

TITLE Re-Designation of Polling Places

FOR CONSIDERATION BY Council on 17 February 2022

WARD Coronation;

LEAD OFFICER Andrew Moulton – Returning Officer

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that polling places are available to enable residents to cast their votes at elections to be held during 2022.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council agree for any elections held in 2022 that:

- 1) St John's Church, Woodley be designated as the polling place for polling district KCM in Coronation Ward instead of St John's Ambulance, HQ, Woodley;
- 2) The Assistant Director Governance be delegated authority, in consultation with the relevant Ward Member(s), to re-designate any polling place in the Borough which becomes unavailable.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

For the following reason an alternative venue is required to be designated as the polling place in order that residents in that area can cast their votes at the forthcoming election:

All St John's Ambulance buildings are still unavailable for third party bookings; therefore the St John's Ambulance HQ in Woodley is unlikely to be available for the May elections as a polling place for polling district KCM.

Background

Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 places a duty on each Borough Council to divide its area into 'Polling Districts' and to designate a 'Polling Place' for each Polling District.

All the polling places in areas up for election, which were previously designated by Council, have been contacted to ascertain their availability for elections in May 2022. Only one polling place has stated that they will be unavailable and the reasons why are set out below. It is therefore necessary for an alternative venue to be designated as the polling place in order that residents in the relevant area can cast their votes.

St John's Ambulance HQ, Woodley

St John's Ambulance HQ has been the polling place for the KCM polling district of Coronation Ward for several years. Due to all St John's Ambulance buildings being closed nationally because of the Covid-19 pandemic it is unlikely to be available for the forthcoming elections. In order to provide electors with certainty and as much advance warning as possible of where they will be able to vote, there is a need to identify an alternative venue for the elections.

St John's Church, which is situated next door to St John's Ambulance HQ, is proposed as the alternative venue. It has good facilities, ample parking and has provision for disabled access.

The Ward Members have been consulted on the change of venue and have not raised any objections to the alternative proposed.

Re-Designation of Polling Places

Due to the elections continuing to be delivered against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that there may be a need to re-designate other polling places at short notice. Currently, either a Council or a Special Council Executive Committee meeting would need to be convened to make such a decision, however, the delay caused in setting up such a meeting could cause uncertainty for the affected electors. It is therefore proposed that for any elections held in 2022 the Assistant Director Governance, Andrew Moulton, be given authority, in consultation with the relevant Ward Member(s), to re-designate a polling place if it becomes unavailable. This would also cover any by-elections that may need to be held during 2022.

This would enable the Elections Team to notify affected residents about the change of polling place as quickly as possible.

Analysis of Issues

In designating Polling Places, certain rules have to be followed by the Council under the 1983 Act. These include that:

- (i) all electors must be given 'such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances'

(ii) so far as is reasonable and practicable, only places which are accessible to electors who are disabled should be designated, and ...

(iii) the Polling Place should be within the Polling District except where special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the Polling District.

Consideration of the above rules have been taken into account when considering the alternative venue.

There is a risk to the Council if it chooses not to designate the best venue as a polling place.

These changes will be advertised as required by legislation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Cross-Council Implications

None

Public Sector Equality Duty

A completed Equality Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix A.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

There will be no impact on the Council's carbon neutral objective.

List of Background Papers

Representation of the People Act 1983

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