

# Crawley Borough Council

## Report to Governance Committee

11 September 2023

### Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations (2023)

Report of the Head of Governance, People & Performance – LDS/207

---

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report informs the Committee of the arrangements for the statutory review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations that must be undertaken before 31 January 2025. The report also highlights the issues relating to polling arrangements following the Borough Elections in May 2023 that may need to be addressed as part of these reviews.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations be endorsed and conducted as set out in paragraph 4 of this report.

#### 3. Reason for the Recommendation

- 3.1. To seek the Council's approval for the arrangements for the next Polling District Review.

#### 4. The Review

- 4.1. The Council has a duty to divide the Borough into Polling Districts and to designate suitable Polling Places within each district. The Electoral Administration Act 2013 introduced a requirement to review these arrangements every five years. The last full review was in 2019.
- 4.2. Following the conclusion of the Boundary Commission for England 2023 Review, and as part of the next phase of the Election Act 2022 provisions, all authorities must hold a full review of the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations during the compulsory review period of 16 months between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025. The Review must however be complete so any changes are in place for the next Parliamentary Election.

4.3. The proposed timetable for the review is:

<b><i>Polling Place and Polling District</i></b>
<i>Monday 2 October 2023</i> Publish notice of Review and issue consultation
<i>Sunday 5 November 2023</i> Deadline for comments and proposed changes
<i>Tuesday 28 November 2023</i> Governance Committee to consideration of comments and proposed scheme and Acting Returning Officer's comments and recommendation of final scheme to Full Council
<i>Wednesday 13 December 2023</i> Full Council considers final scheme.
<i>Thursday 1 February 2024</i> Electoral Register amended to reflect new scheme.

- 4.4. When designating Polling Districts, the Local Authority must seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have reasonable facilities for voting and, as far as practicable, that the Polling Places are accessible to all electors.
- 4.5. When considering the designation of a Polling Place the Local Authority must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled people. In addition, the authority must seek representations from people or organisations that have expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different disabilities. The Election Act 2022 has emphasised that disabled access and general accessibility should be seen as a priority in all aspects of the voting procedure.
- 4.6. Since the last full review in 2019 polling arrangements made for polling have been continually under review, and changes have been made where necessary and when improvements have been possible. The current Polling Scheme is set out at Appendix A, and the turnout by Polling Station voters at the May 2023 Crawley Borough Council Elections at Appendix B.
- 4.7. It is proposed that public consultation begin on 2 October 2023 with details included on the Council's website and invitations sent to local disability organisations requesting comments from an access point of view. Comments will also be sought from all Borough Councillors, County Councillors, the MP for Crawley, and local political parties.
- 4.8. Each Polling Place has been inspected prior to the May 2023 election by the Council's Electoral Services Team and the Council's Safety, Health and Resilience Team, who has particular focused on accessibility for those residents with disabilities and health and safety and access to the venues. Further reviews would also take place during the consultation period.
- 4.9. A report on the consultation and visits will be reported to the Committee's meeting in November to produce a recommendation to the Full Council at its December meeting. This will enable the changes to be made in time for the republication of the Register of Electors in February 2024.

## **5. Polling Issues**

- 5.1. The Returning Officer considers that the current Polling Scheme has generally been working well. However, the issues set out below will need to be considered as part of the review.

### **Polling District LMC – Three Bridges Ward**

- 5.2. For the last two election, the Full Council have approved the use of The Hawth as the Polling Place for the Three Bridges Ward, Polling District LMC. The Hawth is however located just outside of the Three Bridges Ward boundary.
- 5.3. Should The Hawth remain as the Polling Place for LMC, following the review there should be consideration of altering the boundary between Three Bridges and Furnace Green Wards to include The Hawth into Three Bridges Ward. The rationale for this is that it is best practice for Polling Places to be located, wherever possible, within the Ward they are serving.
- 5.4. It would be possible as part of the review to alter the boundary as described above, as there are no residential properties affected in a change to the boundary.

### **Polling Districts LFB and LFD – Ifield Ward**

- 5.5. The Full Council at its meeting on 19 October 2022, reintroduced the use of The Mill School as the Polling Place for Polling Districts LFB and LFD, following its last use in 2019.
- 5.6. During that time Polling District LFB's Polling Place was at Ifield Community Centre, Ifield Drive and LFD was at Wybourne (Ifield West) Community Centre, Hyde Drive, Ifield West.
- 5.7. The layout of The Mill School has meant that it has historically been possible for the school to remain open on polling days.
- 5.8. On Polling Day in May 2023, the Returning Officer / Electoral Services Team received a number of complaints from voters and concerns raised from the Presiding Officer over access to this Polling Station. These complaints were from voters with walking difficulties and those requiring disabled parking near the venue. Since the last use of the venue, the school have changed safety protocol and the exterior gates to the car park were not allowed to be left open during the day or after school hours. Previously this had not been the case and drivers had been able to either drop voters off in the car park or park in the school's disabled bays whilst voting.
- 5.9. The Returning Officer did visit the venue on the Polling Day and noted that there was no other suitable parking in the vicinity.
- 5.10. Further conversations are required with the school but, if the access to the car park remains unusable, the location of the Polling Place should be reconsidered as it would fail to be in an accessible location.

### **Polling District LBB – Creasys Drive former Adventure Playground Site**

- 5.11. For the May 2023 Borough Election, a temporary portakabin, powered by an external generator, was used as the Polling Place, for Polling District LBB – Creasys Drive former Adventure Playground site, as Polling District LBB – covered the whole of the area at Creasys Drive site.

- 5.12. During election day the Council's Safety, Health and Resilience Team, visited the Polling Station for a health and safety inspection, which had not been possible in advance of polling due to the temporary nature of the portakabin.
- 5.13. The findings of the inspection highlight that the portakabin was not a suitable venue to base 'officers' in for a long period of time as the vibrations, and most importantly the noise of the generator, was at a level that was 'intrusive', and should it be used again further migration, such as ear protectors, may be required. Whilst there were toilet facilities provided, via a portaloos, there was no fresh water or kitchen facilities available on site.
- 5.14. One factor that should also be considered is that the combined cost of the hire, i.e., installation and usage of the portakabin, the accessibility ramp, the generation, the portaloos and the security (to protect the equipment the nights prior to Polling Day and following close of poll), was more than the cost of hiring all the other Polling Places combined.
- 5.15. Complaints were also received regarding the use of the portakabin by the Crawley Broadfield Family Hub, which is adjacent to the former Adventure Playground site and shares the car park. Their complaints related to how voters were either not parking in bays or were taking bays used by the Family Hub, and other related matters.
- 5.16. It was acknowledged that the portakabin was only used as a temporary measure as the former Adventure Playground building was deemed as an unsafe venue to serve as a Polling Station, in May 2023, due to damage, caused by weather, vandalism and deterioration as the building was currently not in use. It is believed that there are plans for the building to be repurposed into a depot/workshop. If this is the case, and the building is purposed to be the Polling Place, then it would need to be reassessed, especially in light of the increased accessibility and safety requirements.
- 5.17. If Creays Drive former Adventure Playground site remains as Polling District LBB – the location of the Polling Place in that area, would need further consideration as part of the consultation process.

## **6. Ward Councillor Views**

- 6.1. Ward Councillors will be consulted as part of the review.

## **7. Implications**

- 7.1. The creation or removal of Polling Districts and provision of additional Polling Places has financial implications in terms of the cost of staffing Polling Places, delivery and collection of equipment and hire of premises.
- 7.2. The Council is required to review Polling Districts and Places every five years. All authorities must hold a full Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations during the compulsory review period of 16 months between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 7.3. Representations must be made by the Returning Officer to the Council, and the Council must also actively seek representations from persons it thinks have expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons with different forms of disability.
- 7.4. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

## 8. **Background Papers**

[Local Government Boundary Commission for England Final Recommendations for Crawley Borough Council](#)

[Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations \(electoralcommission.org.uk\)](#)

Report authors and contact officers:

Chris Pedlow – Democracy & Data Manager  
Jill Rozier – Lead Electoral Services Officer