

To: Executive
22 October 2019

Polling District and Polling Place Review 2019
Executive Director: Delivery – Democratic and Registration Services

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposals of the Electoral Review Steering Group for changes to Bracknell Forest's polling locations as part of a review required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and reviews the performance of new polling arrangements following the May 2019 local and European Parliamentary Elections.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 To maintain existing polling arrangements in all wards except for the following:
- BT: The Court House –it is recommended that this polling station is moved to the Bracknell Central Library.

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 To address stakeholder feedback relating to the continued suitability of polling locations and to ensure high quality, accessible polling arrangements for all Bracknell Forest electors.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 BT – The Court House: Consideration was given to moving the polling station to the Time Square council offices. Members decided that the Bracknell Central Library would provide a superior experience to electors.
- 4.2 BJ - Wooden Hill Primary School: In response to feedback received during the public consultation, consideration was given to moving this polling station to the newly refurbished Great Hollands Pavilion. Officers visited the location and while the venue itself has excellent facilities Members decided that the location relative to the electors who would be using it and general issues around accessibility for those electors with limited mobility, discount it as a reasonable alternative compared to the existing arrangements.
- 4.3 BW – Wildridings Primary School: A significant number of representations received requested the relocation of this polling station to an alternative venue. Other locations were considered such as the Wildridings Gospel Hall Members decided that restrictions around bookings meant that this was not a viable alternative.

At the Steering Groups request, officers met with the Headteacher to ascertain whether a compromise arrangement could be put in place to allow the school to remain open on polling days. It was mutually agreed that issues around safeguarding could not be appropriately mitigated. The Steering Group asked officers to keep the location under review and did not recommend any changes at this time.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 There is a statutory requirement to undertake a Polling District and Polling Place review between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. A comprehensive interim

review was concluded in 2018 to prepare for the May 2019 elections. Each polling station venue was assessed in 2018 as part of the interim review. Further feedback and comments on suitability have been taken from polling staff, polling station inspectors and political parties active in the May 2019 elections.

- 5.2 Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission explains that a primary purpose of undertaking these reviews is to ensure that the needs of electors with accessibility issues are suitably considered when designating polling places and polling stations.
- 5.3 It is important to note that this is not a review of electoral areas, only the polling districts and the polling places and that there is no requirement to change any existing arrangements. It is also important to recognise that private venues are under no obligation to host polling stations and several venues in the borough expressly prohibit the taking of bookings for any politically affiliated activities.

6 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 The relevant legal implications are addressed within the main body of the report.

Financial Advice

- 6.2 The proposal in the report maintains the current number of polling stations which would result in no additional financial costs.

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 A public consultation was carried out by officers in line with the responsibilities required of them under the guidance issued by the Electoral Commission. 97 responses to the consultation were received. Of the responses received 28 raised objections to the continued use of Wooden Hill Primary School and 36 in relation to the continued use of Wildridings Primary School.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 The primary purpose of undertaking these reviews is to ensure that accessibility issues are addressed and considered by authorities when selecting their polling venues. As such equality impact assessments are integrated within the review of each polling place and used to evaluate suitability.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 Failure to complete the review would result in the Council being in breach of its statutory duty.

Contact for further information

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