

## DESIGNATION OF POLLING PLACE – WARD OF ST JOHNS

### Executive Summary

This report deals with the designation of a new polling place in the Borough Ward of St Johns. The Council is responsible for the designation of polling places across the Borough.

The existing polling place for the St John's East polling district (K3) in the St John's Ward is the Al Asr Education & Community Centre on Goldsworth Road. The venue has been used to host a polling station by the Council for a number of years, though does have a number of limitations, particularly in terms of accessibility for disabled voters.

During an officer review of the 2021 elections, contact was established with the Surrey History Centre, situated adjacent to the Al Asr Centre, and it was confirmed that the Centre's facilities would be available for future elections. The History Centre has available two large rooms, is fully accessible to all electors and has off-street parking.

The Council's Elections and Electoral Registration Review Panel and Ward Members were consulted on the proposals. The Members of the Review Panel and Ward Councillor Howard and Ward Councillor Leach all expressed their support for the use of the History Centre as a polling station venue. Accordingly, the Council is now asked to agree the designation of the Surrey History Centre as the polling place for the St John's East polling district (K3) in the St John's Ward.

### Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

- (i) the Surrey History Centre be designated as the polling place for the St John's East polling district (K3) in the St John's Ward; and
- (ii) the Council's appreciation be expressed to the Al Asr Centre for its assistance in recent years.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendations set out above.

**Background Papers:** None.

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## Designation of Polling Place – Ward of St Johns

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**Date Published:** 2 February 2022

## Designation of Polling Place – Ward of St Johns

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council is responsible for the designation of polling places across the Borough.
- 1.2 Following the 6 May 2021 elections, a review of the Council's election and electoral registration processes was undertaken by the Council's Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer. As part of the review, feedback was sought on the suitability of all polling places currently used within the Borough.
- 1.3 The current designated polling place for the St John's East polling district (K3) in the St John's Ward is the Al Asr Education & Community Centre on Goldsworth Road. The following accessibility issues to disabled voters were identified as part of the review.
- narrow corridors
  - lack of space within the polling place for motorised wheelchair manoeuvrability
  - lack of parking and parking conditions
  - no disabled access available on exiting the polling station via an alternative route due to only one ramp being available at the polling place
- 1.4 An alternative venue for the polling place has now been identified.

### 2.0 Polling Place Designation

- 2.1 The Returning Officer of an Authority can designate a polling station but only the Council (or suitable Sub-Committee) can designate a polling place. The Electoral Commission definitions are given below:

#### Polling place

- 2.2 "A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.
- 2.3 We are aware that some authorities designate the entire polling district as the polling place. However, Section 18B(4)(e) of the RPA 1983 states that 'the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station'. We therefore consider that polling places should always be defined more specifically than simply the polling district - for example, by designating the name of the polling place (normally a particular building or area and its environs)."

#### Polling station

- 2.4 "A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for the election."

#### Polling district

- 2.5 "A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election."

#### Identifying a Suitable Polling Place

- 2.6 Local authorities must comply with the following legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places:

## Designation of Polling Place – Ward of St Johns

- the council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors
- the polling place must be an area in the 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)
- the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station

### Accessibility

- 2.7 Local authorities must also comply with the following access requirements. As part of the review, they must:
- seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
  - seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled
- 2.8 The Council must have regard to the accessibility to disabled persons of potential polling stations in any place which it is considering designating as a polling place or the designation of which as a polling place it is reviewing.

### **3.0 Proposed Polling Place**

- 3.1 The Surrey History Centre on Goldsworth Road is located adjacent to the Al Asr Education & Community Centre and is therefore within the St John's East Polling District. The Surrey History Centre is accessible to electors from Goldsworth Road by foot and Kingsway where a large car park is available.
- 3.2 The Surrey History Centre has two conference rooms available to use as a polling station. The conference rooms are located off the main foyer and completely separate to the other facilities at the Centre. Multiple polling stations can be accommodated with ease if required and the Surrey History Centre is capable of accommodating all voters going into and out of the polling stations even in the event of a high turnout.
- 3.3 The Surrey History Centre is accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place and has excellent disabled access with the instalment of disabled access door systems, hearing loop facilities and multiple designated parking bays.
- 3.4 It should be noted that the Council has previously approached the Surrey History Centre to explore the possibility of designating it as a polling place. However, it has only been since the Centre adopted new security measures that would allow access during all polling hours that the Centre could be considered.

### **4.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 4.1 Polling station hire charges are met from existing budgets.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 4.2 Designating the Surrey History Centre as the polling place for the St John's East polling district ensures that electors in the area have suitable facilities for voting.

## Designation of Polling Place – Ward of St Johns

4.3 The Surrey History Centre is accessible for all electors in the polling district.

### Legal

4.4 There are no specific legal implications or risks identified within the report.

## **5.0 Engagement and Consultation**

5.1 The proposed designation of the Surrey History Centre as a Polling Place was raised with Ward Councillors and the Council's Elections and Electoral Registration Review Panel, which met on 26 January 2022.

5.2 The Members of the Review Panel and Councillor Howard and Councillor Leach all welcomed the proposals, noting the improved access arrangements that the Surrey History Centre would be able to provide.

REPORT ENDS

**Appendix Title**