

ELECTORAL PROVISIONS SUB-COMMITTEE
5 NOVEMBER 2020

POLLING ARRANGEMENT - 2021

1. Summary

1.1 To update Members on the position of elections following legislation to push back the May 2020 elections and subsequent local authority by-elections and local referendums in England and the PCC elections to May 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the recommendations from the interim polling review at para of the report, be noted.

2.2 That as and when guidance is received from Central Government, to note that further changes **to these arrangements** may be necessary.

3. Background and Discussion

3.1. As the UK is currently experiencing a public health emergency as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, a preliminary review of the current polling arrangements for the polls scheduled for 2021 has been undertaken to ensure that staff can work safely during the pandemic and that electors are able to comply with social distancing guidelines.

3.2. The pandemic is continuing to present particular challenges for the Returning Officer, the Electoral Registration Officer and the Election team preparing to deliver polls in 2021.

3.3. Officers have reviewed the suitability of all the polling places previously used: considering such matters as whether the venues are spacious enough to enable social distancing, if there are multiple entrances and exits to allow a one way system, areas for electors to queue outside and other considerations in line with current public health advice and government guidelines.

3.4. The guidance for the process required at the elections in 2021 is still to be released, but officers have taken a proactive approach to review the position with an understanding that changes may be necessary as further the guidance is issued by government.

3.5. During the last compulsory review of polling districts and polling places, which was approved by the General Assembly of the Council on 14 January 2019[Min.No.87], the Managing Director was granted delegated authority to amend a polling place if the appointed place becomes unavailable. This delegation has subsequently been transferred to the Strategic Director (Internal Services) under the Scheme of Officer Delegations.

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- 3.6. The previously approved polling places have been contacted and a majority have advised that their premises will be available for polling next year although concerns have been raised regarding cleaning etc.
- 3.7. Where the usual venues are not available, or do not meet the requirements, officers have identified suitable alternatives, or suggested adjustments to processes to ensure venues can be operated safely (Appendix A)
- 3.8. Under current legislation (Rule 20 of Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006), The Returning Officer can require the use, free of charge, for the purposes of taking the poll, a room in a school. This effectively renders all mainstream schools liable for use by Returning Officers, irrespective of how they were procured. This includes academies and free schools.
- 3.9. As the Kent County Council elections will also be held in May 2021, the County Returning Officer has supported the use of schools as polling stations and extending this requirement if previous venues are not available or suitable.
- 3.10. The use of mobile units will still be required and these will create their own challenges. The Returning Officer and officers are working with the contractor looking at the type of units available to help accommodate social distancing and also where possible two doors.
- 3.11. The (Acting) Returning Officer has been consulted on the proposals and her comments are attached at Appendix B to the report.

4. Relationship to the Corporate Plan

To provide high quality services that reflects public aspirations and demonstrates improvement

5. Financial, legal, staffing and other implications and risk assessments*

Financial Implications	None
Legal Implications	The Representation of the People Act 1983 places a duty on the Council to divide the Borough into polling districts, designate a polling place for each district and to keep these arrangements under review.
Public Sector Equality Duty	The Electoral Services Customer Access Review sets out the steps taken regarding access to polling places. https://www.dartford.gov.uk/by-category/community-and-living2/equality-and-diversity/customer-access-reviews
Staffing Implications	None

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Administrative Implications	None
Risk Assessment	Following the government guidance for the 2021 elections being released, risk assessments will need to be undertaken on all of the designated polling places.

6. Details of Exempt Information Category

Not applicable

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Review of Polling Places

Appendix B – (Acting) Returning Officer comments

BACKGROUND PAPERS

<u>Documents consulted</u>	<u>Date / File Ref</u>	<u>Report Author</u>	<u>Section and Directorate</u>	<u>Exempt Information Category</u>
Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places – GAC 14/02/19		Sarah Martin	Strategic (Internal)	N/A

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APPENDIX A

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Space for social distancing	Adequate entrance	Area for Electors to Queue	Comments
BEA1	Arrow Riding Centre	Y	Y	Y	
BEA2	Bean Village Hall	Y	Y	Y	
BRG1*	Dartford Bridge Learning & Community Campus	Y	Y	Y	
BRG2*	Bridge Management Centre (Suggested change to Dartford Bridge Learning & Community Campus)	N	N	Y	The Management Centre is not suitable for polling with the restrictions expected. The current room used is small and the corridor to enter would not allow electors to socially distance A dual polling station at the Dartford Bridge Learning & Community Campus would offer a better alternative on this occasion.
BRT1	Dartford Primary Academy (Juniors)	Y	Y	Y	The school has been undergoing refurbishment. However, meetings previously held had found suitable areas, which could be used for polling.
BRT2*	Princes Park	Y	N	Y	There is restricted access into the room previously used, however with staff managing the flow into the room, electors could be controlled and there is sufficient space for electors to queue outside
BRT3	Fleetdown Library	Y	Y	Y	
BUR1	Holy Trinity Church of England School	Y	Y	Y	The school have requested that a mobile unit be used on the playground instead of the school buildings, however this would not offer better polling arrangements.
DAR1	Darenth Hall	Y	Y	Y	Although a dual station, there is sufficient space in the hall.
DAR2	Darenth Hall	Y	Y	Y	

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EBB1*	Castle Hill Primary School (Suggested change to Cherry Orchard Community Centre)	Y	Y	Y	The School have asked if we can continue to use the community centre, which is attached to the school. This has been previously used as a polling station and was able to offer suitable facilities.
EBB2	Mobile Unit (Snowden Hill)	N	Y	Y	This area would be able to facilitate a larger mobile unit. It would need to continue to be located in the car parking bays. Although a public grass area is available, this is a public open space and objections were previously received.
GRE1	Knockhall Academy	Y	Y	Y	The school have requested that the polling station be located in what was previously used as a nursery building which has been used previously as a polling station.
GRE2	Sir John Franklin	Y	N	Y	Although there are multiple doors into the pool room which has been previous used as the polling station, these lead into the bar areas and would not be suitable to use as exits/entrance. The room is small but could facilitate a one way system inside and access could be controlled by staff, as there are external areas for electors to queue.
GRE3*	Ingress Park Community Centre	Y	Y	Y	Management of the community centre has still not transferred to the Town Council. For May 2020, Crest Nicholson (current owners) advised that the centre would no longer be available for use as a polling station. The residents of Ingress Abbey offered the use of a room in their home to use as a polling station. This would no longer be a suitable alternative if the community centre is not available due to possible restrictions in visiting people's homes.
GRE4	No station required	n/a	n/a	n/a	No polling is required in this polling district.
HEA1	Wentworth County Primary School	Y	Y	Y	
HEA2	Scout House (Suggested change to Lutonia Hall, Broomhill Road)	Y	Y	Y	Accessibility into Scout House is a problem and a ramp has to be installed for elections. However, the current room used

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					would not be suitable for social distancing and electors would have to cross in the corridor upon entering the building. Lutonia Hall, a Scout Hall, which is located on the same road would offer a more suitable alternative with more space with better access arrangements. The Group Leaders have provisionally agreed to its use subject to agreement with their executive committee.
HEA3	Mobile Unit (Junction Heathclose Road/Heath Lane)	N	Y	Y	This location would be able to facilitate a large mobile unit and offer an area for electors to queue.
JOY1	Summerhouse Drive Library	Y	Y	Y	The library is not currently open to the public but Kent County Council have confirmed its use.
JOY2	Joydens Wood Community Centre	Y	Y	Y	
LNS1	Jubilee Church Hall	Y	Y	Y	Although there is a small threshold, a one way system would be possible.
LNS2	Jubilee Church Hall	Y	Y	Y	Although this is a dual station, the second electorate is under 130 electors and therefore would manage with staff marshalling electors.
LNS3	Community (Scout) Hall	Y	Y	Y	
LNS4	Mobile Unit (The Oval)	N	Y	Y	This location would be able to facilitate a larger mobile unit and offer an area for electors to queue.
LNS5	Mobile Unit (Nuthatch)	N	Y	Y	This location would be able to facilitate a larger mobile unit and offer an area for electors to queue on the pavement. However, we have received complaints at previous elections on the siting of this mobile unit. Numerous site visits have been conducted in the area with officers, the previous Returning Officer and the contractor however finding an alternative site has not been successful.
LNS6	Southfleet Village Hall	Y	Y	Y	

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LNS7	Mobile Unit (Broomhills)	N	Y	Y	A larger unit at this location may be more difficult to install. If the contractor is unable to install at Broomhills, the location may need to revert to the previous location station Road/Corner Road. This would then require a generator and we have received noise/privacy complaints, which was why the unit was relocated.
MLC1	Bexley Sports and Social Club	Y	Y	Y	
MLC2	Leyton Cross Social Club	Y	Y	Y	
NEW1	Dartford Primary Academy (Infants)	Y	Y	Y	The hall previously used is a suitable size but only has one entrance, which would need to be managed by staff.
NEW2*	Methodist Church Hall	Y	Y	Y	
NEW3	The Hesketh Pavilion	Y	N	Y	Access to the building may need to be managed to ensure social distancing. However there are suitable areas for electors to queue.
PRI1	9th Dartford (Morning Star) Scout Hall	Y	N	Y	Access to the building may need to be managed to ensure social distancing. However there are suitable areas for electors to queue.
PRI2	Mobile Unit (Junction of Chestnut/Larch Road) (Suggested relocation to car park at Highfield Road South)	N	Y	Y	The junction of Chestnut Road and Larch Road where the mobile unit is usually situated would not be suitable for the larger mobile unit and electors would need to queue in the road. The car park on Highfield Road South which is now managed by Dartford Borough Council would offer a more suitable alternative.
PRI3*	Phoenix Place Community Hub	N	Y	Y	Access to the building may need to be managed to ensure social distancing. However, there are suitable areas for electors to queue. Although we are still awaiting to receive confirmation that we are able to use, an alternative would be Lenderyou Court, which has been used previously as a polling station.

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PRI4	Tree Community Centre	Y	Y	Y	The premises is being used by the Healthy Living Centre Dartford. However they have been advised that it will be used for polling.
PRI5	Oakfield Primary Academy	Y	Y	Y	
SCA1	Mobile Unit (Car Park at Lads of the Village) (suggested change to public open space on Chalice Way)	N	Y	Y	The Landlord of the Lads in the Village PH has advised that part of the car park has now been sold for development. An alternative location could be the public amenity land at Chalice Way.
SCA2	Stone Pavilion	Y	Y	Y	The previous room used for polling would not be suitable on this occasion. The Parish Council have also advised that the room is also being used by staff to comply with social distancing guidance. They have suggested that the hall could be available and this would meet all requirements.
SCA3	Mobile Unit (Steele Avenue)	N	Y	Y	This polling district has a high electorate. However, there would be areas for the electors to queue.
SHO1	The Gateway Primary Academy	Y	Y	Y	This is a dual station and the room previously used would not be suitable to allow for social distancing. There are however, alternatives available at the school which would offer a larger room or to facilitate the polling stations in separate rooms.
SHO2	The Brent Primary School	Y	Y	Y	This is a dual station and the hall previously used would be suitable to allow for social distancing.
SHO3	The Gateway Primary Academy	Y	Y	Y	
SHO4	The Brent Primary School	Y	Y	Y	
SH05	Alamein Community Centre	Y	Y	Y	
SWA1	Heritage Community Hall	Y	Y	Y	
SWA2	Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council Offices	Y	Y	Y	

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SWA3	The Church Centre	Y	Y	Y	
TEM1	Mobile Unit (Trevithick Drive)	N	Y	Y	
TEM2*	Temple Hill Primary Academy	Y	Y	Y	
TEM3	Temple Hill Community Centre	Y	Y	Y	
TOW1	Building 69 (suggested change to River Mill Primary Scholl)	Y	Y	Y	Building 69 at Diasorin was used as a temporary arrangement as there were no other suitable premises whilst the development was being built. River Mill Primary School has now opened and can offer suitable arrangements.
TOW2	Highfield Road Baptist Church	Y	Y	Y	The previous area used could be difficult to manage social distancing. However, the Church has arrange for the 2021 elections the main hall could be used which would resolve the problems.
TOW3	Central Park Running Track	Y	Y	Y	
WES1	West Hill Primary Academy	Y	Y	Y	
WES2	Our Lady's Primary School	Y	Y	Y	
WES3	Christ Church Parish Rooms	Y	Y	Y	
WSH1	Sutton-at-Hone Library	Y	Y	Y	The library is currently not open, however KCC have confirmed that it can be used. Previously the area is also shared with a café and if this arrangement were to continue next year, we would need to look at capacity.
WSH2	Hawley Mission Hall*	Y	N	N	We are still to receive confirmation that we can use the room and are concerned that the premises may not be suitable. The Hawley Pavilion could be a suitable alternative and they have been approached to seek if use would be possible.
WSH3	Wilmington Memorial Hall	Y	Y	Y	
WSH4	St Michael's Church Hall	Y	Y	Y	

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WSH5	Oakfield Primary Academy	Y	Y	Y	Although a dual station, there is sufficient capacity within the room used to allow for social distancing.

BOLD* Premises still to confirm that they can be used for 2021