

General Purposes Committee Meeting		Agenda Item:
Meeting Date	29 September 2016	
Report Title	Review of Polling Districts and Places – Sheerness and Woodstock Wards	
Portfolio Holder	Leader	
SMT Lead	Abdool Kara	
Head of Service	Mark Radford	
Lead Officer	Katherine Bescoby	
Key Decision	No	
Classification	Open	
Forward Plan	N/A	
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. the proposed changes to polling districts and the polling place for the Sheerness ward be approved and 2. the proposed change to the polling place for the Woodstock ward be approved. 	

1. Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council is asked to consider proposals to change arrangements for voting in two wards, namely Sheerness and the Woodstock ward, in the light of experiences at recent elections.

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/ Returning Officer.
- 2.2 The last full review was carried out in 2014, prior to the all-out Borough elections held in May 2015 (which were combined with the Parliamentary and Parish elections, using the new ward boundaries).
- 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. Proposal

Sheerness Ward

- 3.1 During the review held in 2014, Members asked for an additional polling district to be created in the Sheerness ward, and for a polling station at Vincent Gardens. Unfortunately, it was not possible to use Vincent Gardens, and so arrangements were made for a mobile building to be located on hardstanding adjacent to Vincent Gardens.
- 3.2 However, feedback has been received about the way in which the electors are allocated to the station, in that some people walk past a different polling station to vote there. This does cause some confusion for electors, and so we have invited input from the ward members and have re-drawn the polling districts.
- 3.3 Whilst a portacabin is often seen as a solution for difficult locations, they do not come without their logistical problems, particularly where there is no obviously defined area for it. For example, in Throwley, there is a long history of the polling station being located on the green, and we have no problems with the location, for example, there is access to mains electricity. At the Sittingbourne Community College we have established a good working relationship with the school and have achieved a sensible solution to ensure the school does not need to close on polling day.
- 3.4 At Vincent Gardens, however, whilst on the day of the election the portacabin has worked reasonably well, it requires considerable prior work. It requires an assessment of residents' parking (with flyers being sent to them); and the need for someone to be on site to take delivery/oversee collection of the portacabin, ramp, generator and the portaloo (which may not arrive at the same time).
- 3.5 Facilities for the polling station team are also very basic with no access to a water supply. In addition the use of portacabin is very expensive in comparison with other venues, costing in the region of £5,000.
- 3.6 In view of the above, discussions are currently taking place with the Freedom Centre, and an update will be given at the meeting. It is therefore recommended that the polling place for this polling district is extended to cover the whole polling district, which will enable the Returning Officer to use the Freedom Centre should it be available, or to continue to use the portacabin at Vincent Gardens if it is not.

Woodstock Ward

- 3.7 It is proposed that Minterne School is no longer used as a polling station, and that the Sports Pavilion (UK Paper) is used instead.
- 3.8 Whilst Minterne School has been used for many years, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the school to accommodate us, and in recent years we have had problems regarding car parking and the size of the room allocated. In contrast, the arrangements worked well at the Sports Pavilion for the EU Referendum, which saw a high turnout without any difficulties on-site.

3.9 As an alternative venue is available nearby, and it is a suitable venue in terms of size, disabled access and car parking, it is recommended that the polling place is extended to include the Sports Pavilion, so that the Returning Officer may use this venue at future elections, but still has the option to use Minterne School if necessary.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 The Committee may make suggestions for alternative venues; however, consideration does need to be given to practical aspects in terms of the venues available within the wards, which will be used for the KCC elections in May 2017.

5. Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.3 Ward Members and Group Leaders have been asked for their views regarding the proposed changes. There will be a full polling station review in 2018, which will include full public consultation.

6. Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Localism
Financial, Resource and Property	We are seeking to retain the current number of polling stations (which must be located within the polling place); however, there may be some variations in price but this will be kept within existing budgets.
Legal and Statutory	The Council is required to take a full review in accordance with the Electoral Administration Act 2006, however, keeps polling stations under regular review.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this time.
Sustainability	None identified at this stage
Health & 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.
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 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Map of Sheerness Ward with revised polling districts

8. Background Papers

8.1 Previous reports and minutes are also available to view at: www.swale.gov.uk