 2.6 The council must:
- (a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
 - (b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
- 2.7 In addition, the polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district.

Polling Places

- 2.8 A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.
- 2.9 The current Scheme designates the Polling Place as the Polling District. Where no suitable Polling Station is available the (Acting) Returning Officer is authorised to designate an adjoining Polling District for that Polling Place.

Polling Stations

- 2.10 A Polling Station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district. This function is the responsibility of the (Acting) Returning Officer.

3. Consultation Process and Results

- 3.1 The council gave notice of undertaking a review of polling districts and polling places on 21 October 2019 through the council's website and via public notice.

3.2 Details of the consultation were sent directly to key stakeholders including all borough and county councillors, parish councils, Kent county council, local disability groups and political parties that have fielded candidates in elections since 2017. The Acting Returning Officer for the Gravesham Parliamentary constituency was also consulted. The consultation ended on 16 December 2019.

3.3 No representations have been received from any county councillor or any political party (national or local office) although individual comments have been received from members of this authority. The comments and brief response to them are summarised below:

- No changes required to polling stations in Higham

Response: The draft proposals support this view.

- No alternative for polling stations in Higham and no reduction of numbers of stations should be considered.

Response: The draft proposals support this view.

3.4 A response was received from Meopham Parish council with two points:

- Judson's Pavilion could be an option for the future after March 2020.

Response: This has been noted for future consideration

- Chinnery Court and the Scout hut are very close together and we should have a Polling Station nearer to Meopham Green

Response: Although Meopham Scout Hut and Chinnery Court are both geographically close they do both serve different polling districts with 1,701 and 1,864 electors in each respective district.

In the 'The Green' – polling district (CF) further analysis was undertaken showing that 60% of the residential properties in the district were within 1.5km of the current polling station, which is an accessible, council owned building with ample car parking and close to public transport links. There were no additional comments received on the location or suitability of this station either during the consultations period or at any of the elections in 2019.

Statutory Consultee Responses

3.1 The (Acting) Returning Officer for the Gravesham Constituency has responded as being satisfied with the existing arrangements.

4. Proposals

4.1 Following the closure of the consultation a review started on the basis of the existing polling districts and places approved by Council in 2014. This review looked at all the currently designated polling places/stations in use and looked in detail on the feedback we have received since the last review.

- 4.2 Designated polling stations are regularly assessed and, where necessary, steps are taken to improve accessibility to all members of the community. At each election polling staff are asked to report on any difficulties encountered by electors and all such reports have been considered before the proposals were drawn up.
- 4.3 The following points relating to proposed polling station changes/adjustments that have been made since the last review are drawn to members' attention.
- **Pelham Ward – Polling District B (Pelham Road)**
Confirmation of the 2016 change from the British Red Cross to Army Cadet Hall, Grange Road.
 - **Riverside – Polling District E (Gordon)**
Following the start of redevelopment work at Chantry Community Academy in 2017 the station was moved to Little Pebbles Children's Centre.
 - **Whitehill – Polling District W (Central Avenue)**
Confirmation of the 2017 change from Whitehill Primary School to Kingsfarm Library, Sun Lane.
 - **Singlewell – Polling District Z (Marling Cross)**
Confirmation of the 2016 change from Singlewell Primary School to Marling Cross Library, MacKenzie Way.
 - **Singlewell – Polling Districts AA & AB (Kings Farm / Christianfields)**
Confirmation of the 2016 change from Kingsfarm Primary School to Smile Centre, Cedar Ave.
- 4.4 Council should note that it has not been necessary to make any changes to polling district boundaries to accommodate the Electoral Commission maximum number of 2,500 electors to one polling station – a polling place can host more than one polling station.

5. Returning Officer's Further Comments

- 5.1 The Returning Officer has a duty to encourage every eligible elector to use their vote and make it as simple as possible to do so.
- 5.2 Although postal voting is available on demand and this is often a convenient voting arrangement for some people, there are many who prefer to exercise their democratic right to vote in person at a polling station and this right is respected.
- 5.3 The Returning Officer is mindful of the fact that changing polling stations can cause confusion for electors who have been used to going to the same station for some years. He wishes to reassure the Council that if changes were made because of unavailability or other unforeseen events full publicity is given to these changes and each elector affected is advised well in advance of any election.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The proposed new scheme set out in Appendix 2 to this report is considered to represent the best arrangements presently available and is recommended to Council for adoption.
- 6.2 It should also be noted that the council has been contacted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) regarding an Electoral Review which could alter the number, size and boundaries of all the boroughs ward boundaries. If recommendations of this nature were made a subsequent review would need to take place. The LGBCE have indicated that a review would be completed by 2022.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 Review documents and responses to them are available on-line.

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS	APPENDIX 1
Legal	There is an obligation to have completed a review and to have the proposals adopted before the 31 January 2020.
Finance and Value for Money	There are no financial implications in designating the Polling Districts however the cost of elections will be affected by the number of Polling Stations used.
Risk Assessment	Any changes to the proposed Polling Places/Polling Districts would require the Register of Electors to be republished.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<p><i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i></p> <p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p> <p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/A</p> <p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk. N/A</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No</p> <p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. N/A</p> <p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>
Corporate Plan	#1 People: A proud community; where residents can call a safe, clean and attractive borough their home.
Crime and Disorder	Public Participation in local democratic processes contributes to community wellbeing and cohesion.
Digital and website implications	The consultation a published on the council website. No other links to digital/website.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	No direct links