

<b>28 January 2015</b>		<b>ITEM: 15</b>
<b>Council</b>		
<b>Amendment to Polling Places and Polling Stations</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Not applicable	
<b>Report of:</b> Graham Farrant, Chief Executive and Returning Officer		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Fiona Taylor, Head of Legal & Democratic Services		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Graham Farrant, Chief Executive		
<b>This report is public</b>		

### **Executive Summary**

This report requests Council to consider and approve the recommendations of the Returning Officer and Chief Executive in relation to the polling places and polling stations used for elections.

#### **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 That members note the existing arrangements for Belhus Ward, polling district F can be confirmed for the elections on 7 May 2015 with a requirement to source a new polling place thereafter.**
- 1.2 That the polling place for polling district P, Corringham and Fobbing be confirmed as the Pegasus Club, Herd Lane.**
- 1.3 That members note there are existing arrangements in place within the Constitution and the Terms of Reference of the General Services Committee which will enable the Chief Executive to make changes to a polling place if required, in an emergency.**

#### **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 Members will recall the Returning Officers report to Council on 22 January 2014 which detailed the statutory Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations. At that meeting members approved the polling places for elections held on 22 May 2014.
- 2.2 The report stated that 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. This review was completed with the report taken to Council on 22 January 2014 and the polling places were confirmed for the elections held on 22 May 2014 and thereafter.

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 There is therefore no requirement for an immediate review of polling districts, places or stations for elections held in 2015 however the Returning Officer and his staff have followed up on issues arising from the 2014 report.
- 2.5 The report had two unresolved issues relating to polling stations:
  - a) the uncertainty of the polling place for Polling District F for elections held in 2015.
  - b) the use of Corringham Primary School in Corringham and Fobbing – polling place for polling district P

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

#### **Belhus Ward - Polling District F**

- 3.1 Members approved the continued use of The South Ockendon Youth Centre at the Culver Centre for elections held in May 2014. However, members were informed that the Youth Centre would not be available in May 2015 due to the closure of the Culver Centre.
- 3.2 The Returning Officer has been informed that the closure of the South Ockendon Youth Centre/ Culver Centre has been delayed and the polling place will be available for elections held in May 2015. The General Election will result in an increased elector turnout and the Youth Centre has adequate facilities to cope with a large turnout. It is also familiar to electors as the polling place for this district.
- 3.3 The Returning Officer therefore recommends no change to the existing arrangements for the May 2015 elections. Members were not consulted on this recommendation as it is continuing and confirming the use of an existing polling place.

#### **Corringham and Fobbing - Polling District P**

- 3.4 At the meeting on 22 January 2014, Members agreed to delegate the decision for the polling place for polling district P to the Chief Executive and Group Leaders. It was subsequently agreed that polling would take place at Corringham School in Herd Lane. The school was used for polling on 22 May 2014.

3.5 Polling places in this polling district have been researched thoroughly in order to find a suitable venue. Prior to the use of the Pegasus Club, Members may recall that polling was undertaken in the Community Hall on Fobbing Road. Due to parking and access issues (this is a working Fire Station) it was not considered suitable for future elections. The Pegasus Club was then designated as the polling place for the district. Polling at the club provided no issues and it was preferable to continue at this site however the future of the club was uncertain in 2014. In the review carried out for 2013/2014, Members and the Conservative Association responded to consultation and stated that the Pegasus Club was the best location for a polling station and encouraged its continued use.

3.6 The following responses to the consultation were received:

- The Labour Party responded and agree with the proposed use of the Pegasus Club.
- The ward member Cllr Andrew Roast responded that the use of the Pegasus Club was acceptable, and in easy walking distance for most with good car parking.
- The Acting Returning Officer for South Basildon and East Thurrock had no objection to the proposed new polling place.
- The Member of Parliament for South Basildon and East Thurrock had no objection to the proposed use of the Pegasus Club.
- The UKIP Basildon and East Thurrock Branch fully support the relocation of this polling station to the Pegasus Club.

3.7 The Pegasus Club reopened in August 2014 and the election staff have enquired and made a provisional booking, subject to member agreement, for 7 May 2015.

3.8 The Returning Officer and his staff consider the Pegasus Club to be a more practical venue than the school for the following reasons:

- a) The Returning Officer and members have tried to minimise disruption to schools wherever possible on polling day and even though the school remained open, it was not ideal and practically it was difficult to organise and safeguard the children. The decision to keep the school open is taken by the school, not the council.
- b) The Pegasus Club offers a self contained annexe for polling with good facilities for staff and electors.
- c) Parking is available on site at the Pegasus Club; parking was not available during school hours when the school was used and Herd Lane becomes congested at peak school hours. The provision of parking is not a requirement for a polling place but it does increase accessibility to the polling station when available.

- d) The Pegasus Club venue would cope better with the higher turnout at a General Election and candidates and election agents/parties would be more welcome and better catered for on this proposed site.
- e) Group Leaders, ward members and their political parties have been asked to comment on the proposal for Polling District P in this report. The Acting Returning Officer for South Basildon and East Thurrock has also been consulted previously and on this occasion.

3.9 The proposed arrangement takes 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 Pegasus Club will be able to accommodate this.

### **Existing arrangements to enable the Chief Executive to make changes to a polling place**

- 3.10 Members are asked to note the existing arrangements in place within the Constitution and the Terms of Reference of the General Services Committee which will enable the Chief Executive to change a polling place if required in an emergency.
- 3.11 There are no known further issues with existing polling places or stations but the Returning Officer would like to remind members of the contingency arrangements in place, which are set out below for Members' information:

#### **General Services Committee – Terms of Reference**

Rule 8 “To exercise the functions of the Council in relation to elections...”

#### **Constitution, Chapter 6, Part 1 – Functions which are delegated to Officers**

Rule 7.1 The Chief Executive shall:

(d) in the case of urgency or emergency, take any decision on behalf of the Council (after consultation with the Leader)

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 The reasons for recommendations are informed by the existing polling arrangements and history of the polling places and districts.

## **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 There was not an extensive consultation exercise carried out for this report. The consultation was carried out for the report brought to council on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2014.
- 5.2 Group Leaders and their political parties, the MP for South Basildon and East Thurrock, South Basildon and East Thurrock UKIP group, plus the Acting Returning Officer for South Basildon and East Thurrock were consulted on the proposed changes included in this report.

## **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 proposed changes will help to ensure that 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. Changes to polling places will be communicated to electors on poll cards, press releases and in statutory notices.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
**Management Accountant**

All costs associated with the changes in polling places or polling stations are contained within the electoral services budget and where applicable will be part funded by the budget provided for the General Election.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**  
**Deputy Head of Legal & Democratic Services**

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. The changes proposed are part of a follow up to the review carried out and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**  
**Community Development and Equalities  
Manager**

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.

### 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

### 8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2013/2014 – report to Council, 22 January 2014 (available via <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/committees-meetings-minutes>)

### 9. Appendices to the report

- None

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