REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2013

1. Summary

1.1 To report the outcome of the light touch annual review of Polling Districts and Polling Places.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the Sub-committee notes the new requirement under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 to conduct full reviews of Polling Districts and Polling Places every 5 years.

2.2 That the Sub-committee notes the outcome of the light touch annual review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2013.

2.3 That the Sub-committee notes the change of location of the Polling Station at the Brent Primary School from the Canteen to the Conference Room.

2.4 That the Sub-committee recommends to the General Assembly of the Council that the polling place for Greenhithe Polling District should be the Dance Union Studio, Unit 1, North Star Boulevard, Greenhithe for the reasons outlined in the report.

3. Background and Discussion

3.1 The Representation of the People Act 1983 places a duty on the Council to divide the borough into polling districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections and to designate a polling place for each district and to keep these arrangements under review.

3.2 Under the provisions of Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, Council’s were required to undertake and complete a full review of all the polling districts and polling places in their area at least once every 4 years. The last full review in Dartford was carried out in 2011. No changes to any polling district were made as a result of that review although some minor changes to polling places were considered necessary due to building works and these were agreed by the General Assembly of the Council on 26 September 2011.

3.3 Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 has introduced a new duty on local authorities to “carry out and complete” reviews of polling districts and polling places within 16 months of 1st October 2013 and then in the period of 16 months beginning with the 1st of October every 5th year thereafter and a full review will take place before January 2015. A full review involves considerable consultation with local organisations and the public according to a statutory process.

3.4 Although a full review is only now required to be carried out every five years a review can be carried out at any time and it is the Council’s
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20 November 2013

practice to undertake a light touch review annually to identify any changes that may be required. The outcome of the annual review for 2013 is reported below.

4. The Annual Review 2013

4.1 The designation of polling districts and polling places is the responsibility of the local authority, however, the locations and provision of polling stations remains the responsibility of the Returning Officer.

4.2 The difference between a polling district, a polling place and a polling station is outlined below:

A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a European Parliamentary electoral region, a ward or an electoral division.

A polling place is a geographical area in which a polling station is located.

However, as there is no legal definition of what a polling place is, the geographical area could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district. In Dartford the polling places are currently quite narrowly defined and any changes outside of these parameters, however minor, require the approval of the General Assembly of the Council.

A polling station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district.

4.3 Given that a full review was carried out two years ago, which involved widespread public consultation, the focus this year has been on whether any changes are required. There have been no major developments or demographic changes which have impacted on the designated polling districts or polling places and all of the Borough’s polling stations currently service less than the 2,500 electors recommended as the maximum figure by the Electoral Commission (taking postal votes into account).

4.4 Wherever possible the designated polling places are locations which have suitable buildings available for use as polling stations, ideally public or community use buildings. However where this is not the case, temporary portacabin units are used. Whilst these are far from ideal they represent a practical solution to the need to provide a polling station at a suitable location in each polling district.

4.5 Since the last light touch review was carried out in 2012 there have been two Borough Council by-elections and two major elections, the
Police and Crime Commissioner elections in November 2012 and the Kent County Council elections in 2013. This represents considerable electoral activity and opportunity to see how well the existing polling districts and polling places have served the Borough. Electoral arrangements are reviewed by the Returning Officer following major elections, including consideration of the suitability of the polling places used. Following each election the views of polling station staff on the suitability of polling places and the buildings used are also collected to identify any issues or opportunities for improvement.

4.6 With the agreement of the GAC temporary changes to two of the polling station locations were made for the November elections due to major gas works at Steele Avenue and the unavailability of the Church Centre, Swanscombe Street. Mobile units were located at the nearby King Edward Road car park, the same location as used for the Castle by-election on 27 September 2012, and at St Pauls Close, just off Swanscombe Street. These temporary arrangements worked well but for the KCC elections the stations reverted to their usual locations agreed following the last full review of polling districts and polling places in 2011.

4.7 Feedback from polling station staff has indicated that all of the polling places used have been suitable for use although there were comments about low temperatures in the temporary stations, mainly associated with the unusual timing of the Police and Crime Commissioner elections. The Council tries to keep the use of temporary polling stations to a minimum on the grounds of cost, working conditions and possible inconvenience to local people. However where there are no suitable buildings in a polling district temporary stations are the only practical solution.

4.8 Due to the semi-rural nature of the Borough the Council uses 9 temporary polling stations, a relatively high number, where suitable buildings have not been found in a polling district. Generally these have been accepted by local residents without complaint and the portacabins are in place for no more than a week at each election to minimise disruption and inconvenience. Before the Police and Crime Commissioner elections last November Kent Highways objected to the siting of the portacabin at the corner of Nuthatch and Shearwater (New Barn West (IC) Polling District) on the grounds of highway safety and the portacabin was re-sited approximately 20 feet to the right of its original location further along Nuthatch. This siting was used again during the KCC election. This resulted in complaints from three neighbouring properties at both elections and one resident wrote to suggest an alternative location, the junction of Pescot Avenue and New Barn Road. This location is just inside the boundary for the polling district whereas the existing location is in the centre of the district. Appendix A shows the two locations. Officers have visited the proposed site and also toured the polling district to see whether there are any alternative sites where a polling station could be located. The junction of Pescot Avenue and New Barn Road is not a suitable location for a temporary polling station as the grass verge on the
junction has a heavy camber, New Barn Road is a busy road with limited parking, no direct power supply and problems for disabled access. No other suitable alternative locations have been identified in the polling district and it is recommended that the existing location continues to be used.

4.9 Officers have identified a permanent building in the Greenhithe Polling District (DA) which is suitable for use as a polling station and which could replace the use of a temporary polling station currently located at the Eagles Road car park. The premises are the Dance Union Studio, at Unit 1, North Star Boulevard, Greenhithe. As can be seen in Appendix B the proposed new location is a short distance from the Eagle Road car park and well within the polling district. It would provide better accommodation, has better disabled access and is considerably cheaper than the price of hiring a temporary polling station at Eagles Road. It is recommended that the polling place be re-located to the Dance Union Studio for future elections.

4.10 The canteen at the Brent Primary School has been used as the polling station for St John’s Polling District (LC) in past elections. The school has raised concerns about the current location which causes disruption to pre and post school activities whenever there is an election. Alternative rooms have been considered and with a view to this the school was designated as the polling place which enables the Returning Officer to stipulate where the polling station will be located within the school premises. The school has recently refurbished its Conference Room and has suggested that this should be used as the polling station. Officers have visited the proposed location which has better facilities, is readily accessible and would be less disruptive to the school’s routine. However the new location is at the other end of the school to the canteen and is approximately 200 yards away from the Brent Old Boys Social Club which is used as a double polling station for Milestone (JA) and St Vincent’s East (JD) polling districts which could potentially confuse some voters. Appendix C shows the location of the current polling station, the proposed new location, and the proximity of the Brent Old Boys Social Club. The Returning Officer has considered the proposed change and has decided that, unless Members have strong views to the contrary, the Conference Room offers significant advantages and should be used as the polling station for future elections.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Sub-committee is requested to note the outcome of the light touch review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2013 and the change to the location of the polling station at the Brent Primary School from the canteen to the Conference Room. Members are asked to recommend to the General Assembly of the Council that the polling place for Greenhithe Polling District should be changed to the Dance Union Studio for the reasons outlined above.
6. Relationship to the Corporate Plan

Not applicable.

7. Financial, legal, staffing and other administrative implications and risk assessments

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<th>Financial Implications</th>
<th>There will be a saving of around £2,000 arising from the change of polling location in Greenhithe Polling District</th>
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<td>Legal Implications</td>
<td>None.</td>
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<td>Staffing Implications</td>
<td>None.</td>
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<td>Administrative Implications</td>
<td>None.</td>
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<td>Risk Assessment</td>
<td>The use of temporary units is less desirable in most cases than using a permanent facility but is an accepted alternative in the absence of other suitable options. The changes outlined in the report and the use of one less temporary polling station will benefit both staff and voters.</td>
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8. Appendices

Appendix A – map of New Barn West Polling District
Appendix B – map of Greenhithe Polling District
Appendix C – map of St John’s Polling District

BACKGROUND PAPERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents consulted</th>
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<th>Report Author</th>
<th>Section and Directorate</th>
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<td>Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places Reports to the Sub-committee in August and September 2011</td>
<td>A Twyman (01322) 343430</td>
<td>Member Services / Improvement and Efficiency</td>
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