

TITLE	Re-Designation of Polling Places
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 22 February 2024
WARD	Bulmershe & Coronation and Shinfield
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 on 2 May 2024.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council agree that the following Polling Places are designated for the elections to be held on 2 May 2024:

- 1) St John's Church, Woodley be designated as the polling place for polling district KCEb and KDEb in Bulmershe & Coronation Ward instead of St John's Ambulance, HQ, Woodley;
- 2) Shinfield Players Theatre be designated as the polling place for polling district SAE2a in Shinfield Ward instead of White Knights Primary School
- 3) 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 2 May 2024 elections as a polling place for polling district KCEb and KDEb.

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 2024. Two polling places have stated that they will be unavailable and the reasons why are set out below. It is therefore necessary for alternative venues to be designated in order that residents in the relevant area can cast their votes.

St John's Ambulance HQ, Woodley

Since a report seeking the designation of Polling Places was approved at the Council meeting on 18 January 2024, St John's Ambulance HQ has confirmed that they are unavailable for third party bookings.

St John's Church, which is situated next door to St John's Ambulance HQ, is proposed as the alternative venue. It has suitable facilities, good parking provision and is suitably accessible.

Ward Members and the members of the Polling Places Working Group have been consulted on the change of venue and have not raised any objections to the alternative venue proposed.

White Knights Primary School, Shinfield

Since a report seeking the designation of Polling Places was approved at the Council meeting on 18 January 2024, White Knights School has confirmed that they are not able to accommodate a Polling Station on 2 May 2024.

Shinfield Players Theatre is in the same Borough Ward and Parish Council. The venue is an established polling station with sufficient space to accommodate voters from SAE2a. There was no other alternative polling place identified in the polling district and no other suggestions were put forward in consultation responses.

Ward Members and members of the Polling Places Working Group have been consulted on the change of venue. A number of Members have responded to confirm that they do not have any objections. Two Members have responded to raise queries around the potential for increased traffic building up in this location as a result of the polling station being designated at this venue. Further, queries around the pedestrian walking route to this venue and the need for sufficient signage to ensure that residents are able to locate the venue. Discussions are ongoing with Highways officers to consider how these concerns can be mitigated. Signage around the venue will also be carefully considered.

An alternative venue was proposed but as it fell outside of the borough's boundary, could not be considered.

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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