

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>COUNCIL</b> <b>13 DECEMBER 2021</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>POLLING PACES AND POLLING DISTRICTS</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Katherine Kerswell, Chief Executive and (Acting) Returning Officer Seth Alker, Head of Mayors Office, Elections and Coroner Service</b>
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	<b>Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Business Recovery</b>
<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF REPORT:</b>	
<p>This report sets out the proposed changes to the polling districts and polling places used at Parliamentary and Local Government elections in Croydon, including the Council and Mayoral elections that will take place on 5 May 2022.</p> <p>At the GLA elections on 6 May 2021 and the Croydon governance referendum on 7 October 2021, due to the Covid-pandemic, the Returning/Counting Officer utilised the delegated authority given to her by Council to make significant changes to the scheme of polling places previously agreed by Council in January 2020.</p> <p>This report recommends which of the alternative arrangements made by the Returning/Counting Officer in 2021, should be adopted permanently, starting at the elections on 5 May 2022.</p> <p>This report recommends some very limited changes to polling district boundaries in Thornton Heath and Coulsdon Town wards and the creation of a new polling district with a new polling place in Thornton Heath ward.</p>	
<b>FINANCIAL IMPACT:</b>	
<p>Additional polling station hire and polling station staff cost of around £1,500 per election (cost would be covered by external election funding for parliamentary and GLA elections).</p>	
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b>	
<p>Council is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Approve the amendments to the existing schedule of polling districts set out in Appendix A.</li> <li>2) Approve the revised schedule of polling places set out in Appendix B.</li> </ol>	

- 3) Delegate to the Returning Officer authority to approve an alternative polling place in the event that any polling place becomes unavailable or found to be unsuitable in the run up to an election and to make this change on a permanent basis following the election.

## **1. REVISED SCHEME OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING STATIONS**

- 1.1 In January 2020, Council agreed a revised scheme of polling districts and polling places following a compulsory review of existing arrangements required by the Representation of the People act 1983 and the Electoral Administration Act 2013.
- 1.2 The Coronavirus Act 2020 postponed the elections that had been scheduled to take place on 7 May 2020, including the Mayor of London and Greater London Assembly elections until 6 May 2021.
- 1.3 On 11 February 2021, the Government wrote to Returning Officers asking them to seek, where practically possible, to avoid using schools as polling places to minimise further disruption to children's education.
- 1.4 In addition numerous mitigation measures to make polling stations Covid-safe had to be introduced prior to the elections in May 2021. This included social distancing and where possible one-way systems for access to and exit from buildings.
- 1.5 The combination of the Government direction regarding schools, the introduction of Covid measures and some unavailability of venues meant that there were 32 polling places used at the elections on 6 May 2021 which were different to those approved by Council in January 2020.
- 1.6 There was no Government direction to the Counting Officer to avoid using schools as polling places at the Croydon governance referendum on 7 October. Some of the Covid measures introduced at the GLA elections were also relaxed. However the Counting Officer decided, where possible, to continue trying to avoid disruption for schools, along with avoiding potential voter confusion by using alternative venues to those used in May. 24 polling places used at the referendum on 7 October 2021 were different to those approved by Council in January 2020.
- 1.7 The Returning Officer's assessment is that to avoid further voter confusion and to minimise the impact on schools where there are reasonable alternative facilities, we should continue to use the majority of the polling places that were used at both the referendum and at the elections on 5 May 2022. The Returning Officer is recommending 22 changes to polling places from those approved in January 2020.
- 1.8 Because of there being very limited time between the referendum and the

start of the preparations for the elections on 5 May 2022, there has not been an adequate period of time in which to conduct a public consultation on the proposals. However Members were consulted in February 2021 on what changes to Polling Places could be made at the GLA elections, and were also invited to provide feedback to these proposals in November 2021.

- 1.9 A physical assessment of all proposed polling places was made to assess their suitability including their suitability for electors with disabilities.
- 1.10 This report recommends the following venues are formally designated as polling places as changes to the agreed scheme of polling places in January 2020:
- ADW1 – Addiscombe Baptist Church, 201a Morland Road, CR0 6HD
  - BGN1 - West Thornton Primary Academy, Rosecourt Road, CR0 3BS
  - BMR6 - Haslemere Hall, 2a Haslemere Road, CR7 7BE
  - CTN2 - Coulsdon Methodist Church, 83 Brighton Road, CR5 2BE
  - CTN6 - Coulsdon Library, Brighton Road, CR5 2NH
  - FFD2 - St Michael`s Parish, Church Hall, Poplar Walk, CR0 1UA
  - FFD5 - Croydon Central Library, Katharine Street, CR9 1ET
  - NAN2 - Croydon Jubilee Church, 77-79 Dunley Drive, CR0 0RJ
  - NPH2 - Norbury Library, Beatrice Avenue Entrance, SW16 4UW
  - NPK3 - Croydon African Caribbean Family Organisation, 40 Northwood Road, CR7 8HQ
  - NPK4 - St Oswald`s Church Hall, St Oswald`s Road, SW16 3SB
  - OCN3 – New Community Centre, Goodenough Way
  - POR3 - Purley Bury Bowls Club, 53 Purley Bury Avenue, CR8 1JF
  - PWC4 - St James`s Church, St. James`s Road, CR8 2DL
  - SEL2 - The Crescent Primary School, Croydon, CR0 2HN
  - TNH6 - Beulah Family Church, Beulah Crescent, CR7 8JL
  - WDN5 - Aerodrome Children`s Centre, Violet Lane, CR0 4HN
  - WDN7 - The Salvation Army, Booth Road, CR0 1XY
  - WDS2 - Croydon Youth Theatre Organisation, Oakley Road, SE25 4XG
  - WTN1 - St Stephen`s Church Hall, Warwick Road, CR7 7NH
  - WTN3 - St Jude with St Aidan Church Hall, Thornton Road, CR7 6BA
- 1.11 This report recommends some minor amendments to the polling district boundaries in Thornton Heath and Coulsdon Town wards to make the revised polling place changes work better for electors:

**Thornton Heath:**

Dairy Close, Osborne Gardens, Osborne Road and Garratt Close move from TNH1 to TNH6 polling district and electors in these streets will vote at Beulah Family Church.

### **Coulsdon Town:**

Chipstead Valley Road, Edward Road, Leaden Hill, Lion Green Road, Malcolm Road, Station Approach, Station Approach Road, Victoria Road and Brighton Road south of the railway line will move from CTN2 to CTN6 polling district and electors in these streets will vote at Coulsdon Library.

- 1.12 This report recommends the creation of a new polling district in Thornton Heath ward (TNH7) for electors in the vicinity of South Norwood Hill incorporating Falkland Park Gardens, Warncliffe Gardens, and Warncliffe Road from TNH2 Polling District, and Ardent Close, Canham Road, Cranleigh Gardens, Cuthbert Gardens, Ross Road, South Norwood Hill, Wrights Road, and Whitehorse Lane (between Canham Road and South Norwood Hill) from TNH3 Polling District.
- 1.13 This new polling district would be served by a new polling station located at Spurgeons College, South Norwood Hill and is subject to the scheduled assessment of Spurgeons College confirming that it is a suitable location for a polling place, and that it is available. If Spurgeons College is unsuitable or unavailable as a polling place then this amendment will not be implemented and the current arrangements will remain in place in May 2022.
- 1.14 Amendments to the polling districts will take effect on the publication of the electoral register on 2 January 2022.

## **2. CONSULTATION**

- 2.1 This is not a formal review of polling districts and polling places and therefore there was no requirement to follow the statutory review process.
- 2.2 Members were consulted in February 2021 on potential alternative venues in their wards following the Government's direction to avoid using schools and once it was known what measures would be needed in order to make venues Covid-safe. Members were in numerous cases able to suggest alternative venues and to provide helpful feedback on the location of polling stations in their wards.
- 2.3 On 6 November 2021, on behalf of the Returning Officer, the Head of Mayor's Office, Elections and Coroners Service contacted Members providing details of the proposals for changes to the existing scheme of polling stations for May 2022. Members were asked to respond by 15 November 2021.
- 2.4 In total 5 submissions were received from Members during the consultation period and considered in the drafting of this report.
- 2.5 Comments and feedback from electors received at both the GLA elections and governance referendum were also considered when evaluating the final proposals to be included in this report.

### **3. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **3.1 Revenue and Capital consequences of report recommendations**

There would be additional polling station hire and polling station staff costs of around £1,500 per local election due to the creation of an additional polling district (TNH7). The cost would be covered by external election funding for parliamentary and GLA elections.

#### **3.2 The effect of the decision**

It will formalise the arrangements for polling that have been in place for the past two electoral events (GLA elections and governance referendum).

#### **3.3 Risks**

There could potentially be some voter confusion, for those electors who have not voted since 2019, who will now be asked to vote at a different location in 2022. However this is mitigated by the provision of poll cards, and an online polling station finder tool.

#### **3.4 Options**

1. To introduce the polling district and polling places scheme as recommended in this report.
2. Not to approve the recommendations and as such to retain the existing polling scheme with changes only where venues are not available along with the small amendments to the polling district scheme not being introduced.

#### **3.5 Future savings/efficiencies**

The next statutory review of polling districts and polling places is due to take place in 2024, although the council could decide to undertake one before then if it wished to do so. Any future review could specifically look at reducing the number of polling districts and polling places to reduce hire and staff costs, although it would have to take account of Electoral Commission guidance on the number of electors voting at each polling place, and the potential impact reducing the number of polling places would have on the democratic process.

3.6 Approved by: Matthew Davis, Interim Director of Finance

### **4. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 This report is seeking to approve the amendments to the existing schedule of polling districts and the revised schedule of polling places for the forthcoming election in May 2022.

4.2 Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 ('1983 Act') allows the

Council to divide its area into polling districts and may alter such a district for local elections. It also requires the Council to be able allot such districts for electors participating in parliamentary elections.

- 4.3 Section 18C of the 1983 Act, as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, requires the Council to carry out a review of polling districts and polling places in its area for a parliamentary election within a period of 16 months of every fifth year from 1 October 2013. The last compulsory review was carried out in 2019. Therefore the current review is not a statutory review and as such they do not need to follow the statutory processes set-out in schedule A1 of the 1983 Act.
- 4.4 Section 18C of the 1983 Act also allows a local authority to conduct a review at any time. It is sometimes necessary that interim reviews are needed to be conducted outside the compulsory period.
- 4.5 A Polling District is a geographical area created by the sub-division of an electoral area i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a ward or an electoral division.
- 4.6 A Polling Place is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. There is no legal definition of what a Polling Place is; it could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.
- 4.7 A Polling Station is the actual location point where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the Polling Place designated for the particular Polling District.
- 4.8 The Council's functions relating to a review of polling districts and places are designated by law as a non-executive function and so cannot be discharged by the Leader or Cabinet. The Council can delegate the responsibility for approving changes, following any review, to a committee, sub-committee or an officer of the Council. The Constitution provides for no such delegation hence the responsibility for approving or delegating such changes rests with full Council.
- 4.9 Approved by Sandra Herbert, Head of Litigation and Corporate on behalf of the Interim Director of Law & Deputy Monitoring Officer

## **5. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

- 5.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising out of this report for Croydon Council employees or staff.
- 5.2 Approved by: Gillian Bevan Head of Human Resources

## **6. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 6.1 All polling places have been assessed including the suitability of the venue for disabled voters. All are accessible to disabled voters either with permanent step-free access or where necessary temporary ramps or adjustments that will make the building accessible on polling day. Access into and movement around polling places are parts of the Presiding Officer and Polling Station Inspector assessments on the day to ensure that the polling station is set up to be useable by disabled voters.
- 6.2 Polling places will be kept under constant review and equality considerations will form part of the process. Feedback and assessments from polling station staff, polling station inspectors, electors and candidates and agents are collated after every election so that improvements and modifications that need to be made before the next election can be identified and made.
- 6.3 For those less able to vote in person at a polling station, whether due to age or mobility, the option of voting by post or proxy is an option for all electors at every election. Although all polling stations are accessible to disabled voters, if an elector attends their polling station and finds that they are unable to access a polling station the Presiding Officer may bring the elector's ballot paper and the ballot box to them so that they can vote outside the building.
- 6.4 Approved by: Gavin Handford, Director of Policy, Programmes & Performance

## **7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 7.1 None arising from this report.
- 7.2 Approved by: Gavin Handford, Director of Policy, Programmes & Performance

## **8. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

- 8.1 None arising from this report.
- 8.2 Approved by: Kristian Aspinall Interim Director of Culture and Community Safety

## **9. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.1 WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?**

No.

### **9.2 HAS A DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA) BEEN COMPLETED?**

No personal data is processed as a result of this report.

9.3 Approved by: Gavin Handford, Director of Policy, Programmes & Performance

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**CONTACT OFFICER:** Seth Alker, Head of Mayors Office, Elections and Coroner Service, Ext 47469

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT**

1. Detail of the proposed changes to the existing scheme of polling districts and polling places
2. The scheme of proposed polling districts and polling place designations

**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:** None