

Guildford Borough Council

Report to: Council

Date: 5 December 2023

Ward(s) affected: All

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Report Status: Open

Polling District & Polling Places Review 2023

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider recommendations arising from the recent review of polling districts and polling places undertaken by the Electoral Services Manager. A list of existing polling districts and current designated polling places is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.
- 1.2 This statutory review, which is based on polling districts and polling places for parliamentary elections and is based on the proposed new parliamentary constituencies, must be carried out during the 16-month period commencing 1 October 2013 and every fifth year after that.
- 1.3 The consultation period commenced on 13 October 2023 and ended on 17 November 2023 and 58 responses were received. Details of the representations received during the consultation are set out in **Appendix 2**.

- 1.4 A screening Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out, but a full EIA was not considered to be appropriate.
- 1.5 There are no changes recommended for polling districts and recommendations for changes to two designated polling places are set out below.

2. Recommendation to Council:

- 2.1 That no changes be made to existing polling districts.
- 2.2 That the following proposed changes to designated polling places be approved:

- (a) That the designated polling place in polling district SN2 Stoughton North (North-West) within Stoughton North Ward be changed from Stoughton Infant School to Stoughton Methodist Church, Stoughton Road, Guildford, GU2 9PT.

- (b) That the designated polling place in polling district C&H6 West Horsley (North) within the Clandon and Horsley Ward be changed from the Raleigh School to The Wheelhouse, 82 East Lane, West Horsley, Leatherhead, KT24 6LQ.

3. Reason for Recommendation:

- 3.1 As a result of this statutory review, the new designated polling places will improve elector polling experience, improve access, and further reduce the necessity for schools to close on polling days.

4. Exemption from publication

- 4.1 No part of this report is exempt from publication.

5. Purpose of Report

- 5.1 The Council is asked to approve changes to two designated polling places referred to in paragraph 7.11. Once approved as designated polling places, these will be used whenever an election is held within the Guildford Parliamentary Constituency or the Guildford Borough voting area (as relevant).

6. Strategic Priorities

- 6.1 The outcome of the polling district and polling place review and the changes made offer the public better access to polling places. It reflects as far as possible what the community needs given the sometimes still limited choice of public buildings available for voting. The relocation of some of the designated polling places will particularly assist with disabled access and the secrecy of the vote, which is a key consideration in the location of any polling station. This falls within the Council's mission of being a "trusted, efficient, innovative, and transparent Council that listens and responds quickly to the needs of our community". It also falls within the Community strategic priority by tackling inequality in our communities.
- 6.2 In addition, where it has been possible to relocate polling places away from schools, there will clearly be less disruption experienced by parents and children attending those schools which normally close on polling day. This ensures a better-quality service to the public and falls within the remit of our values of putting the interests of our community first, listening to the views of residents, and being open and accountable in our decision-making.

7. Background

- 7.1 A polling district is a sub-area of an electoral area (such as a ward or constituency) that is divided for the purposes of delivering an election. In parished areas, each parish or parish ward is to be treated as a separate polling district. A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be located. 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. The polling station is the actual room or area where the voting takes place. There should be no more than 2,500 electors allocated to a particular polling station.
- 7.2 The responsibility for designating polling districts is for the Council to determine. In drawing up polling district boundaries the Council must ensure that all electors in the area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

- 7.3 Polling places are normally designated within the boundary of the polling district unless there are special circumstances that prevent this, for example a lack of suitable buildings.
- 7.4 In designating polling places, the Council must seek to ensure that:
- a) all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
 - b) so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.
- 7.5 A list of the existing polling districts and current designated polling places is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.
- 7.6 The review relates to polling districts and polling places within the Guildford Parliamentary Constituency; however, each local authority is expected to carry out the review within its own borders with representations from the relevant neighbouring constituency Acting Returning Officers taken into account. The Acting Returning Officers for the Surrey Heath and Godalming & Ash constituencies were contacted as part of the consultation and no concerns with polling districts or polling places have arisen.
- 7.7 The consultation period in respect of the current review commenced on 13 October 2023 with the public (via the website), councillors, MPs, election agents, parish councils, Guildford Access Group, and lettings managers of polling places. The lettings managers were asked to indicate whether:
- (a) they saw any reason why their premises should not be used as polling places from 2024 onwards,
 - (b) there were any expected refurbishments likely to affect the use of their premises as polling places, and
 - (c) there were any access issues that needed to be addressed
- 7.8 Representations were also sought from the Acting Returning Officers of Surrey Heath and Godalming & Ash constituencies that fall within

the Guildford Borough boundary. Views were sought on the location of polling districts and in particular polling places within those districts in relation to accessibility by the majority of the electorate and also disabled people. The deadline for comments was Friday 17 November 2023.

- 7.9 Fifty-eight representations were received from councillors, parish councils, lettings managers, and from the Labour Party and Green Party. A summary of the responses received is set out in **Appendix 2**. No objections have been received from the Acting Returning Officers of Surrey Heath and Godalming & Ash constituencies regarding the continued use of these polling places at parliamentary elections.
- 7.10 All polling places that are to remain unchanged are deemed satisfactory for use at present, but the situation will, as always, be kept under review.
- 7.11 Several suggestions were received for new changes to polling places and the feasibility of these options have been evaluated by the Electoral Services Manager and recommendations discussed with local ward councillors and parish councils. The Returning Officer’s response, where necessary, to the representations is also set out in **Appendix 2**. No changes are proposed to any of the polling districts.

Proposed changes to Designated Polling Places

- 7.12 As a result of the consultation during the 2023 review, the following permanent changes to two designated polling places are recommended:

| Polling District | Previous Designated polling place after 2019 review | Recommended Designated polling place from 2023 review onwards | Reason(s) for change |
|------------------|---|--|---|
| SN2 | Stoughton Infant School, Stoughton Road, Guildford, GU2 9ZT | Stoughton Methodist Church, Stoughton Road, Guildford, GU2 9PT | To avoid the school having to close on polling day and to improve disabled access |

| Polling District | Previous Designated polling place after 2019 review | Recommended Designated polling place from 2023 review onwards | Reason(s) for change |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| C&H6 | The Raleigh School, Northcote Crescent, West Horsley, KT24 6LX | The Wheelhouse, 82 East Lane, West Horsley, KT24 6LQ | To avoid the school having to close on polling day and to improve disabled access |

7.13 The Returning Officer has the delegated power to use an alternative polling place at any election/referendum should they consider it to be necessary to make a temporary change.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications

8.1 A screening Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was completed in September 2023. The main concerns were around disability and age. As these aspects have been fully taken into account in the review and the overall adverse impact score was low, it was not considered necessary to conduct a full EIA.

9. Financial Implications

9.1 There are no significant financial implications arising directly from the proposals in this report. Costs associated with the hire of venues for use as polling stations are recovered in full for all elections, except Borough Council elections.

10. Legal Implications

10.1 Each local authority is obliged according to section 18C (1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013) to conduct a review of polling districts and polling places within its area. The review must be carried out during the 16-month period commencing 1 October 2013 and every fifth year after that.

10.2 Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 prescribes the statutory steps for an authority conducting a polling district review.

11. Human Resource Implications

11.1 There are no human resource implications arising from the proposals in this report. Polling station staff (presiding officers and poll clerks) are appointed for each election. In considering suitable premises for designation as a polling place, the Returning Officer takes into account a number of factors, which include ensuring that the working conditions for the polling station staff are adequate with appropriate rest facilities, as well as ensuring that a building is accessible for voters.

12. Conclusion

12.1 The Council is asked to agree that no changes be made to existing polling districts, and to approve the two proposed new designated polling places as listed in paragraph 7.12 above as they improve the polling experience for electors, improve access, and save the disruption of closing local schools on polling day.

12.2 The Returning Officer together with the Electoral Services Manager will continue to review the use of individual polling places and make temporary changes under delegated powers as the need arises at each election.

13. Background Papers

Responses received to the consultation on the polling district review. Screening Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (September 2023).

14. Appendices

Appendix 1: List of existing polling districts and current designated polling places

Appendix 2: Summary of the representations received during the consultation and Returning Officer's response