

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

10 NOVEMBER 2014

**REPORT OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES GROUP HELD ON
24 OCTOBER 2014**

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

Issue for Decision

Every local authority with responsibility for electoral administration must carry out a review of its polling district and polling places at least once every five years. The reviews are governed by the following legislation:

- Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013;
- Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006;
- Electoral Administration Act 2006;
- Representation of the People Act 1983 (Schedule A1)

This report makes recommendations to Council having regard to the results of the review recently completed, and includes proposed alterations to the polling places for electors in some areas.

Recommendation Made

That the following changes to polling places be approved:

1. Bridge Ward - That the use of St Simon Stock R C Comprehensive School be discontinued. Electors in Polling District FA who currently vote at this polling station will vote at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This polling place to become a double station.
2. Heath Ward - That St Andrews Church Hall is re-instated as a polling station to accommodate electors outside of the former Oakwood hospital site. Electors in Polling District N will be split between Beechwood Community Hall and St Andrews Church Hall. All electors to the East of Queens Road and to the South of St Andrews Road will vote at St Andrews Church Hall.
3. Marden and Yalding Ward, Collier Street Parish – That the polling place be moved from St Margaret’s Church to St Margaret’s School for electors in polling district RR.
4. Harrietsham and Lenham Ward, Lenham South Parish - That St Edmunds Centre, Platts Heath becomes a polling station for use by electors in Polling District LC.

5. Headcorn Ward, Headcorn Parish – That the position of the station within the polling place will change from the games room to the small restaurant at the Hawkenbury Public House for electors in Polling District MB.
6. Sutton Valence and Langley Ward, Sutton Valence Parish – That the position of the station within the polling place will change from the games room to the small restaurant at the Hawkenbury Public House for electors in Polling District ZB.

Reasons for Recommendation

The Council commenced a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations on 1st October 2013. The initial stage of the review required a physical inspection of all stations and an assessment of each district and its polling stations to ensure that they remained fit for purpose.

The initial findings of that review were published on 3rd February 2014 and on that day the Council commenced a public consultation on the draft proposals in order to obtain the views of the general public, Parish Councils, County Councillors, Borough Councillors, Political Parties, MP's, MEP's and Disability Focus Group.

The responses to the consultation were reviewed following closure of the consultation on 7th April 2014. Commentary and any amendments were made to the draft proposals and second stage consultation with all stakeholders listed above commenced on 1st September 2014.

Second stage consultation ended on 21st October 2014 and it is now necessary to recommend the proposed changes to Council. The General Purposes Group was requested to consider the proposed changes and recommend the changes to Council. Once the recommendations have been considered by Council, agreed recommendations can be incorporated into the electoral register before its formal publication on 1st December 2014.

Within the Borough there are parts of two parliamentary constituencies. These are Maidstone and the Weald constituency and Faversham and Mid-Kent constituency. All polling districts, stations and places within each were considered by the review. In the majority of cases the review has recommended no change to the current situation but has identified recommendations for change in six polling districts.

Attached at Appendices A and B are details of the reviews that resulted in no recommended change.

Attached at Appendices C and D are details of the reviews that resulted in the recommendations to change.

During the public consultation on the review, carried out on two occasions, two of the proposals received comments, although they were limited in number.

- i. In relation to the proposal in Bridge Ward Councillor Pickett, a Member for Bridge ward, raised concerns about access to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and recommended a number of alternatives. All alternative proposals were considered but none were suitable and the views of the Returning Officer were passed back to Councillor Pickett. In addition a questionnaire was handed to voters at St. Simon Stock School, of 415 electors only 12 comments were received, 6 disagreed with the proposal and 5 agreed. The remaining comment was a question asking for further detail.
- ii. In relation to the proposal to use St Edmunds Centre, Platts Heath for Harrietsham and Lenham Ward the then Councillor, Mr Tom Sams, raised concerns that electors in Platts Heath may not see the proposals. He agreed to forward a copy of the notice to the hall committee and display the notice at other places within the district and in the residents' magazine. To date there has been no communication from electors within the ward.

Alternatives Considered and Why Not Recommended

The Council could decide not to make the changes recommended by the Group. However, a full review had been completed as required and this has identified issues in relation to the locations where change is recommended. The Council would need to be satisfied that to make no change or to agree an alternative change was a suitable solution to the issues identified. Members should appreciate that a significantly different approach may require additional consultation and members should note the following:

- i. In general the recommendations are made in order to improve the situation for electors or staff managing the polling stations and it would not be appropriate to choose not to act upon the identified issues.
- ii. In relation to the recommended transfer of polling district FA from St Simon Stock School to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the proposal is intended to improve transport and disabled access. Where the possibility exists that electors may not be able to reach the new location or are not prepared to vote at the new location they will be able to apply for a postal or proxy vote so will not be disenfranchised.
- iii. The proposal to use St Edmunds Centre in Platts Heath is of benefit to the community who have previously raised concerns about the distance they travel to the current polling station at Lenham Community Centre. This proposal increases the number of polling stations and does not close the polling station at Lenham Community Centre for other polling districts.

Appendices

Appendix A - Maidstone & the Weald Constituency details of reviews leading to no change.

Appendix B - Faversham and Mid Kent Constituency details of reviews leading to no change

Appendix C - Maidstone & the Weald Constituency details of reviews leading to proposals for change.

Appendix D -Faversham and Mid Kent Constituency details of reviews leading to proposals for change.

Background Papers

None