

STATUTORY REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS 2019

REPORT OF: HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Council
29th January 2020

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Council of the outcome of the statutory Polling Places Review

Summary

2. Designation of polling districts and polling places is the responsibility of Council. A polling scheme is already in place, though it is appropriate that some adjustments are made to this from time to time. In accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 the Council is required to complete a review of the District's polling places before the end of January 2020.
3. The situation of polling stations is the sole responsibility of the Returning Officer, though the review also allows for comments regarding the suitability of current venues. In a few cases it is clear that replacement or alternative venues may be identified, and the Electoral Services team will carry out further work later this year.

Recommendations

4. **That 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 District BCF in Herontye Ward be designated as East Court, College Lane, East Grinstead.**
 - (b) **Polling Place for Polling District BAC in Ashurst Wood Ward be designated as East Court, College Lane, East Grinstead**
 - (c) **Polling Place for Polling District KFB in Victoria Ward be designated as St. Wilfrids Parish Hall, Station Road, Burgess Hill.**
 - (d) **Polling Place for Polling District FCB in High Weald Ward be designated as Lindfield Evangelical Free Church, Chaloner Close, Lindfield.**
 - (e) **Polling Place for Polling District KEE in Dunstall Ward be designated as St Edward the Confessor Church Hall, Burgess Hill.**
 - (f) **Polling Place for Polling District IE in Cuckfield Ward be designated as Ashenground Community Centre, Vale Road, Haywards Heath.**
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Background

5. The previous compulsory review was conducted in late 2013 and reported to Council in early 2014. Reviews are to be conducted at least every 5 years.
6. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the scheduled timings in that a compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive).
7. As reported to Council 24 July 2019, our statutory review was carried out 2 September 2019 – 29 November 2019.
8. Council determines the size and location of polling places and polling districts. The situation of polling stations is the prerogative of the Returning Officer.
9. The purpose of the review is to:
 - Ensure that all the electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
 - Ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.

Definitions

10. 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 a number of 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. In total there are 63 polling districts within the district.
11. A polling place is a defined area in which polling station(s) for the polling district can be allocated by the Returning Officer. It can be as small as a single building, or cover a wider area allowing for the relocation of a polling station should the usual facilities become unavailable. Some authorities define the entire polling district as a polling place to allow for maximum flexibility in this matter.
12. A polling station is the room or area of the polling place in which voting is conducted.

Roles and Responsibilities

13. The Local Authority.
 - Every relevant 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 four years and determine whether amendments are required as a result.
14. 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.

15. The Returning Officer

During the review the Returning Officer comments in terms of the polling stations currently in use and those that could be used as a result of changes to polling districts and/or polling places. Allocation of polling stations at an election is a matter for the Returning Officer alone, but he cannot allocate a polling station beyond the boundary of the designated polling place. In future years some additional / alternative stations will be needed to accommodate rising electorates in some areas.

Preparing for the Formal Stages of the Review

16. In early September 2019 all Polling Stations were sent a pre-review questionnaire inviting them to confirm the facilities available to electors and electoral staff. This also asked them to consider the extent to which the venue is accessible to disabled people; a key focus of this review, as well as guiding them to self-assess the venue's ongoing suitability as a polling station.

The Consultation

17. The consultation ran from 23 September 2019 until 29 November 2019.
18. Questionnaires, and in some cases follow up reminders, were sent to 59 polling places and full responses were received from 56 of these, representing a 95% return.
19. Review information was also sent to all political stakeholders and elected representatives. One response was received from this stakeholder group (see 25).
20. Residents were invited to contribute to the review by post, email or online. No responses were received from this stakeholder group.

Inspection of Polling Stations

21. As there were three major electoral events in 2019 and each station has been inspected multiple times at each event, it was not necessary for the Returning Officer's staff to conduct inspections at this review.
22. Information gathered at elections from Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors was also used to inform the review.

Findings of the Review

23. A summary of the recommendations for the 59 polling stations is as follows:
 - 54 - Polling places remain suitable. No change to current arrangements
 - 0 - The currently designated polling stations should be merged or moved
 - 0 - Polling Districts should be merged.
 - 5 - Additional work / equipment is required to improve accessibility
 - 0 - A new polling station has been suggested
 - 0 - A new polling district with polling station should be created
24. Although there were no submissions from some stakeholder groups information gathered on three polling days in 2019 clearly identified 5 polling stations where action is required to improve access for disabled voters. 4 of these require the installation of an accessible toilet and 1 requires that an entirely gravel car park be adapted to be made suitable for wheelchairs, push chairs and mobility scooters.

25. Response from East Grinstead Labour Party – The response suggested that:
- a) The polling station at the Kings Leisure Centre is unpopular with some Town Ward voters owing to weather exposure and being difficult to get to. It proposed returning to Chequer Mead.

RO's assessment: No public comment on the suitability of the Kings Leisure Centre has been received, so it has not been possible to verify that it is 'unpopular with some voters'. Unfortunately, Chequer Mead is not a viable polling station option for logistic and cost reasons.

- b) The loss of the Halsford Park School on the Stone Quarry Estate is regretted.

RO's assessment: We too regret the loss of Halsford Park School in Imberhorne Ward as this was convenient for voters. However, the school Governors have decided that they will no longer make the school available for use as a polling station owing to considerable parental objection. The new default polling station for these voters is St. Peter's Catholic Primary School. This station however is not available for the PCC election on 7th May 2020 necessitating that a temporary alternative is identified. Electoral Services are considering and visiting suitable options.

Parliamentary Constituency Boundary Review

26. There is no current review of Parliamentary Boundaries.

Policy Context.

27. None.

Other Options Considered

28. The Council is required to conduct a review under the Electoral Administration Act 2006. No other options were considered.

Financial Implications

29. Any reduction in the number of polling stations might result in a decrease to the costs of venue hire and the Returning Officer's staff. However this is likely to be partially offset by an increase in the number of postal voters in some polling districts, increasing postage and processing costs. The proposals in this report do not make any polling station reduction save for the school issue in Imberhorne Ward.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

30. Part of the review process is an impact assessment for residents with physical disabilities.

Background Papers

31. Appendix 1 – 2020 Polling Scheme.