

Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places of Dartford 2020 (Acting) Returning Officer Comments

As (Acting) Returning Officer, I have reviewed the proposals approved by Officers in the interim review and support the recommendations which seem to offer effective arrangements in light of the current pandemic. However, I recognise that these arrangements need to remain fluid as the government guidance changes or premises may become unavailable if there is a local outbreak.

Electoral Commission guidance recommends that where possible no more than 2500 electors should vote at any one polling station. However, consideration has needed to be given to the current situation and elector and staff safety has been given priority. There is also an expectation that there will be an increase in postal vote demand which will reduce the electorate visiting polling stations.

Dartford will continue to change with new households and an increasing electorate, therefore in time a further review of polling districts and their boundaries will be required. Due to the current situation this would not be the appropriate time to undertake with complex polls scheduled for 2021.

As Returning Officer, any changes to polling places will be communicated clearly and in a timely manner to electors, candidates and other stakeholders as needed.

My comments on the proposals are as follows:-

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Returning Officer Comments
BEA1	Arrow Riding Centre	No comment
BEA2	Bean Village Hall	No comment
BRG1	Dartford Bridge Learning & Community Campus	Although still to confirm availability this is a publically funded space. If for any reason it was not available the The Bridge Primary school attached could be used as an alternative
BRG2	Management Centre	Agree with the officers comments that this would not be a suitable polling place in 2021. The Dartford Bridge Learning & Community Campus would offer a more compliant venue where two separate entrances could be used if required. The distance between the two polling stations is only 0.22 miles (4 min walk)
BRT1	Dartford Primary Academy (Juniors)	No comment
BRT2	Princes Park	The external door leads straight into the room previously used as the polling station, therefore agree that this could be managed with staff marshalling entrance.
BRT3	Fleetdown Library	No comment
BUR1	Holy Trinity Church of England School	A mobile unit would be a huge cost when a suitable public funded building is available. Therefore a room or the hall within the school would remain the polling station.
DAR1	Darenth Hall	No comment
DAR2	Darenth Hall	No comment
EBB1	Castle Hill School	Using the community centre attached to the school worked successfully at previous elections and I have no concerns with the polling station being located in that part of the building.
EBB2	Mobile Unit (Snowden Hill)	No comment
GRE1	Knockhall Academy	The nursery building was previously used as the polling station and was only reviewed at the request of the school. I am happy that this be used for the 2021 elections.
GRE2	Sir John Franklin	Although using the current arrangements may be challenging, there are no other suitable alternatives in this polling district. This venue offers better facilities than a mobile unit, and agree that the flow of electors could be controlled to comply with expected regulations.
GRE3	Ingress Park Community Centre	This offered good polling facilities in 2019 and should continue to do so. If the issues of use cannot be resolved then a mobile polling station would need to be installed as there is no suitable alternative.
GRE4	No station required	No comment
HEA1	Wentworth County Primary School	No comment
HEA2	Scout House	I support the recommendation that Lutonia Hall would make a more suitable alternative polling station.
HEA3	Mobile Unit (Junction Heathclose Road/Heath Lane)	No comment
JOY1	Summerhouse Drive Library	No comment
JOY2	Joydens Wood Community Centre	No comment
LNS1	Jubilee Church Hall	No comment
LNS2	Jubilee Church Hall	No comment
LNS3	Community (Scout) Hall	No comment
LNS4	Mobile Unit (The Oval)	No comment

LNS5	Mobile Unit (Nuthatch)	Although complaints have previously been received regarding the siting of this unit, I am unable to find an alternative location within the polling district. Looking into the history of its siting, the complaints started when we were requested to re-site the unit from the edge of the junction. The complaints previously received are around the loss of on-street car parking and the effect on traffic movement. Due the guidance expected for Covid-19, a large mobile unit would need to be situated at this location. However, I will ensure that the contractors remove the unit as quickly as possible and emergency access is not effected.
LNS6	Southfleet Village Hall	No comment
LNS7	Mobile Unit (Broomhills)	It would be preferable to have the mobile unit located on Broomhills as this offered a better location for previous elections, however if the contractor was unable to locate I would need to seek an alternative site within the polling district.
MLC1	Bexley Sports and Social Club	No comment
MLC2	Leyton Cross Social Club	No comment
NEW1	Dartford Primary Academy (Infants)	Although St Albans Church has been used previously as a polling station, the school remains the preferred option. It is a publically funded building and also would not exclude any electors from voting as is not a religious premises.
NEW2	Methodist Church Hall	No comment
NEW3	The Hesketh Pavilion	No comment
PRI1	9th Dartford (Morning Star) Scout Hall	No comment
PRI2	Mobile Unit (previously located at the junction of Chestnut/Larch Road)	I support the suggestion that the mobile unit be relocation to car park at Highfield Road South and if works well in 2021 to look that it be located here in future elections.
PRI3	Phoenix Place Community Hub	The Community Hub would be the preferred option to use as a polling station. Lenderyou Court may be difficult with the pandemic regulations and I would be concerned that it is a residential premises for vulnerable people.
PRI4	Tree Community Centre	No comment
PRI5	Oakfield Primary Academy	No comment
SCA1	Mobile Unit (Car Park at Lads of the Village)	As the previous location is no longer available a suitable alternative would need to be found which would be able to facilitate the mobile unit, a power supply and also have an area for electors to queue. The officers recommendations will be reviewed with the contractor and a suitable location will be found within the polling district.
SCA2	Stone Pavilion	The room used previously will not be suitable with the restrictions expected and therefore would look to use a hall as an alternative which would provide more space and better access.
SCA3	Mobile Unit (Steele Avenue)	Although a larger mobile unit will be used at this location, this polling station has a large electorate. There is not a suitable premises which can be found for this polling district so a mobile unit would have to be used. There is a suitable area for electors to queue so I will not look for an alternative location to site the unit.
SHO1	The Gateway Primary Academy	No comment
SHO2	The Brent Primary School	No comment
SHO3	The Gateway Primary Academy	No comment
SHO4	The Brent Primary School	No comment
SHO5	Alamein Community Centre	No comment

SWA1	Heritage Community Hall	No comment
SWA2	Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council Offices	No comment
SWA3	The Church Centre	No comment
TEM1	Mobile Unit (Trevithick Drive)	As the mobile unit will be larger, more car parking bays will be required and I will liaise with the Head of Housing to help with the concerned raised with tenants.
TEM2	Temple Hill Primary Academy	For the one of the elections held in 2019 the previous Returning Officer agreed that the room used by the nursery could be used as the polling station. This room is not suitable due to access and also the entrance is next to an alternative polling district which caused elector confusion.
TEM3	Temple Hill Community Centre	No comment
TOW1	Building 69	The recommendation that the River Mill School is used as the polling station is supported as this offers better polling facilities to meet the expected guidance. The room used in Building 69 (diasorin) would not offer a facility where social distancing could be adhered too.
TOW2	Highfield Road Baptist Church	The hall would offer suitable polling facilities,
TOW3	Central Park Running Track	No comment
WES1	West Hill Primary Academy	No comment
WES2	Our Lady's Primary School	No comment
WES3	Christ Church Parish Rooms	No comment
WSH1	Sutton-at-Hone Library	If the café is operational in May 2021, consideration will need to be considered as to how social distancing could be adhered too.
WSH2	Hawley Mission Hall	The Hawley Pavilion would make a suitable alternative polling place and if it could be hired, I would support the move to this location. If neither of the premises were available I would seek an alternative location within the polling district.
WSH3	Wilmington Memorial Hall	No comment
WSH4	St Michael's Church Hall	No comment
WSH5	Oakfield Primary Academy	No comment