

Waverley Borough Council

Report to: Council

Date: 12 December 2023

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director: Transformation & Governance

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Report Status: Open

Key Decision: No

Polling District and Polling Places Review 2023

1. Executive Summary

The Council is required to conduct a compulsory polling district and polling place review every five years and the next review period is between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

A review has been conducted and the consultation period ran between 2 October and 14 November 2023. The representations received during the consultation period have been considered by Officers and there are proposals to change to three polling places: in the Holloway, Farncombe

and North West 2 polling districts. There are no proposed changes to the polling districts throughout Waverley.

2. Recommendation

The Standards and General Purposes Committee considered the Polling District and Polling Places Review 2023 in their meeting on 29 November 2023.

2.1 Recommendation to Council:

The Standards and General Purposes Committee recommends that Full Council approves:

(a) the polling place for Farnham North West 2 as Hale Village Institute Hall; and upon doing so

(b) that that Full Council approves the proposed polling districts and polling places as set out in appendix 1 to this report, including the polling place for Farnham North West 2.

3. Reason(s) for Recommendation:

3.1 To ensure the proposed polling districts and polling places (appendix 1), which have been developed from evaluation of previous polls and the responses received during the consultation (appendix 2), are adopted and can be used in future polls.

4. Exemption from publication

4.1 None.

5. Purpose of Report

5.1 The Council is required to conduct a compulsory polling district and polling place review every five years. Under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, a compulsory review must be

undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

- 5.2 A review has been conducted and two alternatives to existing polling places have been recommended by Officers. The review also investigated an alternative venue for the Farnham North West 2 polling district and the assessment of both venues is included in this report.
- 5.3 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement from the Committee for the future polling station in Farnham North West 2 and for the Committee to recommend the approval of the designation of future polling places by Council.

6. Strategic Priorities

- 6.1 The proposals support the strategic priority of local, open, participative government.

7. Background

- 7.1 Under the representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district.
- 7.2 Definitions of terms used in this report:
 - Polling District: the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors.
 - Polling Place: the building or area within a polling district in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.
 - Polling Station- the room or building within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places, polling stations are chosen by the Returning Officer.

- 7.3 In accordance with The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (as amended), Local Authorities are required to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.
- 7.4 Under section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month window between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 7.5 The Boundary Commission for England has completed a review of parliamentary constituency boundaries and published its final recommendations. The Boundary Order is expected to be made in November and will come into force 2 weeks following this.
- 7.6 Once the Boundary Order for the parliamentary boundaries has been made, the new constituencies will be used for the next general election. The next general election must take place before Tuesday 28 January 2025, but it could happen at any point before then.
- 7.7 Due to the uncertainty on the date of the next general election, the Review was undertaken as early as possible so that the Council can agree polling districts and places based on the new parliamentary constituencies. The new polling scheme will be used for the next parliamentary election as well as the scheduled Police and Crime Commissioner election on 2 May 2024.

The review

- 7.8 A review has been undertaken in accordance with Schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- 7.9 Public notice of the review was given on 2 October 2023 and information was published on the Council's website. The consultation period was from 2 October to 16 November 2023 and allowed for comments to be made on the existing arrangements and proposals from the Acting Returning Officer.
- 7.10 Due to comments received at the elections in May 2023 about the existing polling station in Farnham North West 2, every registered

elector in this polling district was sent a letter or email to seek their view on its suitability or to identify an alternative venue (appendix 5).

- 7.11 Eight responses were received by email (appendix 3) with a further 113 received via the online survey to residents in Farnham North West 2 (appendix 4).
- 7.12 There are no proposed changes to the polling districts throughout the district as the new parliamentary boundaries are consistent with current polling districts. No feedback was received about the polling districts during the review.
- 7.13 Amendments to two polling places are recommended as set out in the table below.

Polling District	Previous polling place	Proposed polling place	Reason
Holloway	Sports Pavilion	St John the Baptist Church	Change of use at Sports Pavilion to coffee shop – not easily available for future polls
Farncombe	Broadwater Youth Centre	St John the Evangelist Church	Central location for electors – more accessible for majority to travel to.

Farnham North West 2

7.14 The polling place for Farnham North West 2 was investigated due to comments received during the elections in May 2023. The comments were predominantly about the closure of Folly Hill Infant school on polling day to accommodate the polling station.

7.14 Schools are often used as polling places because they lie at the centres of the communities they serve, they often provide necessary facilities, and they are generally accessible to voters with disabilities. The Representation of the People Act 1983, Chapter 2, Schedule 1, part III, paragraph 22, of states that:

'22-(1) the returning officer may use, free of charge, for the purpose of taking the poll

- a room in a school to which this rule applies*
- a room the expense of which is payable out of any rate'*

The decision on whether a school closes on polling day is made by the head teacher and governors and the Returning Officer is not involved in such decisions.

7.15 The online survey asked respondents about their experience at the polling station at Folly Hill Infant School in May 2023. More than three quarters (77.8%) provided a positive or neutral rating of their experience. Reasons given included the convenience of the location, being able to walk and good parking arrangements.

7.16 However, two written responses and one comment on the online survey included concerns about the accessibility of Folly Hill Infant School for voters with disabilities due to the steep driveway at the entrance of the school and limited parking.

7.17 Officers investigated alternative venues for the polling place, but no suitable alternative within the polling district has been identified. The only possible alternative that has been suggested is the Hale Village Institute Hall which is outside the polling district and located in Farnham Heath End 2.

- 7.18 The Hale Village Institute Hall has been used as a polling place at previous elections and this was the designated polling station for some electors in Farnham North West 2 before the Waverley ward boundaries changed in May 2023.
- 7.19 Due to the location of the Hale Village Institute Hall, it would be preferable to also move the polling place for electors in Farnham Heath End 2 from the Community Room, Gorselands, Alma Lane, GU9 0NB, to avoid confusion for electors in Farnham Heath End 2.
- 7.20 The Hale Village Institute Hall has been assessed by staff and it could comfortably accommodate two polling stations for electors in Heath End 2 and North West 2.
- 7.21 The online survey which was sent to all electors in Farnham North West 2, suggested the Hale Village Institute Hall as an alternative venue to the Folly Hill Infant School and asked respondents for their views. 79.6% of in-person voters said they would go to the Hale Village Institute Hall if the polling station was moved. However, of those that said they would not, most stated that they would not because it is too far to walk to and much further away from their house than the school.
- 7.22 Overall, responses to the online survey were mixed between those in favour and those against keeping the polling place at the Folly Hill Infant School. The responses in favour of keeping the polling place at the Folly Hill Infant School stated that it was a good venue for convenience, closeness to their home and good experiences in May 2023. The responses in favour of moving it away from the Folly Hill Infant School stated that the steep driveway caused accessibility issues for electors with disabilities and it was disruptive to children's education. Parking was cited both for and against moving it to the Hale Village Institute Hall with some responses stating that more would need to drive which would cause more parking issues. Some respondents felt that parking facilities were better at the hall and others thought they were worse.

Next Steps

- 7.23 Due to the mixed feedback from the consultation, the Committee is asked to decide on the future location of the polling place for voters in Farnham North West 2. If the Committee decides to designate Hale Institute Village Hall as the polling place for North West 2, Officers recommend also changing the polling place For Farnham Heath End 2 to avoid voter confusion.
- 7.24 Once Council has agreed the polling districts and polling places, details will be published together with the reasons for decisions taken. The Council must publish correspondence and representations received by the Acting Returning Officer in connection with the review, correspondence sent to any person in relation to the review, and the details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area because of the review.

8. Consultations

- 8.1 A six week consultation period ran between 2 October and 16 November 2023. Officers Contacted Borough and County Councillors, Town and Parish Clerks, local MPs, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey and local groups including public and voluntary organisations, to advise them of the review and invite them to participate in the consultation. The review was also publicised on the Council's social media channels.
- 8.2 Electors in the Farnham North West 2 polling district were contacted directly by post or by email to invite them to send comments or complete an online survey about their polling station.
- 8.3 Seven responses were received by email (appendix 3) and a further 113 responses were received via the online survey (appendix 4).

9. Key Risks

- 9.1 The Council is required to designate polling districts and polling places to effectively conduct the elections. By agreeing the

recommendations in this report, the Council will be meeting its statutory duties.

- 9.2 If the proposals in this report are not agreed and recommended to Council, a special Standards & General Purposes Committee and/or Council meeting would need to be scheduled to agree suitable polling districts and places. There is a risk that if they are not agreed in a timely manner, suitable arrangements will not be put in place ahead of next May's elections leading to a reputational risk to the Council and failure to provide the Returning Officer with the necessary information to conduct the elections.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1 Any financial implications of this report will be met from approved budgets for Waverley elections and external contributions if elections/referendums are held on behalf of Government or other public bodies.

11. Legal Implications

- 11.1 The recommendations in this report will ensure that the Council complies with its obligation to review polling districts and polling places under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- 11.2 The Council is required to follow the procedure set out in section 18C and Schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, which has been adhered to throughout the review process.

12. Human Resource Implications

- 12.1 There are no direct HR implications in relation to the proposals in the report.

13. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 13.1 A key consideration of this review is to improve access to polling stations for all electors and to ensure voters can cast their vote easily and efficiently.
- 13.2 All new stations have been visited to ensure access arrangements meet required standards. Officers have also visited polling stations where concerns were raised via representations in the consultation.
- 13.3 Officers will monitor the polling stations to ensure there are no negative impacts and each polling station will be reviewed after the Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2024.

14. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 There are no direct climate emergency implications arising from this report.

17. Summary of Options

- 17.1 It is a requirement for the Council to designate new polling districts and polling places following the boundary changes and alternative options are limited.
- 17.2 The Committee is asked to decide on which polling place is the most appropriate to be designated for the Farnham North West 2 polling district.
- 17.2 The Committee may decide to request officers to further review certain parts of the proposals. Due to the tight timetable, a special meeting of the Standards & General Purposes Committee and/or Council would be required to review the changes.

18. Conclusion

- 18.1 A Polling District and Polling Place Review has been undertaken in accordance with Schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- 18.2 The consultation for the review ran between 2 October and 14 November 2023. Representations received during the consultation have been considered by Officers and have been taken into consideration in the recommendations in this report.
- 18.3 The Council is required to designate polling districts and polling places for elections. The new arrangements will be used for future polls including the Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2024 and the next parliamentary election.

19. Background Papers

- 19.1 There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of proposed polling districts and their polling places

Appendix 2 – Maps of polling districts

Appendix 3 – Responses received via email during the consultation

Appendix 4 – Online survey responses to electors in Farnham North West 2

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Service	Sign off date
Finance / S.151 Officer	14/11/2023
Legal / Governance	17/11/2023
HR	15/11/2023
Equalities	
Lead Councillor	21/11/2023
CMB	
Executive Briefing/Liaison	
Committee Services	