

<b>Council Meeting</b>		<b>Agenda Item:</b>
<b>Meeting Date</b>	17 February 2016	
<b>Report Title</b>	Changes to Polling Arrangements 2016	
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Bowles, Leader	
<b>SMT Lead</b>	Mark Radford	
<b>Head of Service</b>	n/a	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Katherine Bescoby	
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	
<b>Classification</b>	Open	
<b>Forward Plan</b>	<b>Reference number:</b>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That Council agrees to change the polling place for voters in the Tunstall Urban Parish polling district (in Woodstock Ward) to include the Tunstall Rural Parish polling district (in West Downs Ward), to enable voters in both wards of Tunstall Parish to vote at Tunstall Memorial Village Hall.</li> <li>2. That Council notes that the Returning Officer intends to locate the polling station for voters in the Roman West polling district of Roman Ward at the Netchurch, East Street, Sittingbourne, which is within the current polling place.</li> <li>3. That Council notes that the Returning Officer intends to locate the polling station for electors in the Ospringe polling district of the East Downs' Ward at the Alma Public House, which is within the current polling place.</li> <li>4. That Council notes that the Returning Officer intends to locate the polling station for electors in the Meads ward at the Meads Community Centre, which is within the current polling place.</li> </ol>	

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Council agreed a scheme of polling districts and places at its meeting in October 2014. Whilst there will be a further full review of polling districts before the electoral register is published on 1 December 2016, it is necessary to put in place some interim changes for elections in 2016, which will include the Police and Crime Commissioner election, possible the EU Referendum, and of course any by-elections that may be required.

- 1.2 It may be useful to clarify at this point that the Council is responsible for setting the **polling district** (a geographical area of a ward) and **polling places** (a geographical area usually within a polling district that the polling station must be located within). The Returning Officer is responsible for locating **individual polling stations** which must be within the polling place.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 A review of polling districts and places was undertaken in 2014, in readiness for the elections on 5 May 2015, based on new ward boundaries.
- 2.2 Under the new ward boundary arrangements, due to the fact that Tunstall Parish is now split between two borough wards, voters in Tunstall were allocated to two different polling districts to reflect the parish wards and the different Borough wards. However, there concerns have been raised regarding the convenience of the polling station for voters.
- 2.3 The Netchurch, East Street, Sittingbourne, was used at short notice, as South Avenue School had urgent building works at the time, and so it was not possible to hire the venue. No complaints from electors were received and a review suggests that this arrangements worked well.
- 2.4 Whitehill Chapel has been used as a polling station for many years, but is now in private ownership and so is no longer available to hire. Therefore it is necessary to identify an alternative venue.
- 2.5 The Meads Community Centre was not ready to use for the last elections, and so the Jenny Wren Public House was used as an alternative. However, the Meads Community Centre is now up and running.

## **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 Given the above, the proposals are to:
- (a) ask Council to agree to change the polling place for voters in the Tunstall Urban Parish polling district (in Woodstock Ward) to include the Tunstall Rural Parish polling district (in West Downs Ward), to enable voters in both wards of Tunstall Parish to vote at Tunstall Village Memorial Hall. This is considered to be more convenient for voters and will also provide for a more equitable distribution of electors between polling stations;
  - (b) ask Council to note that the Returning Officer intends to locate the polling station for electors in the Roman West polling district of Roman Ward at the Netchurch, East Street, Sittingbourne, which is within the current polling place;

- (c) ask Council to note that the Returning Officer intends to locate the polling station for electors in Ospringle polling district of the East Downs ward at the Alma Public House, which is within the current polling place; and
- (d) ask Council to note that the Returning Officer intends to locate the polling station for voters in the Meads Ward at the Meads Community Centre, which is within the current polling place.

## 4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to make the change set out in (a) above, but this is not recommended for the reasons set out.

## 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Ward Members have been consulted. At the time of writing, ward members for West Downs and Woodstock have responded positively to the proposals around Tunstall Memorial Village Hall.
- 5.2 In respect of the proposals for the Roman Ward, both ward members have been consulted, though one is content with the proposal, whilst the other considers that facilities at the school are better.
- 5.3 The Returning Officer has considered the matter and intends to retain use of the Netchurch because:
  - there is much more room available at Netchurch than at the school, as the latter now only offer use of a portacabin so that they may keep the school open on election day; and
  - there is limited parking at the school and, whilst there is no parking at Netchurch, we have put in place agreements with the local pub and supermarket to allow voters to use their car parks when voting.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	This helps to deliver the 'Council to be proud of' priority theme of the Corporate Plan.
Financial, Resource and Property	Any changes to costs will be within existing budgets.
Legal and Statutory	The Council is required to keep polling districts and places under review, and to carry out a full review every five years. A further review will be undertaken later this year now that the Kent County Council divisions are known.

Crime and Disorder	None identified.
Sustainability	None identified.
Health and Wellbeing	We need to ensure that all voters have reasonable facilities for voting.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	We need to ensure that all voters have reasonable facilities for voting.
Equality and Diversity	The 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.

## **7 Appendices**

7.1 None.

## **8 Background Papers**

Report and Minute to Council –

<http://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=128&MId=1287&Ver=4>

Report and Minute of General Purposes Committee -

<http://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=144&MId=1477&Ver=4>