

## REVIEW & REVISION OF POLLING SCHEME 2021

REPORT OF: HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES  
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Wards Affected: All  
Key Decision: No  
Report to: Council  
27<sup>th</sup> January 2021

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### Purpose of Report

1. Considering the need to stage 'covid secure' WSCC and PCC elections, to inform Council of the outcome of an additional polling scheme review and a revised polling scheme for Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021, and any other election dates in 2021.

### Summary

2. Covid secure risk assessments have been conducted at polling venues in preparation for the provision of safe electoral events in 2021. In some places replacement or additional venues were required. The review also identified risks at some venues, that the Electoral Services team has been able considerably to reduce by agreeing mitigations with those venues
3. Designation of polling districts and polling places is the responsibility of Council. A polling scheme is long-established, though it is appropriate that some adjustments are made to this from time to time.
4. The situation of polling stations is the sole responsibility of the Returning Officer within the polling districts, but Council must agree those that are in other polling districts outside of the council ward. The Returning Officer may need to make subsequent changes if any booked venues become unavailable prior to the elections.

### Recommendations

**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 for Polling Districts BFA and BFD in Imberhorne Ward be designated as Trinity Methodist Church, Lindfield Road, East Grinstead.**
- d) **Polling Place for Polling District KFB in Victoria Ward be designated as St. Wilfrids Parish Hall, Station Road, Burgess Hill.**
- e) **Polling Place for Polling District FCB in High Weald Ward be designated as Lindfield Evangelical Free Church, Chaloner Close, Lindfield.**

- f) **Polling Place for Polling District HAB in Haywards Heath Franklands Ward be designated as Haywards Heath Baptist Church, Sussex Road, Haywards Heath.**
- g) **Polling Place for Polling District KEE in Dunstall Ward be designated as St Edward the Confessor Church Hall, Burgess Hill.**
- h) **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. A previous compulsory review was conducted in late 2019 and reported to Council 29<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Compulsory reviews must be conducted at least every 5 years in accordance with The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.
- 6. The purpose of our most recent, additional review was as follows:
  - To conduct specialist risk assessment of venues to determine which, if any, polling stations could be operated in a covid safe way.
  - To agree with existing venues any risk mitigations that would enable a venue to continue to be used for covid safe elections, and where this was not possible to identify replacement venues.

## **Inspection of Polling Stations**

- 7. 68 of 79 polling stations were inspected by a retained risk assessment specialist after the 2<sup>nd</sup> national restriction period in November and before Tier 4 restrictions came into force in December. Given the current national restrictions, the remainder will now be remotely assessed by the Electoral Services team, but no significant issues are expected with these.

## **Findings of the Review**

- 8. A summary of the findings for the 68 polling stations is as follows:
  - 58 - polling stations remain suitable. No change to current arrangements
  - 3 - where mitigations were agreed with the venue to improve safety
  - 6 - new polling places have been assessed and agreed
  - 1 - new polling district with a new polling station has been created

## **Summary of Safety Measures**

- 9. Most venues meet the requirements for separate entrances and exits, our prescribed layout and voter flow that will be necessary. Most stations will have stewards to assist with entry conditions, flow, and any queue management that may arise. Voters and observers will be asked to wear face masks and sanitise their hands on the way in and on the way out. Across our region a cleaning regime for polling booths, issuing desks and touch points will be in operation at all stations after every 15 voters or every 30 minutes whichever occurs soonest. The Returning Officer's staff will be wearing face masks together with face shields and steps will be taken to comply with the physical distancing rules that exist at that time.
- 10. Further information about safety measures at our polling stations is available at the election pages of the Council's website.

### **Key message to Voters:**

11. 'Polling stations will be as safe as they can be, but if you wish to have a postal vote, apply now.'
12. We are expecting and planning for a significant rise in the number of postal voters at these elections.

### **Definitions**

13. 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 numerous polling districts, whilst an un-warded parish is normally comprised of a single polling district.
14. 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.
15. A polling station is the room or area of the polling place in which voting is conducted.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

16. *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.
17. *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.**

18. None.

### **Other Options Considered**

19. The Council was required to risk assess polling stations to meet government requirements to plan for covid safe elections. No other options were considered.

### **Financial Implications**

20. HM Government has acknowledged the additional costs involved with staging covid safe PCC elections and West Sussex County Council is willing to fund its fair share.

### **Equality and Customer Service Implications**

21. Part of the review process is always to assess suitability for residents with physical disabilities.

### **Background Papers**

22. The revised polling scheme attached highlights the main changes in red font. Appendix 1 – 2021 Polling Scheme.