

POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2023

Executive Summary

The Council is required to review its Parliamentary polling districts and polling places before 31 January 2025.

The Council carried out a review in October and November of the existing arrangements and invited comments and proposals for alternative arrangements.

Prior to the start of the review, Officers noted the majority of the existing arrangements were suitable and they would not be proposing any changes. Officers would be focussing attention on the St John's West polling district, with the view to changing the polling district boundary to include an alternative accessible polling place to the Sutton Avenue Common Room. In addition to this, Officers would be concentrating on the Barnsbury Polling District in identifying an alternative polling place to The Lighthouse Barnsbury if accessibility issues could not be resolved.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That:

- (i) the existing arrangements for the following polling districts and their designated polling places be continued:

A1 - West Byfleet
A2 - Byfleet
B1 - Town Centre
B2 - Town Centre North
B3 - Walton Road
B4 - Sheerwater
B5 - Board School Road
B6 - Woodham
C1 - Goldsworth West
C2 - Goldsworth Central
C3 - Goldsworth East
C4 - Goldsworth South
D1 - Brookwood
D2 - Brookwood South
D3 - Mayford
D4 - Hook Heath
D6 - Sutton Green
E1 - Westfield
E2 - Kingfield
E3 - Shackleford Road
E4 - Old Woking
E5 - Gresham Park
F1 - Horsell West
F2 - Horsell South
F3 - Horsell East

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G1 - Knaphill West
G2 - Knaphill South
G3 - Knaphill East
G4 - Knaphill North
H1 - Mount Hermon West
H2 - Mount Hermon West
H3 - Mount Hermon Central A
H4 - Mount Hermon Central B
J1 - Maybury
J2 - Maybury South
J3 - Pyrford
J4 - Pyrford North
K3 - St John's East

- (ii) the Woking Sportsbox be designated as the polling place for the Barnsbury polling district (D5) in the Heathlands Ward;
- (iii) changes to the St John's West polling district (K1) boundary to include all properties within St John's Lye (Festival Path) and Carolyn Close from the St John's Central polling district (K2);
- (iv) the St John's Memorial Hall be designated as the polling place for the St John's West polling district (K1) in the St John's Ward;
- (v) changes to the St John's Central polling district (K2) boundary to remove all properties within St John's Lye (Festival Path) and Carolyn Close to the St John's West polling district (K1);
- (vi) the St John's Church be designated as the polling place for the St John's Central polling district (K2) in the St John's Ward: and
- (vii) the Council's appreciation be expressed to the residents of Sutton Avenue for their support and assistance in the use of the Common Room for the May 2023 Poll.

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

Background Papers:	None.
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. The Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended, introduced a duty on all local authorities in Great Britain to review their polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.
- 1.2 Under Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the next compulsory review must be undertaken within a 16-month period between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 1.3 The Council commenced its review on 1 October 2023. This report sets out the results of the consultation and the proposals for the future arrangements for polling districts and polling places in the Borough.

2.0 Consultation

- 2.1 The consultation period commenced on 1 October 2023. Details of the existing polling district arrangements and polling places used for elections were published on the Council's website and were available to view at Woking Library and Byfleet Community Library.
- 2.2 A public notice was published on 1 October 2023 which set out the arrangements for the review, including the deadlines for comments on the existing scheme and on any proposed revisions. Local electors were invited to make representations regarding the current and proposed schemes. The deadline for comments on the existing scheme was 6 November 2023.
- 2.3 In carrying out the review, the Council consulted the Returning Officer who administers elections in Woking, (the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) at Parliamentary Elections) and sought representations from such persons or organisations with particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. A full list of the consultees is set out at Appendix 1.
- 2.4 The following people/organisations were also contacted to obtain their views:
 - Local Government Electors for Woking (via an Official Notice)
 - Woking Borough Councillors
 - Surrey County Councillors for Woking
 - MP for Woking
 - Local constituency political parties; and
 - Other representative local groups
- 2.5 The ARO's comments regarding the existing scheme and proposal are set out at Appendix 2 and a summary of the other representations received is set out at Appendix 3.

3.0 Summary of Responses

- 3.1 In total 198 individual responses were received to the review via the Council's website online consultation and in writing.
- 3.2 178 of those responses were in support of the polling arrangements across 34 of the 41 polling districts and polling places where no changes to the current scheme were proposed.

4.0 Woking Borough Council

- 4.1 Responses were received from four Borough Councillors. Two representations were made regarding the proposed arrangements for the Barnsbury polling district (D5) in support of The Lighthouse Barnsbury Café remaining the designated polling place. One representation was made regarding the proposed arrangements for the St John's West polling district (K1) recognising the requirement for an accessible polling place within the polling district.

5.0 Town Centre (B1) and Town Centre North (B2) Polling Districts

- 5.1 Fourteen responses were received, three were in support of the current polling arrangements and eleven did not agree. Ten representations were made as follows:

Welcome Church should be superseded by more focused location for voters in The Grove and Ferndale Road.

When the light box was used as a polling station it was possible to walk. Now the polling station is a car ride away and this is not a step towards carbon neutrality. Also, the council should be using its own real estate to avoid paying rent for a room.

I am surprised about your comment that no feedback was received after the May 2023 elections as I know that the change from Trinity Methodist Church to Welcome Church was challenged by a number of residents living in The Grove and Ferndale who have difficulty walking or driving and found it difficult to get to Welcome Church.

I previously complained about the change in polling station relocation on 28 March, 2023, prior to the last local elections. The Welcome Church is not accessible for some residents in Town Centre North B2, of which I am in Ferndale Road. For our B2 location the change is actually a move away from being accessible to making it a more difficult process. A better location would be the Trinity Methodist Church, which is actually in Canalside, not Horsell ward.

We used to vote at the Lightbox which was straightforward to reach from our ward. We have quite a number of elderly residents and people with young families who have found it difficult to get across town to the new location. I have health issues which meant it was too far to walk, so I didn't vote. Trinity Methodist Church could be used as an alternative to the Lightbox.

It is not a convenient site for the section of 'Canalside' which is actually part of historic Horsell. Voters have to pass two suitable polling stations to get to the Welcome Church. Objections were made before the May 2023 election.

Since we have been moved into Canalside Ward from Horsell East Ward the polling station has recently been changed from the Lightbox to the Welcome Church. When we first came to The Grove in 1976 it was at Trinity Church for many years. I am now in my 80's and it's not so easy for me to vote in the Welcome Church. Either Trinity Church or The Lightbox is much easier for me vote at.

The Lightbox was much more convenient for the roads north of the Canal.

I wish to comment on the location of our present polling station which is the Welcome Church. Up until last year our polling station was The Lightbox which was very convenient for us all. The Welcome Church is much further away and I know of quite a number of people who did not cast their vote last year because it was not easy to get to the Polling station. This was especially true of elderly residents. I would ask that Trinity Methodist Church be considered as an alternative to the Welcome Church. Trinity is already used as a polling station and would appear to have capacity for another ward and it is on our doorstep so much more convenient for us all.

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I have been a Horsell resident for almost 48 years and until the last election in may 2023 could walk to Trinity methodist Church or The Lightbox to cast my vote. The Welcome Church is not practical for me as I don't drive and it is becoming too far for me to walk. I am strongly against such a small number of properties north of the canal being included in Town Centre North instead of Horsell. I appreciate I could register for postal voting but I feel it would be a waste of paper most of the time.

6.0 Woodham Polling District (B6)

- 6.1 Five responses were received, four were in support of the current polling arrangements and one did not agree. One representation was made as follows:

The grouping of polling districts within this broader Canalside ward is challenging given the differing needs of the community. It would be better for Woodham side to be put back with Horsell as it used to be as the needs are more similar and local Councilors can focus more specifically on each wards needs rather than having such a diverse grouping.

7.0 Goldsworth Central (C2) and Goldsworth South (C4) Polling District

- 7.1 Seven responses were received, six were in support of the current polling arrangements and one did not agree. No representations were made.

8.0 Barnsbury Polling District (D5)

- 8.1 Six responses were received in support of the current polling arrangements. Two representations were made as follows:

Keeping the polling station where it is, encourages people to vote in this area and would strongly recommend to leave there.

Whilst moving the polling venue to the Sport Box may sound a good idea I am concerned the distance from the estate for a lot of elderly voters and in particular crossing Egley Road although there is a crossing for the school there is no crossing isle by Almond Avenue. Yes they could postal vote but surely the same applies to those that need a ramp to enter/exit the Lighthouse venue. A bright idea no doubt thought up by a younger person with a car.

9.0 Mount Hermon West Polling District (H2)

- 9.1 Eight responses were received in support of the current polling arrangements. One representation was made as follows:

I strongly disagree with Voter ID being required in order to vote. This is voter suppression and is deliberately designed to discourage and disenfranchise voters. This is totally unacceptable in a functioning democracy. It is a solution in search of a nonexistent problem.

10.0 St John's West Polling District (K1)

- 10.1 Six responses were received, five were in support of the current polling arrangements and one did not agree with regards to the proposed scheme. One representation was made as follows:

Sutton Avenue Common Room is a more central location for all residents in the ward. The memorial hall would, for most residents, require driving/transport to access to vote. By moving the location this limits access for voters, the pedestrian bridge between hermitage and St Johns Lye for example is not accessible. Sutton Avenue Common Room is owned by WBC, therefore minimal costs, is this the same for the memorial hall? Sutton Avenue have residents that have accessibility requirements already – shouldn't the common room be accessible to them at all times?

11.0 Proposed Polling District and Polling Place Scheme

St John's West Polling District (K1)

- 11.1 Before the review commenced, Officers identified that alternative arrangements for the St John's West polling district would be investigated, to identify a suitable and accessible polling place for the area. Under the existing scheme, Sutton Avenue Common Room is the designated polling place for the polling district.
- 11.2 The current polling place is centrally located within the polling district however it is not accessible to all electors. The main entrance/exit is not accessible by ramp and there is no level access available to the polling place, therefore making this venue inaccessible to disabled electors. A temporary ramp to the polling place was installed for the May 2023 Poll at no cost, however any future installation would be at a significant cost to the Council per election.
- 11.3 Several issues regarding the use and suitability of the ramp by electors was reported by the Presiding Officer on Polling Day. In addition to this, due to the limited size of the common room it would not accommodate the elector turnout for a parliamentary election as a dual polling station. 663 electors voted in person at Sutton Avenue for the Borough election held in May 2023, however at the last Parliamentary election held in 2019, 1753 electors voted in person in the St John's West polling district.
- 11.4 Following the May 2021 Poll 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. The use of the Oaktree Infant School as the previous designated polling place was ceased in 2022 due to the disruption caused to the school and/or closure of the school on polling day.
- 11.5 Other than the schools in the polling district, no other alternative and suitable venues within the polling district have been identified. It is therefore proposed to change the polling district boundary to include properties from within the current K2 (St John's Central) polling district, St John's Lye (Festival Path) and Carolyn Close. Change the designated polling place for the polling district to St John's Memorial Hall, St Johns Lye, St John's Woking, GU21 7SQ.

St John's Central Polling District (K2)

- 11.6 The current designated polling place for the St John's Central polling district is St John's Memorial Hall. Whilst the facilities available at St John's Memorial Hall would adequately accommodate three polling stations, there is insufficient parking to cater for the total number of electors from two polling districts. This in turn would cause congestion and disruption to local residents and business in the village of St John's.
- 11.7 St John's Church on Church Road is located near to the St John's Memorial Hall, a five minute walk on foot and is therefore within the St John's Central polling district. St John's Church provides appropriate and suitable facilities for voting and is accessible to all electors.
- 11.8 St John's Church has a large room available to use as a polling station. Multiple polling stations could be accommodated with ease if required and the St John's Church is capable of accommodating all voters going into and out of the polling stations even in the event of a high turnout. Sufficient off-street parking and multiple designated disabled parking bays are available. Additional on street parking is available in Church Road.
- 11.9 It is therefore proposed to change to the polling district boundary to reflect the relocation of properties within St John's Lye (Festival Path) and Carolyn Close to K1 (St John's West) polling district. Change the designated polling place for the polling district to St John's Church, Church Road, St John's, Woking, GU21 7QN.

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11.10 If the proposed changes are agreed, all changes to polling districts and polling places will be incorporated in the revised Register of Electors and take effect from 1 December 2023.

Barnsbury (D5) Polling District)

11.11 Before the review commenced, Officers highlighted that alternative arrangements for the Barnsbury polling district would be investigated, in identifying an alternative polling place to The Lighthouse Barnsbury if accessibility issues could not be resolved.

11.12 The current designated polling place for the polling district is The Lighthouse Barnsbury. Whilst the polling place is centrally located within the polling district, it is not accessible to all electors. The main entrance/exit is not accessible by ramp and there is no level access available to the polling place, therefore making this venue inaccessible to disabled electors.

11.13 A temporary ramp to the polling place was installed for the May 2023 Poll at no cost, however any future installation would be at a significant cost to the Council per election.

11.14 Approval was sought from Surrey County Council as to the viability of the installation of a permanent ramp outside the polling place. Following an initial review, the Highways department has advised the following:

- Despite the relatively wide footway in front of the café, the step that needs to be catered for looks to be quite high therefore there are concerns regarding the feasibility to provide a ramp at the correct gradient and still allow other footway users to pass around it.
- There already appears to be a “crossfall” over the width of the footway, the back of the footway is higher than the front at the kerb edge, which would need to be taken into account.
- A number of utility covers are present and would need to be taken into consideration.
- A survey would be required to be undertaken to determine the relative levels etc., and subsequent design work, therefore it is not possible to say whether the provision of a ramp is practical.

11.15 Officers will continue to work with Surrey County Council and other partners regarding the feasibility of the installation of a permanent ramp at The Lighthouse Barnsbury. It is therefore proposed to change the designated polling place for the polling district to Woking Sportsbox, Egley Road, Woking, GU22 0AF until such time the accessibility issues can be resolved.

11.16 If the proposed changes are agreed, all changes to polling districts and polling places will be incorporated in the revised Register of Electors and take effect from 1 December 2023.

12.0 Publication of Results

12.1 Following consideration by the Council, the outcome of the review will be published on the Council’s website. The following information will also be available to view:

- All information correspondence sent to the Acting Returning Officer in connection with the review;
- All correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to the access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability;
- All representations made by any person in connect with the review:

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- The minutes of any meeting held by the authority to consider any revision to designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review;
- The details of the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review:
- The reasons for the final decision regarding every polling district and polling place; and
- The details of the places where the results of the review have been published.

12.2 All electors affected by the changes will be contacted, advising them on their new polling arrangements. Local constituency parties will also be sent a copy of the new arrangements.

13.0 Corporate Strategy

13.1 The Woking for All Strategy commits the Authority to a set of strategic objectives between 2022 and 2027 that give a clear direction to residents, businesses, partner organisations and Council Officers, based around four community based themes, namely:

- Healthier communities;
- Engaged communities;
- Greener communities; and
- Prospering communities.

13.2 This review has sought to ensure that residents were provided with an opportunity to comment on the proposals, and that all the necessary supporting information was made available. This report includes details of the feedback received during the consultation.

14.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

14.1 The consultation was completed at minimal financial cost with the support of the Marketing and Communications Team.

14.2 Agreeing the outcomes of this review will ensure that the Council fulfils its duties as part of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, as amended. The changes seek to ensure that the Borough's polling districts and places meet the needs of residents for the coming years.

Equalities and Human Resources

The outcome of this review will ensure that all polling stations and voting facilities are accessible for electors with disabilities.

Legal

14.3 The Council is legally obliged to undertake a five yearly review of polling districts and polling places pursuant to the Electoral Administration Act 2006. The recommendations before the Council are the culmination of the 2023 five year review in accordance with the Act.

15.0 Engagement and Consultation

15.1 The Council has consulted residents, Borough Councillors and other stakeholders during this review and details of responses received are set out elsewhere within this report.

REPORT ENDS