

POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES FOR 2023

REPORT OF: THE RETURNING OFFICER
Contact Officer: Terry Stanley, Head of Democratic Services & Elections
Email: terry.stanley@midsussex.gov.uk Tel: 01444 477415
Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Council
25 January 2023

Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out, and seeks Council's approval for, the polling places which are situated outside the district council wards for all electoral events in 2023.

Summary

2. Designation of polling districts and polling places is the responsibility of Council, last agreed by Council on 27th January 2021. The Mid Sussex polling scheme is regularly reviewed by Electoral Services, usually annually.
3. Following the Local Government Boundary Commission's (LGBCE) Electoral Review of Mid Sussex, and several Community Governance Reviews it was necessary for Electoral Services to re-design polling districts and to consider polling places to take account of the outcomes of these Reviews, which are effective 1st April 2023.
4. To satisfy a requirement to supply to Councillors the 2023 Electoral Register in December 2022, reflecting current and future wards, it has been necessary to divide some polling districts into further smaller parts for this year only. These smaller parts of primary polling districts are shown in brackets in the recommendations below. They will revert to their primary polling district letters (not bracketed) when the 2024 Electoral Register is produced.
5. The situation of polling stations within polling districts is the sole responsibility of the Returning Officer but Council must agree polling places that are situated outside of the district council ward. As is commonly the case in this District, there are insufficient suitable polling places in every district council ward: 8 of the 9 recommended polling places below have been used by us previously, the new station being required as a replacement for a previous station which was found to be unsatisfactory. The Returning Officer may make subsequent changes if any booked venues become unavailable or unsuitable prior to the 2023 local government elections.

Recommendations

6. **The polling places for all polling districts be defined as the entire District Council ward in which the polling district is situated, with the following exceptions:**
 - a) **Polling Place for Polling Districts BA and (BB) in Ashurst Wood & East Grinstead South Ward be designated Chequer Mead Arts Centre, De La Warr Road, East Grinstead;**
 - b) **Polling Place for Polling Districts BCA and (BCD) in East Grinstead Herontye Ward be designated Chequer Mead Arts Centre, De La Warr Road, East Grinstead;**

- c) **Polling Place for Polling District BCB and (BCC) in East Grinstead Herontye Ward be designated Chequer Mead Arts Centre, De La Warr Road, East Grinstead;**
- d) **Polling Place for Polling District BEC in East Grinstead Town Ward be designated East Court, College Lane, East Grinstead;**
- e) **Polling Place for Polling District BFA in East Grinstead Imberhorne Ward be designated Trinity Methodist Church, Lingfield Road, East Grinstead;**
- f) **Polling Place for Polling Districts BFB and (BFC, BFD, BFE) in East Grinstead Imberhorne Ward be designated Trinity Methodist Church, Lingfield Road, East Grinstead;**
- g) **Polling Place for Polling District EDB in Ardingly, Balcombe & Turners Hill Ward be designated Queens Hall, High Street, Cuckfield;**
- h) **Polling Place for Polling District GCB in Lindfield Rural & High Weald Ward be designated Lindfield Evangelical Free Church, Chaloner Road, Lindfield;**
- i) **Polling Place for Polling District HAB in Haywards Heath Franklands Ward be designated Haywards Heath Baptist Church, Sussex Road, Haywards Heath;**
- j) **Polling Place for Polling District HEA in Haywards Heath North Ward be designated Haywards Heath Methodist Church, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath;**
- k) **Polling Place for Polling District HEB in Haywards Heath North Ward be designated Dolphin Leisure Centre, Pasture Hill Road, Haywards Heath;**
- l) **Polling Place for Polling District IC in Lindfield Ward be designated Haywards Heath Methodist Church, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath;**
- m) **Polling Place for Polling District KEB in Burgess Hill Dunstall Ward be designated St. Edward The Confessor Church, Royal George Road, Burgess Hill;**

Background

7. A statutory review of polling districts and polling places was carried out in late 2019 and its recommendations were agreed by Council on 29 January 2020.
8. Interim reviews are carried out annually by Electoral Services in each year that has scheduled large-scale elections to ensure that the assigned electorate numbers and geographical locations remain appropriate.
9. On this occasion, it was essential to design a new polling district scheme and reflect it in the 2023 Electoral Register, whilst also supplying it to Councillors for their existing wards.
10. The majority of these polling stations have been used before, however there is one new station at Kings Weald Community Centre. This is a newly built facility in Burgess Hill St. Andrews which provides a larger venue for a rapidly rising electorate at a lesser cost than the previous venue.

11. Haywards Heath United Reformed Church has become unsuitable and therefore Haywards Heath Methodist Church (Wesley Hall) has been sourced as an alternative. This venue was previously used in 2021.
12. In Ashurst Wood and East Grinstead South, following feedback from the 2021 election, an alternate venue has been proposed. This addresses issues raised by voters and stakeholders regarding the remote location and limited accessibility of the previous venue. Therefore Chequer Mead Arts Centre is now recommended as an alternative.
13. All selected polling stations are well-connected to the road network and public transport infrastructure.
14. All venues are visited and assessed against a series of suitability criteria (location, size, accessibility, secrecy, and facilities for voters and staff). Arrangements for the planned polling scheme have been discussed with Town and Parish Council and the proposed scheme was then provided to Electoral Agents in order to enable them to comment on the proposals. This consultation resulted in a further polling station being provided in West Hoathly (within the relevant ward).
15. Council is therefore asked to agree the polling districts and polling places situated outside of district wards. These polling stations are close to the respective wards. Electors who do not want to vote in-person or who envisage difficulty getting to a polling place are advised to consider applying for a postal vote; they do need to give a reason for doing so.

Definitions

16. A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a local authority into smaller parts. A UK Parliamentary constituency is made up of several polling districts, whilst an un-warded parish is normally comprised of a single polling district. Wards of Mid Sussex District Council are comprised of between one and six polling districts, depending on the parish arrangements below them. A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations are selected by the 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. Section 18B(4)(e) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 states that 'the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station'. The Electoral Commission considers that polling places should be defined by designating the name of the polling place (normally a particular building or area and its environs).
17. A polling station is the room or area of the polling place in which voting is conducted. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the Returning Officer. The elections rules state that the Returning Officer decides how many polling stations are required for each polling place and they must allocate electors to the polling stations in such manner as they think most convenient. However, the number of electors allocated to a particular polling station should not exceed 2,500.
18. Local authorities must comply with the following legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places:
 - each parish is to be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply

- the council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors
- the polling place must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified in the district)
- the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station
- ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
- ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled

Roles and Responsibilities

19. The Local Authority.

Every principal local authority in Great Britain is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts and designating polling places for each polling district. The authority must review these arrangements at least once every five years and determine whether amendments are required as a result.

20. The Electoral Registration Officer.

If any amendments to polling districts are made by the local authority the Electoral Registration Officer must ensure that the Register of Electors is amended accordingly and publish a notice to that effect.

Policy Context.

21. The LGBCE is due to seek parliamentary approval for its final recommendations in the summer of 2023. A further review of polling districts and polling places will therefore be necessary in the autumn.
22. Electoral Services completed a statutory review of polling districts and polling places in 2019 in accordance with the statutory requirements. The next statutory review must be conducted in late 2024 and reported to Council in January 2025. This will invite input from all political stakeholders, registered electors, and others.

Other Options Considered

23. The LGBCE's Electoral Review of Mid Sussex, and several Community Governance Reviews necessitated that Electoral Services re-design polling districts and consider polling places to take account of the outcomes of these Reviews, which are effective 1st April 2023.
24. As set out in this report, the recommended polling places are the result of detailed consideration against the assessment criteria, and consultation with all political stakeholders.

Financial Implications

25. Any reduction in the number of polling stations would result in a decrease in the costs of venue hire and the cost of the Returning Officer's staff. However, this would likely be partially offset by an increase in the number of postal voters in some polling districts, increasing postage and processing costs. The recommendations of this report do not reduce the number of polling stations.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

26. Part of the review process is always to assess suitability of polling places for residents with accessibility needs. There are also new requirements for Voter ID and the facilities to check these in a culturally sensitive manner which have had to be taken into account in designing the scheme.

Background Papers

[The Mid Sussex \(Electoral Changes\) Order 2022](#) [LGBCE]

[The Mid Sussex District Council \(Reorganisation of Community Governance\) Order 2022](#)