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| 22 January 2014 | | ITEM: 13 |
| Council | | |
| Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2013/2014 | | |
| Report of: Graham Farrant, Chief Executive and Returning Officer | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Yes | |
| Accountable Head of Service: Fiona Taylor, Head of Legal Services | | |
| Accountable Director: Graham Farrant, Chief Executive | | |
| This report is public | | |
| Purpose of Report: To seek approval of Full Council on the recommendations following the conclusion of the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations | | |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report requests Council to consider and approve the recommendations of the Returning Officer and Chief Executive in relation to the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1.1 That the existing arrangements for Aveley and Uplands be confirmed.**
- 1.2 That the existing arrangements for Belhus Ward polling districts E1 and E2 be confirmed.**
- 1.3 That the existing arrangements for Belhus Ward, polling district F be confirmed with a requirement to source a new polling place for 2015.**
- 1.4 That Chestnut Farm on South Road be confirmed as the polling place for Polling District G in Belhus Ward.**
- 1.5 That, in the event that Chestnut Farm is not available, the Ockendon Guide and Scout Hall in Tamarisk Road be confirmed as the polling place for Polling District G in Belhus Ward.**
- 1.6 That the existing arrangements for Chadwell St Mary be confirmed.**

- 1.7 That the existing arrangements for Chafford and North Stifford, polling district L and N be confirmed.**
- 1.8 That Chafford Gorge Nature Centre be confirmed as the polling place for Chafford and North Stifford, polling district M.**
- 1.9 That the existing arrangements for Corringham and Fobbing, polling districts O and Q be confirmed.**
- 1.10 That the decision in respect of the location of the polling place for polling district P, Corringham and Fobbing, be delegated to the Returning Officer following consultation with Group Leaders.**
- 1.11 That the existing arrangements for East Tilbury be confirmed.**
- 1.12 That the existing arrangements for Grays Riverside be confirmed.**
- 1.13 That the existing arrangements for Grays Thurrock be confirmed.**
- 1.14 That the existing arrangements for Little Thurrock Blackshots be confirmed.**
- 1.15 That the existing arrangements for Little Thurrock Rectory be confirmed.**
- 1.16 That the existing arrangements for Ockendon be confirmed.**
- 1.17 That the existing arrangements for Orsett be confirmed.**
- 1.18 That the existing arrangements for South Chafford be confirmed.**
- 1.19 That the existing arrangements for Stanford East and Corringham Town be confirmed.**
- 1.20 That the existing arrangements for Stanford le Hope West be confirmed.**
- 1.21 That the existing arrangements for Stifford Clays be confirmed.**
- 1.22 That the existing arrangements for The Homesteads, polling district AV, AW be confirmed.**
- 1.23 That Gable Hall School be confirmed as the polling place for The Homesteads, polling district AX.**
- 1.24 That the existing arrangements for The Homesteads, AY be confirmed.**
- 1.25 That the existing arrangements for Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park, polling districts BA and AZ be confirmed.**
- 1.26 That the polling place for Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park, polling district BB be confirmed as the Sunshine Centre.**

1.27 That the existing arrangements for Tilbury St Chads be confirmed.

1.28 That the existing arrangements for West Thurrock and South Stifford be confirmed.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

2.1 The report sets out the legal requirements of the Review, the methodology used and the conclusions drawn, together with the proposed changes that have been recommended by the Returning Officer.

2.2 Council are requested to approve the recommendations detailed in this report.

2.3 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced the requirement for all Councils to undertake a full review of all polling districts and stations to improve accessibility. Additional Statutory Instruments were issued in late December 2006.

2.4 The Electoral Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The Act stated that the review must be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 inclusive.

2.5 The first review was completed in 2007 and there was a statutory requirement to complete a further review every four years. Following the review of 2011, members requested a review to be undertaken in 2013. This review was delayed to meet the requirements of 2013 Act and to maximise staff resources. The Act now requires that compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.

2.6 The Returning Officer and his staff scheduled the timing of the review to comply with the recommendations from the 2011 review and to implement any changes to polling places and stations ahead of elections to be held on 22 May 2014.

2.7 There were two legal requirements that were required of the review: -

- (i) The Council must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- (ii) The Council must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.

- 2.8 There were several other guidelines that had to be considered when undertaking the review and reflecting upon the outcomes;-
- (i) The polling place should preferably be in its own polling 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)
 - (ii) No polling place should be shared by two wards.
 - (iii) Where possible “natural” boundaries should be used, e.g. railways, major roads, waterways.
 - (iv) All properties in a minor road or estate should be in the same polling district.
 - (v) Polling places should be “logical”; that is, electors should not have to pass another polling place to get to their own place.
- 2.9 The consultation with the electorate and elected members was an integral part of the process and the following consultation exercises were undertaken:-
- (i) Members were informed by email of the consultation and asked for their comments on the existing polling places and to provide suggestions for new polling places. A summary of their responses is included at Appendix 1.
 - (ii) The conservative association responded to the consultation. Their responses included the views of the MP for Thurrock and the MP for South Basildon and East Thurrock. The comments are summarised in Appendix 1 and addressed further in the Returning Officer recommendations, Appendix 2.
 - (iii) A notice was published in the Thurrock Enquirer on 10 October 2013 and on the Council noticeboard. A press release was issued. A second notice and reminder was published in the Thurrock Enquirer on 15 November 2013.
 - (iv) The consultation was available for completion via the council website for completion.
 - (v) Details of the consultation were sent to a random sample of 2000 electors chosen from the Electoral Register.
 - (vi) Political Parties have been asked to comment on the proposals in this report. The Acting Returning Officer for South Basildon and East Thurrock has also been consulted and responded.

- 2.10 Electoral Services staff have consulted maps of each polling district and electorate totals in order to inform the Returning Officer decisions. Major Projects have supplied a list of new builds to inform a future picture of the electorate size. Each existing and proposed polling station was reviewed in order to assess the suitability of the station and utilised results from previous reviews and issues raised at previous elections. During every election, an Inspector carries out a review of the polling stations in use.
- 2.11 All the comments received are incorporated in the final recommendations of the Returning Officer and take account of the whole electorate for each polling district, the logistical arrangements and the financial implications to the Service and the Council. The recommendations can be found in Appendix 2.
- 2.12 The proposed arrangements take into account the Electoral Commission guidance for the recommended number of electors voting at one polling station. The Electoral Commission recommend that no more than 2500 electors be allocated to vote at a single polling station (excluding absent voters). The electorate figures shown in Appendix 2 include absent voters and the numbers voting at the polling station are therefore lower and will fall within the 2500 level. Where necessary, a second polling station will be setup within the polling place based on estimated turnout and directions issued by the Electoral Commission.

3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

- 3.1 The issues, options and analysis for each polling station and district is detailed in Appendix 2.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 The reasons for recommendations are informed by the consultation and the analysis in Appendix 2.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The consultation exercise was extensive to maximise inclusion and input into the review. The consultation arrangements were outlined in paragraph 2.9 and the political parties and MPs have been apprised of the Returning Officers recommendations.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 6.1 The Council continually seeks to ensure services are accessible by all users and the review will help to ensure that those prospective electors who wish to vote will not be put off by inaccessible polling stations. The proposed changes have been reviewed to actively encourage participation.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Telephone and email: **01375 652772**
mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk

All costs associated with the changes in polling places or polling stations are contained within the electoral services budget.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Telephone and email: **01375 652087**
david.lawson@bdtlegal.org.uk

The authority is required pursuant to the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to undertake a full review of all polling districts and stations to improve accessibility. The Electoral Administration Act 2013 now requires such reviews to be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
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The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on Local Authorities to promote equal opportunities. These considerations should sit alongside the statutory obligations set out in the Electoral Administration Act. The Electoral Administration Act (2006) and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 seeks to improve the engagement in the electoral process, by ensuring that polling places are accessible to all. The proposed changes will improve access to the electoral process, in line with the objective of the legislation.

The proposals contained in the report will aid community participation in elections, by bringing the polling stations nearer to the voters and ensuring adequate facilities are available. The consultation gave consideration to the use of religious buildings and access requirements.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- The Electoral Commission – Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix 1 – Polling Station Review – summary of responses
- Appendix 2 – Returning Officer recommendations

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