

Democracy Committee

16 November 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

No

Review of St Michael's School Polling Station

Final Decision-Maker	Council
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy and Communications
Lead Officer and Report Author	Elizabeth Bailey, Senior Electoral Services Officer
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Fant (East)

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To recommend to Council changing the polling station in Fant Ward from St Michaels School to the Grange Moor Hotel

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all.
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Democracy Committee	16/11/2016
Council	07/12/2016

Review of St Michael's School Polling Station

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 When considering changing the venue of a polling place or polling station it is a legal requirement to carry out a polling station review.
 - 1.2 The main purpose of the change is to avoid disruption to the school as it has become increasingly difficult to use the site due to staff training days and holidays.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On a number of occasions the school has not been available for use as a polling station.
 - 2.2 An alternative polling place was sought and the Grange Moor Hotel in St Michael's Road was deemed suitable.
 - 2.3 Permanently basing the station at the hotel will avoid uncertainty for electors as to which polling station is being used at election time.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 When the school has not been available the hotel has been used as the polling station for Fant Ward (East)
 - 3.2 Parking facilities at the school are limited but there is ample off road parking behind the hotel.
 - 3.3 Out of 81 responses to the preliminary consultation 48 of those supported the move to prevent disruption to the children education.
 - 3.4 'Do nothing' and keep the polling station at the school and deal with the school not being available as and when it happens.
 - 3.5 Alternative venues were considered i.e. the St Michael's Church Hall and parish rooms but were unavailable as used by a playgroup/nursery
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred option is to close the polling station at the school and use the Grange Moor Hotel instead for a number of reasons:
 - The Grange Moor Hotel has good parking and disabled facilities.

- It has been successfully used as a polling station in the past, although it is smaller than the room used at the school it still functions as a polling station effectively
 - Following a site visit to look at health and safety concerns, there is room for tellers outside the proposed venue and inside the venue if the weather is inclement.
 - Moving to the hotel will provide continuity and consistency for electors
 - Consultation has identified that there is a need to move the polling station to avoid disruption to the school and pupils' education. If the proposal is agreed to move the polling station to the hotel further investigations will take place at a later date to try and find an additional polling place to serve the electors in the Maidstone West area of the ward.
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5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 To get to this stage a preliminary consultation was held at the Grange Moor Hotel when the school was not available for use as a polling station and 81 electors responded. The results were as follows:

- 48 responders were for the move
- 4 suggested looking for alternative venues other than the Grange Moor Hotel
- 2 electors would opt to vote by post,
- 5 were not minded one way or the other; and
- 22 responders were against the move.

5.2 This was followed by an initial consultation which was displayed in the Gateway and on the council's website.

5.3 Emails together with the documents were sent to the Disability Focus Group, Ward Councillors, Helen Grant MP and the political group leaders. The only comments received were from two Councillors. – Councillor Boughton was in favour of closing the polling station at the school and moving it to the hotel as 'it is not feasible for the school to host a polling station at every single election'. Councillor Harper was in favour of keeping the polling station at the school open as 'the hotel is not safe for accessor for tellers'.

5.4 The final review details were displayed in the temporary Gateway and online. One councillor responded.

5.5 A notice has also been displayed in the Town hall noticeboard.

6 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.2 A notice stating Alterations must be displayed the day after full Council on 7/12/2016

6.3 There will be no need to revise the Electoral Register as the polling District will not change.

7 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Ensuring good governance and democratic engagement ensures that the Council is transparent in delivering our priorities.	Head of Policy and Communications
Risk Management		
Financial	None	
Staffing	n/a	
Legal	The review has been carried out under the process set out in Schedule 1A of the Representation of the People Act 1983. This allows for individual reviews of polling places outside the usual timetable of compulsory reviews of the polling district	Interim Head of Legal Partnership
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	A Site visit has been undertaken to ensure the proposed venue complies with disability access requirement.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Environmental/Sustainable Development	n/a	
Community Safety	n/a	
Human Rights Act	n/a	
Procurement	n/a	
Asset Management	n/a	

8 REPORT APPENDICES

None.

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None