

New Polling Station in Sherwood Ward (Knights' Wood)

For General Purposes Committee 25 February 2021

Summary

Lead Committee: General Purposes

Lead Director: William Benson, Returning Officer/ERO

Head of Service: Jane Clarke, Head of Policy and Governance

Report Author: Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral Services Manager

Classification: Public document (non-exempt)

Wards Affected: Sherwood

Approval Timetable	Date
General Purposes Committee	19 January 2021
Consultation	4 weeks from 20 January to 16 February
General Purposes Committee	25 February 2021

Recommendations

1. That the General Purposes Committee notes the result of the public consultation at appendices A-B.
2. That the General Purposes Committee agrees to set up a new polling district in the Sherwood ward called CC.
3. That the General Purposes Committee agrees to establish a new polling place and polling station at The Skinners' Kent Primary School, The Avenue, Knights Wood, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN2 3GS.
4. That the General Purposes Committee requests the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to make amendments to the Register of Electors as necessary.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the Council to carry out a review of the Borough's polling districts and polling places every five years. The last full review was completed in December 2019. In practice, however, we monitor this more regularly and have, when necessary, made arrangements for alternative polling places/stations with the agreement of the Council.
- 1.2 The last full review went to Full Council on 18 December 2019 and the decision was taken to investigate the provision of an additional polling station in the Sherwood ward, this was to accommodate increased housing growth in the area.
- 1.3 At its meeting on 19th January 2021, the General Purposes Committee agreed to launch a public consultation, with key stakeholders directly invited to respond, on establishing a new polling district and polling place for the Sherwood Ward.

2. Polling Arrangements

- 2.1 The Borough area is divided into 'polling districts' and one or more polling districts can make up a ward (or division for County). The same polling districts are used for each type of election.
- 2.2 A 'polling place' is a geographical area which (usually but not always) holds the 'polling station' on it. It must be within the polling district unless special circumstances make it necessary to designate it outside of the district. Each polling place should be small enough to indicate to electors how they will be able to reach their polling station. If no polling place is designated then the whole polling district is taken to be the polling place.
- 2.3 A 'polling station' is the actual building/room where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district. The suitability of polling stations need to be assessed for their accessibility and facilities for voters, in particular those with a disability or who have access difficulties.

3. Consultation on Polling Arrangements

- 3.1 Following the General Purposes Committee meeting on 19th January 2021, a four-week public consultation was launched to propose setting up a new polling district, and suggesting a new polling place at the Kent Skinners Primary School.
- 3.2 Residents who would be directly affected by the proposals were contacted by letter, inviting them to submit a response, and other key stakeholders were contacted via email.
- 3.3. The responses to the consultation are attached at appendix A, with the response from the Returning Officer included. The responses are overwhelmingly in favour of establishing a new polling station for the Knights Wood estate, and for using the school as the polling station.
- 3.4 There were some representations against the proposals however, which raised the following issues:
- Using a school will further disrupt children’s education.
 - Not enough parking.
 - Concern regarding the amount of traffic to the site.
 - Concern that the access road is only one way in and one way out.
- 3.5 The Council has been advised by the school that it would not need to close on polling days, and so education should not be disrupted by elections. The site has been assessed for parking, which is sufficient, in particular because many electors chose to walk or cycle to their station, and this station is close enough for electors to do this. It is unlikely that there will be traffic issues, as the only roads allocated to this polling station are on the Knights Wood estate.

4. Options Considered

- 4.1 There were no alternative sites suggested as part of the consultation, and so the Committee can only consider two options:

1. Keep the current ward, polling district and polling station arrangements.

This would go against the Full Council decision to provide a new polling station in the Sherwood ward, to accommodate increased housing growth in the area. It would also mean that residents of the Knights Wood area would need to

continue travelling up to two miles to vote at the TN2 Community Centre and drive past Skinners' Kent Primary School.

2. Establish a new polling place and station at Kent Skinners Primary School.

This would be in-keeping with the Full Council decision, and is the only site that has been suggested through public consultation.

5. Preferred Option and Reason

- 5.1 The preferred option is option 2, to establish a new polling place and station at Kent Skinners Primary School, and to allocate the streets and houses listed in appendix F to that polling place.
- 5.2 TN2 Community Centre is currently the polling station for the Sherwood North polling district in the Sherwood ward. The new polling district will enable residents to vote locally at Skinners' Kent Primary School situated on the Knightswood area, which is a 5 to 10 minute walk away.
- 5.3 The residents in this area currently have to travel 2 miles to vote at TN2 Community Centre and drive past Skinners' Kent Primary School, as access to TN2 Community Centre is only via Longfield Road.
- 5.4 The new polling district will need to be agreed by February enabling us to re-publish the Register, to enable residents to vote at Skinners' Kent Primary School for the Kent County Council, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner, Borough elections on 6 May 2021.

6. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Polling station suitability and equalities considerations
- Appendix B: Consultation Methodology
- Appendix C: Consultation responses
- Appendix D: List of streets, properties, and electors

6. Cross Cutting Issues

A. Legal (including the Human Rights Act)

The Representation of People Act 1983, section 18C(2) (“the Act”) places a duty on the council of a district in England to carry out a review of each polling district and polling place in its area at least every five years. (The 1983 Act as substituted by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, section 17).

The council is under an ongoing duty to keep the polling districts and polling places in an area under review. Under section 18C(3) of the Act, a council may carry out a review of some or all of the polling districts or polling places in its area outside of the compulsory review periods as set out under section 18(2) of the Act. Therefore, a review may be undertaken at a time that the Council considers appropriate.

The Council must publish notice of the holding of a review (in the prescribed manner) and seek representations from appropriate groups and electors within the ward. The matters detailed in schedule A1 of the Act should be complied with and in accordance with the Electoral Commission’s guidance. This includes (a) meeting the reasonable requirements of the electors in the ward or any body of those electors; and (b) take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place. The report and schedules A and B address the relevant implications and the Council’s obligation under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Patricia Narebor
Head of Mid Kent Legal Partnership

B. Finance and Other Resources

The final decision report will need to lay out the financial implications of creating an additional polling station and explain the need for a very local station by the population demographic of Knights Wood, with similar consideration for the increase in the numbers of postal votes.

Jane Fineman, Head of Finance, Procurement & Parking, 11 January 2021.

C. Staffing

Staff are appointed at the start of each new election and additional staff will need to be employed for any new Polling station.

Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral services Manager, 6 January 2021.

D. Risk Management

There are no significant implications as a result of this decision.

Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral services Manager, 6 January 2021.

E. Environment and Sustainability

There are no significant implications as a result of this decision.

Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral services Manager, 6 January 2021

F. Community Safety

There are no significant implications as a result of this decision.

Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral services Manager, 6 January 2021

G. Equalities

There are no obvious implications as a result of this decision. Equalities considerations are noted at Appendix B.

Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral services Manager, 6 January 2021

H. Data Protection

There are no significant implications as a result of this decision.

Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral services Manager, 6 January 2021

I. Health and Safety

There are no significant implications as a result of this decision.

Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral services Manager, 6 January 2021

J. Health and Wellbeing

There are no significant implications as a result of this decision.

Mathew Jefferys, Democratic and Electoral services Manager, 6 January 2021