

General Purposes Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	28 October 2020
Report Title	Polling district review for Teynham & Lynsted ward (Tonge Parish area)
Cabinet Member	Leader – Councillor Roger Truelove
SMT Lead / Head of Service	David Clifford – Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services
Lead Officer	Keith Alabaster – Electoral Services Officer
Key Decision	No
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<p>The General Purposes Committee is asked to consider the proposals and recommend to Council that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A new polling district is set up in the Teynham & Lynsted ward (Tonge Parish area) to allow electors to vote at Lakeview Village Hall on the Great Easthall Estate, Murston.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to consider proposals to change arrangements for voting for residents who live on the Great Easthall Estate in the Tonge Parish area (TLT).

2 Background

- 2.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a requirement for councils to undertake a review of polling districts and places in 2007 and every four years thereafter. In practice, however, we monitor this more regularly and have, when necessary, made arrangements for alternative polling places/stations with the agreement of the Council and Returning Officer.
- 2.2 The last full review was carried out in 2018, prior to the all-out Borough and Parish elections held in May 2019.
- 2.3 To clarify, the Council is responsible for setting the polling district (a geographical area of a ward) and polling places (a geographical area within a polling district that the polling station must be located within). The Returning Officer is responsible for locating the polling station, which must be within the polling place.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed that a new polling district is created in the Teynham and Lynsted ward, which covers all the streets and houses on the Great Easthall Estate in the Tonge Parish area (TLT) – see Appendix I
- 3.2 12 streets, 357 houses and approximately 560 electors will benefit from the new polling district – see Appendix II
- 3.3 The new polling district will enable residents to vote locally at Lakeview Village Hall situated on the Great Easthall estate which is a 5 to 10 minute walk away. Lakeview Village Hall is currently the polling station for the Murston Central (MUC) polling district in Murston ward.
- 3.4 The residents in this area currently have to travel 3 miles to vote at Bapchild Village Hall and drive past Lakeview Village Hall, as access to the Great Easthall Estate is only via Murston.
- 3.5 The new polling district will need to be agreed prior to the publication of the revised 2021 register of electors on 1 December 2020, to enable residents to vote at Lakeview Village Hall for the Kent County Council elections and Kent Police and Crime Commissioner election on 6 May 2021.
- 3.6 It is proposed that the new polling district be called “Tonge (Great Easthall)” with TTG as the polling district code.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The ward and parish boundaries could be altered so the affected area could become part of Murston, however a Community Governance review would be required to change the parish boundary, which takes 12 months and the Local Government Boundary Commission would need to change the ward boundary and both would need to be done simultaneously.
- 4.2 Residents in the affected area could be encouraged to apply for absent votes (postal and proxy votes) if travelling to Bapchild Village Hall was too onerous.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Ward members for Murston and Teynham & Lynsted ward plus Tonge Parish Council have been consulted previously and agree that the Great Easthall estate sits within Murston and it is a boundary anomaly, created by the new development, that has led to this difficulty which disadvantages residents.

- 5.2 A number of complaints were received from residents during the 2019 elections about not being able to vote at the local polling station at Lakeview Village Hall and having to travel all the way to Bapchild. Residents were advised that the Council was aware of the anomaly and would be taking action in the future to rectify the issue.
- 5.3 A Community Governance Review for the parish boundary and a request to review the ward boundary by the Local Government Boundary Commission should be initiated but thus far has not been possible due to resource issues, caused by three all out elections in 2019 and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. It is proposed to conduct these reviews in 2021/2022. The new polling district will temporarily resolve this issue for the 2021 elections until the reviews can be completed.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Ensuring voters are able to vote at the most convenient and commodious venue within the polling place contributes to the objective to strengthen democracy within the emerging corporate plan
Financial, Resource and Property	None identified at this time.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The Council is required to take a full review in accordance with the Electoral Administration Act 2006, but in practice keeps polling stations under regular review.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this time.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Drastically reducing travel distance to a polling station and removing the need to use a car to vote will reduce carbon pollution.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The purpose of the review is to ensure that all voters have reasonable facilities for voting. It is important that venues meet health and safety requirements so as not to put voters at risk. Polling Station staff are encouraged to give feedback on venues and each station is visited by a Polling Station Inspector on election day. Lakeview Village Hall is a new station with excellent facilities and being local is a safer alternative to Bapchild Village Hall and is large enough to easily accommodate extra voters.

	Lakeview would become a double station with a separate polling station team for the KCC elections as Murston ward and Teynham & Lynsted ward are in different KCC divisions, so it is very important to keep the different ballot papers with separate teams to avoid any risk of the wrong ballot papers being issued to the wrong voters.
Equality and Diversity	One purpose of the review is to ensure that all electors in the Borough have reasonable facilities for voting, and that as far as is reasonable and practicable, facilities for voting are accessible for disabled people. Lakeview Village Hall has excellent accessibility.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this time.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I – Map of proposed area for new polling district - Great Easthall area of Tonge Parish (TLT), listing streets and house affected.
- Appendix II – List of streets, number of properties and number of electors that would form the new polling district

8 Background Papers

None