

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 1 DECEMBER 2015

Title:

REVIEW OF POLLING STATION PROVISION

[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Robert Knowles]

[Wards Affected: Farnham Castle; Haslemere East and Grayswood; Witley and Hambledon]

Summary and purpose:

This report outlines issues which have arisen regarding polling station provision in some polling districts in the lead up to and since the elections conducted in May 2015, and outlines recommendations to designate alternative polling places in three polling districts prior to the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections in May 2016.

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

Registered electors must be able to exercise their democratic right to vote for all types of elections and referendums. It is important to the Council that we understand our residents' needs and ensure our services are designed to meet peoples' needs across the Borough. The Council is committed to providing customer-focused services at the best value for money.

Financial Implications:

In the event that there is a move away from the use of a particular school as a polling station then there will be an increase in venue hire costs. The Returning Officer is entitled by law to use free of charge schools maintained or assisted by a local authority, as well as those schools that receive grants made out of monies provided by Parliament. This includes academies and free schools.

As Waverley only funds the cost of Borough elections which are not due until 2019 and all other elections are funded from grant monies from Central Government, the financial implications are insignificant. The election reserve should have enough funds to pay for any additional hall hire costs in 2019 because these additional costs are expected to be small.

Legal Implications:

Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 outlines that in the case of polling places at parliamentary elections, a polling place must be an area in the polling district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified in the district). Polling districts and polling places for elections other than parliamentary elections are based on UK Parliamentary polling arrangements.

Where, because of local circumstances, a polling place has been selected that is not fully accessible, then reasonable adjustments must be undertaken to provide access for all electors. Alternatively, the local authority can consider whether it would be appropriate to designate a polling place that falls outside the polling district.

Introduction

1. The next scheduled elections will be the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections to be held on Thursday 5 May 2016. The UK Government has introduced legislation which, if passed, will provide for a referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union to take place by the end of 2017. While the EU Referendum Bill in its current form provides that the poll at the referendum cannot be combined with the Police and Crime Commissioner Elections on 5 May, it could still take place at some time in 2016. The Returning Officer must ensure that polling places are in place in all polling districts for all scheduled and unscheduled elections in 2016.

Farnham Castle ward

2. Farnham Castle ward is divided into the BC Farnham Castle polling district and the BD Farnham Castle polling district. The designated polling place for the BC polling district is Farnham Memorial Hall, West Street and there are 2 polling stations run from this venue. The designated polling place for the BD polling district is the United Reformed Church, South Street with a single polling station run from this venue. This place is not suitable for a multiple polling station.
3. Farnham Memorial Hall is likely to close late March or early April 2016 for refurbishment work. The venue will not be available for polling station use for the May 2016 elections. As a result a suitable alternative venue must be identified.
4. The Garden Gallery behind Farnham Museum, West Street, GU9 7DX has been identified as a potential venue and a suitability visit has been conducted. Whilst this is an excellent venue, parking is on-street only and limited. This venue is considered not to be suitable.
5. Daniel Hall, Long Garden Walk, GU9 7HX has been considered although this falls just outside the BC polling district and into the BD polling district. A suitability visit has been conducted. There is no parking on site and it is not possible to provide a disabled parking place at the venue. The nearest parking provision can be found at the Lower Hart or Upper Hart car parks. The room that would accommodate a double polling station is upstairs and those unable to use the stairs would need to manage the stair lift. The venue is not considered to be suitable.
6. St. Andrews Parish Church, Upper Church Lane, GU9 7PW has been considered and a suitability visit conducted. The Church would provide ample space for a double polling station and good facilities including ramps into the building for disabled access. However Middle Church Lane would be the nearest location for possible disabled parking spaces and the nearest pay and display parking provision is at Wagons Yard and thus this venue is not considered to be suitable.
7. Farnham Library, 28 West Street, GU9 7DR has been considered as a potential venue. However the public car parks at Wagons Yard and the Lower and Upper

Hart car parks would be the nearest parking locations and thus this venue is not considered to be suitable.

8. The University for the Creative Arts Farnham, Falkner Road, GU9 7DS has been considered as a potential venue. However the University have advised that they are not able to accommodate our request for the use of their site as a polling station.
9. Farnham Baptist Church, The Hart, GU9 7HA has been considered as a potential venue. However the booking clerk has advised that they are not able to accommodate our request for the use of the Church hall as a polling station.
10. The facilities at Farnham Town Football Club, Babbs Mead, GU9 7DY have been considered as a potential venue but no suitable parking provision will be available once the works at Farnham Memorial Hall commence.
11. Potters Gate Sure Start Children's Centre, The Chantrys Community Centre, GU9 7AL has been considered as a potential venue. However the Information Officer at the Centre has advised that they are not able to accommodate our request for the use of the Centre as a polling station.
12. The Potters Gate C of E Primary School, GU9 7BB was used as a polling station in the past. The School were not happy with use of their premises as a polling station previously and there was an issue regarding disabled access. The Head Teacher has been informed that Waverley is considering reusing it on a temporary basis. Requiring use of the School is expected to be unpopular with the school, parents and governors, taking into account complaints received regarding polling station provision at schools across the Borough. Every effort is being made to identify a suitable alternative that would not require use of the school as a temporary measure while the building works at the Memorial Hall are completed. However, ultimately if no suitable alternative can be found, the Returning Officer can by law require use of Local Authority-maintained Schools.
13. In the absence of any suitable alternative, it is recommended that The Potters Gate C of E Primary School be designated for temporary use as a polling place once the Farnham Memorial Hall becomes unavailable, and that the length of the use be for 2016 or until the building works at Farnham Memorial Hall have been completed.

Haslemere East and Grayswood ward

14. Grayswood C of E Primary School, Lower Road, is the designated polling place for the Grayswood CD polling district. The school was not available for use as a polling station in May 2015 because of extensive building works. Council Members approved the use of Grayswood Village Hall for the May 2015 elections. The Village Hall proved to be a very suitable venue.
15. The building works at the School are due to be completed by the end of October 2015 and the Head Teacher has advised that the School would be able to be used as a polling station in May 2016.

16. In light of the suitability of Grayswood Village Hall and continued efforts to move away from using Schools as polling stations where a suitable alternative venue can be identified, it is recommended that Grayswood Village Hall be permanently designated as the polling place for the Grayswood CD polling district.

Witley and Hambledon

17. The Chandler Junior School, Middlemarch, Roke Lane is the designated polling place for the HA Witley polling district. Prior to the elections this year a complaint was received from a parent of children at Chandler School regarding its continued use as a polling station. After the elections Jeremy Hunt MP requested that alternatives to the School be identified following receipt of a complaint from a Governor at the School. The Returning Officer and his staff recognise the disruption that can be caused to schools, children and parents when a school is used as a polling station.
18. The Chichester Hall in Witley has been visited and assessed as a suitable venue. The large hall could accommodate a double polling station, there is level access into the building, good off-road parking provision with security lighting and good facilities for polling station staff. A-frame signs could be placed next to the road to indicate parking at the hall would be for voters only. Parking is reserved on site in this way for people attending other events at the hall. The booking clerk advised that local people and those travelling from further away to walk in the area are used to parking on the grass verge outside the site as necessary.
19. The ward councillors have been approached for their views on polling station provision in Witley. Councillor James has advised that some electors would be happy with the Hall, others would prefer the School. Councillor James felt that overall Chandler School would suit more people but those with young children walk to the infant school which is nearer to the Hall than Chandler School. Her view is that the School is the most suitable but the hall would be acceptable. Councillor Holder's view is the site of Chandlers School makes it readily accessible by foot for a large proportion of the Witley electorate who live in the immediate vicinity of the school. Those people, if they wished to vote at Chichester Hall, would have to drive there and with limited parking at the Hall would need to park on the grass verge opposite. He has pointed out that the road is the A283 and the Hall is situated on a bend. In summary Councillor Holder's first choice would be Chandler School and Chichester Hall second.
20. On balance it is recommended that The Chichester Hall be designated as the polling place for the HA Witley polling district.

Conclusion

21. This report provides an opportunity to consider polling place provision in those areas where issues have arisen in the lead up to and since the last elections. Alternative options for polling places have been identified. Ultimately the provision of convenient polling places in each polling district can contribute to a good turnout at elections, and Waverley consistently achieves turnout levels well above the national average.

Recommendation

It is recommended to the Council that:

1. the Potters Gate C of E Primary School be designated for temporary use as the polling place for FC Farnham Castle polling district once the Farnham Memorial Hall becomes unavailable, and that the length of the use be for 2016 or until the building works at Farnham Memorial Hall have been completed;
2. Grayswood Village Hall be designated as the polling place for the CD Grayswood polling district; and
3. the Chichester Hall be designated as the polling place for the HA Witley polling district.

Background Papers

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

CONTACT OFFICER:

Name: Tracey Stanbridge

Telephone: 01483 523413

Email: tracey.stanbridge@waverley.gov.uk