

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE

4 DECEMBER 2018

Title:

REVIEW OF PARTICULAR POLLING PLACES

[Portfolio Holder: Councillor Julia Potts]

[Wards Affected: Cranleigh West, Farnham Castle, Farnham Shortheath and Boundstone, Godalming Farncombe and Catteshall]

Summary and purpose:

In response to representations received regarding the continued use of particular polling places, a review has been undertaken of these polling places with a view to either confirming their continued suitability or establishing if any suitable alternative options can be put in place. This report recognises that the Farnham Memorial Hall has re-opened and can be used as a designated polling station once more.

Ward councillors have been consulted on the proposals and have not objected.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

An active democratic process which involves as many electors as possible is central to supporting the Council's corporate priorities.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

In order to ensure that voters can receive a high quality service and that voting is available to all, the Returning Officer ensures that access needs are taken into account when planning for and setting up polling stations.

Financial Implications:

This review has been conducted without the need for any additional staff or financial resources.

In the event of any change of polling station use from a school to hall or other community facility, there would be an increase in the cost of venue hire to be met from elections fees. This is because publicly funded schools may be used as polling places free of a hire charge. The only requirement is to pay running costs including heating and lighting together with any extra caretaking costs required on polling day.

National and Parish election costs are fully reimbursable either from Parishes or central government. The only costs which are not covered by external parties are Waverley Borough elections. The average hall hire cost is around £250.00. A small increase in costs is likely to result from designating an alternative venue to a school building.

Legal Implications:

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The last full review was conducted in 2014 and the next must be started and completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. This does not preclude a review being conducted of a particular polling place or district at any time.

Background:

1. There are eighty designated polling stations positioned in 53 polling places across the Waverley Borough. Six of these polling places are situated in schools and one of these schools is being used on a temporary basis pending completion of the refurbishment of the designated polling place. Three of these six schools stay open for pupils on polling day. In recent years wherever possible, alternative venues to schools have been identified and where suitable recommended for use as designated polling places.
2. There are many factors that need to be considered by the Returning Officer when assessing whether a venue is suitable for polling station provision and a venue that might seem to be appropriate may not be. These factors include the following. A polling station should be within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district, provide reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances, must be accessible to electors who are disabled both outside and within the station, must be readily available for hire, sufficiently sized to accommodate all allocated electors and have adequate parking facilities.

Review of particular polling places

St. Peter's Primary School, Little Green Lane, Farnham, GU9 8TF – Farnham Shortheath and Boundstone ward

3. Representations were received in the lead up to the snap General Election in 2017 requesting that St. Peter's Primary School no longer be used as a polling place. This is due to the disruption caused to pupils and the impact on parents and carers required to make arrangements for childcare on polling day due to the school's closure. The Returning Officer has required use of the school as a polling station on 5 separate occasions in 2016 and 2017. The School is the designated polling station for voters in the Farnham Shortheath and Boundstone ward. The ward comprises two polling districts: BK Boundstone and BL Shortheath. There is one polling station for the Boundstone polling district with an electorate of 1132 and two for the Shortheath polling district with a combined electorate of 2137. All three polling stations are accommodated within the School Hall. The School closes every polling day.
4. Requests have been made to the Returning Officer in recent years for an alternative venue to be used. Up until now there have been no other suitable alternative venues that could accommodate a triple polling station.
5. A review was conducted of polling provision in this ward in 2014 and its continued use agreed. Consideration was given at that time to the use of Wrecclesham Community Centre, Greenfield Road, Wrecclesham, Farnham, GU9 8TJ. This

Centre is situated just around the corner from St. Peter's Primary School on the border of the Shortheath and Boundstone ward and accommodates 2192 electors within two polling stations for voters in the Farnham Wrecclesham and Rowledge Ward. The venue is not large enough to accommodate any additional polling stations.

6. Work to address disabled access for the Hall and Church and improve the facilities has been undertaken at the Leverton Hall which is situated behind St. Peter's Church in Beales Lane, Wrecclesham, Farnham, GU10 4PY within the adjoining Farnham Wrecclesham and Rowledge ward. A full assessment has been conducted of Leverton Hall.
7. The Hall could accommodate three polling stations and could be divided by use of a sliding screen. If the screen was used to separate the room for the two polling districts, use could be made of two separate entrances to the Hall and signs employed to direct electors to their allocated polling station.
8. An external lift has been installed at the venue so that wheelchair users and others with restricted mobility can access a path to the Hall. Limited parking is available outside the Church. It may be possible to make an arrangement with the nursing home to use some of their car park space for polling station staff so that the parking outside the Church can be allocated for electors. The Hall is available for hire.
9. As the Leverton Hall is within the Farnham Wrecclesham and Rowledge ward, some electors allocated to the Shortheath and Boundstone ward would pass the Hall on their way to their polling station at Wrecclesham Community Centre. There is a risk that these electors would enter the Leverton Hall expecting to be able to vote there. Polling station staff would be notified of this risk in advance so that appropriate signage can be used and/or advice given to electors. Consideration has been given to moving the Wrecclesham and Rowledge ward from the Community Centre to Leverton Hall and using the Community Centre for the Shortheath and Boundstone ward electors however the size of Wrecclesham Community Centre is such that it would not be possible to accommodate three polling stations within the Centre.
10. It is recommended that agreement be given to the use of Leverton Hall, St. Peter's Church, Beale Lane, Farnham as a polling place instead of St. Peter's Primary School.

Red Cross Centre, Wey Court, Meadrow, Godalming, GU7 3JE

11. The Centre in Wey Court is the designated polling place for the Godalming Farncombe and Catteshall ward. It accommodates two polling stations with a total electorate of 2255.
12. This centre is in the process of being sold by the current owners. The Red Cross have vacated the premises and the Centre is currently being sub-let to a private nursery. As the medium to long term future of the site is unknown, it would be preferable to put alternative arrangements in place.
13. Enquiries have been made at Godalming Unitarian Chapel, Meadrow, Godalming, GU7 3JB. This venue is almost directly opposite the entrance to Wey Court where the Red Cross Centre was situated. Facilities are good with a hall that would easily

accommodate a double polling station. There is level access to the Hall and parking available on site for around 10 cars. The Godalming Unitarians Trustees have agreed to use of the building for polling station provision and the Hall is available for hire. Borough ward councillors Ross Welland and Nick Williams have stated that they would be content with moving polling station provision to the Unitarian Chapel. Councillor Williams has suggested that free parking be set aside for electors in the Wey Court public car park and such arrangements can be put in place.

14. It is recommended that agreement be given to the use of Godalming Unitarian Chapel, Meadow, Godalming as a polling place instead of the Red Cross Centre, Wey Court, Godalming.

United Reformed Church, South Street, Farnham, GU9 7QU

15. The Church is one of two designated polling places for the Farnham Castle ward. Major building works are intended although full funding for the project has not yet been secured and planning permission has not been applied for. If the building works commence, the hall currently used for polling may not be available. The Church has been offered as an alternative. There is good level access to the Church with the entrance at the front of the building. Pews are due to be removed when the building works commence. Access to the kitchen would be required through the Church during polling day for the URC cafeteria staff but this is expected to be kept to a minimum. In the event that neither the Church nor the hall can be made available for polling, Farnham Town Council offices are available for hire for polling and the space available would serve as a temporary suitable alternative until the United Reformed Church is able to accommodate polling once more.
16. It is recommended that agreement be given that in the event no part of the United Reformed Church site is available for polling use Farnham Town Council offices, South Street, Farnham be designated as a temporary alternative venue.

Cranleigh Band Room, Village Way, Cranleigh, GU6 8AF

17. The Cranleigh Band Room is the designated polling place for the Cranleigh West ward. The trustees and venue manager have advised that they will no longer accommodate polling. A booking for the May 2019 elections has been declined. Enquiries have been made at Cranleigh Parish Council regarding suitable and available alternative venues. Cranleigh Village Hall is not available for booking on the first Thursday in May each year due to a regular event. The Snoxhall Fields Youth Centre, Knowle Lane, Cranleigh, GU6 8JL has been visited and assessed. The venue is available for hire. The Youth Centre is situated behind Cranleigh Leisure Centre and can be accessed on foot from Village Way, Hitherwood and the Downslink. The sports hall would make a suitable room for polling and is large enough to accommodate the double polling station required. The venue's car park is accessed from Knowle Lane. There is an access track from Knowle Lane to the Youth Centre. This is a single track with some passing bays. There is a good sized car park which has been recently upgraded with 2 disabled spaces and a ramp directly from those spaces into the basketball court. Parking for voters would be set aside in the car park, especially as the traditional polling day of Thursday is market day in Cranleigh. Lighting both inside and outside the venue is good. There is an additional ramp into the reception area of the building with good facilities for electors and polling station staff.

It is recommended that agreement be given to the use of Snoxhall Fields Youth Centre as a polling place in place of Cranleigh Band Room.

Farnham Memorial Hall

18. Farnham Memorial Hall is a designated polling station for the Farnham Castle ward. During building works at the premises an alternative polling station was designated at Potters Gate School, Potters Gate, Farnham. The Returning Officer and the elections team would like to express their thanks to the staff at Potters Gate School for accommodating a number of elections and by-elections since May 2016. As the refurbishment works have now been completed at the Memorial Hall polling can now return to the venue.
19. It is recommended that agreement be given that use of Potters Gate School as a temporary polling venue for the Farnham Castle ward cease and that use of Farnham Memorial Hall as the previously designated polling station re-commence.

Compulsory review of polling districts and polling places

20. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 sets out the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and reviews. The next compulsory review must be completed by 31 January 2020. The Returning Officer is planning to commence this review after the conduct of the May 2019 Borough and Town/Parish elections. This will give a timely opportunity for all those involved in the electoral process to gather their feedback from the May 2019 elections and engage with the review.

Conclusion

21. Alternative polling station venues have been identified as set out in the table below.

Polling District	Existing Polling Place	Proposed Polling Place
BK – Boundstone and BL - Shortheath	St. Peter’s Primary School, Farnham	Leverton Hall, St. Peter’s Church, Beales Lane, Wrecclesham, Farnham
AE - Catteshall	Red Cross Centre, Godalming	Godalming Unitarian Chapel, Meadow, Godalming
BD – Castle 2	United Reformed Church, South Street, Farnham	United Reformed Church, South Street, Farnham but if building works prevent the site from being used for polling, then Farnham Town Council offices to be designated.
LA – Cranleigh West	Cranleigh Band Room, Village Way, Cranleigh	Snoxhall Fields Youth Centre, Knowle Lane, Cranleigh

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Executive agrees:

1. to the use of Leverton Hall, St. Peter's Church, Beale Lane, Farnham as a polling place instead of St. Peter's Primary School;
2. to the use of Godalming Unitarian Chapel, Meadrow, Godalming as a polling place instead of the Red Cross Centre, Wey Court, Godalming;
3. that in the event no part of the United Reformed Church site is available for polling use Farnham Town Council offices, South Street, Farnham be designated as a temporary alternative venue;
4. to the use of Snoxhall Fields Youth Centre, Knowle Lane, Cranleigh as a polling place instead of Cranleigh Band Room, Village Way, Cranleigh
5. that use of Potters Gate School as a temporary polling venue for the Farnham Castle ward cease and that use of Farnham Memorial Hall as the previously designated polling station re-commence.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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