

Agenda Item 77.

TITLE	Re-designation of Polling Place
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Council on 24 March 2016
WARD	Bulmershe and Whitegates
LEAD OFFICER	Andrew Moulton, Head of Governance and Improvement Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

A polling place in which to enable applicable residents to cast their votes at the forthcoming European Union Referendum.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council agree that Bulmershe Leisure Centre be designated as the Polling Place for Bulmershe and Whitegates ward, instead of Earley Home Guard Social Club, for the European Union Referendum scheduled on 23 June 2016.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Due to a long standing commitment Earley Home Guard Social Club is not available as a Polling Place at the forthcoming European Union Referendum therefore another venue has to be designated to enable residents in that area to cast their votes.

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.

Earley Home Guard Social Club has been the polling place for the Whitegates area of the Bulmershe and Whitegates ward for a number of years. However due to a long standing commitment this venue is not available for the forthcoming European Union Referendum, due to be held on 23 June 2016. It should be noted that as usual the venue will be available for the Police and Crime Commissioner and Borough elections scheduled for 5 May 2016.

Bulmershe Leisure Centre is put forward as the most suitable alternative. It is a well-known venue that has excellent facilities, ample parking, is on a bus route and has provision for disabled access.

Christchurch Main Hall in Woodley, which is currently used as a Polling Place for the Bulmershe area of the ward, was also considered but was rejected. The reason why this venue was rejected was because it would mean having four polling stations within one venue and it would be further for voters to travel in order to cast their votes.

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.

Although Bulmershe Leisure Centre is not in the relevant polling district it is within the Bulmershe and Whitegates ward and meets criteria (i) and (ii) above. It is therefore considered that this venue is the best option for the ward. Although the room that will be used at the Leisure Centre is on an upper floor there is a lift which will be accessible to electors who are disabled. The proposal has been notified to the ward members.

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

This change will be advertised as required by legislation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

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

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Cross-Council Implications

N/A

List of Background Papers

Representation of the People Act 1983

Contact Andrew Moulton	Service Governance and Improvement Services
Telephone No 07747777298	Email Andrew.moulton@wokingham.gov.uk
Date 14 March 2016	Version No.

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