

SUBJECT:	<i>Review of Polling Places</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Leader of the Council – Councillor I A Darby</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Bob Smith, Returning Officer</i>
REPORT AUTHOR	<i>Lesley Blue, Interim Democratic and Electoral Services Manager</i> lblue@chiltern.gov.uk Tel: 01494 732010
WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>Hilltop and Townsend Ward</i> <i>Little Kingshill and Little Missenden Ward</i> <i>Seer Green Ward</i>

1. Purpose of Report

To review the location of three polling places in light of lessons learnt from the Combined Elections in 2015 and as a result of the implications of the Bucks County Boundary Review 2012.

To review the location of one polling place in Seer Green Ward that is no longer available for use in 2016 and future elections.

RECOMMENDATION

- i) That the following Polling Place be relocated for the reasons set out in the report:
 - Chesham Grammar School be relocated to White Hill Community Centre
- ii) That the following Polling Place venue be retained and not relocated due to lack of a satisfactory alternative location:
 - Methodist Church, Chesham
- iii) That although the implications of the Buckinghamshire County Electoral Review 2012 changes amalgamated the Little Kingshill and Little Missenden Parish wards to form one ward, a polling place will remain in each ward namely Little Kingshill Parish Hall for Little Kingshill and Little Missenden Village Hall for Little Missenden to minimise disruption for electors in each area of the ward; and
- iv) That the following Polling Place be relocated for the reasons set out in the report:
 - Seer Green Parish Hall be relocated to Seer Green Scout Hall

2. Executive Summary

The proposed review of the location of four polling places has been considered due to lessons learnt from the Combined Parliamentary and Local Elections 2015 and the need to review the locations for the reasons as set out below.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

The four polling place locations outlined in this report have been reviewed and the subsequent recommendations proposed for the following reasons:

- Chesham Grammar School – the room provided by the school is small and inadequate for the size of the electorate for this area

- Methodist Church, Chesham – the location was reviewed due to a small amount of electors raising concern in respect of the access to the polling place
- Little Missenden Village Hall – the location of the polling place be retained to minimise disruption to electors in the ward of Little Kingshill and Little Missenden
- Seer Green Parish Hall – the room previously provided is no longer available to be used as a polling place

4. Content of Report

Periodically a review of all polling places is completed to ensure that all polling places within Chiltern District Council are suitable and adequate for the purposes of conducting a poll within each ward of the District. The key factors taken into consideration are ease of access of the location for the electorate for the parish and district ward and the suitability of the location to accommodate polling place staff for a period of 15 hours and to be of suitable size to ensure that the electorate for the ward can easily vote at the polling place.

All Polling Places within Chiltern District Council were reviewed during 2014 – 15 and all polling places are deemed adequate for the purposes of holding an election at the location and accessible to all electors. The next compulsory review will take place during 2019 – 20.

However following the Combined Elections in 2015 further recommendations are proposed.

4.1 Chesham Grammar School

During 2014 Chesham Grammar School underwent substantial refurbishment to improve facilities for the students and the location of a room available for use as a polling place was changed. The room now offered to the Returning Officer for the purpose of a polling location is a small study room in the sixth form area of the school. The room is significantly smaller than previous rooms provided at the school and although this room was used at the 2015 Elections it was wholly inadequate for the size of the electorate eligible to vote at that polling place. The polling place staff also raised concern that the facilities available to them during the day eg. Kitchen and toilet facilities, although they were adequate were not located immediately near to the room used as a polling place. The current electorate eligible to vote at the Chesham Grammar School is 821.

Due to the high turnout for the Combined Elections 2015 at times the electors visiting the polling place to cast their vote were often required to queue outside the room to maintain the secrecy of the vote and to enable capacity of the room to be adhered to.

An alternative location to the Chesham Grammar School has been sought in the location area and a suitable venue is available within less than a mile of the School and is located at the White Hill Community Centre.

The White Hill Community Centre offers an excellent alternative location within the immediate vicinity of the Grammar School. The location has adequate parking, the location is accessible for disabled electors, the rooms at the venue are of adequate size and the facilities available for polling place staff are suitable and appropriately located for ease of access during the polling day.

District Councillors representing Hilltop and Townsend ward were consulted on their views of the suitability of this polling place.

4.2 Methodist Church, Chesham

During the Combined Elections in 2015 negative feedback was received in respect of the polling place located at the Methodist Church, Chesham due to the access of this location. The Methodist Church has a steep access drive to the location and although parking and direct access is on the level the drive to the car park can be difficult to access for less mobile or disabled electors. The location has been approved by the Disability Access Group during a previous review of polling places in 2011 and no changes have been made to the location since this review. The current electorate eligible to vote at the Chesham Methodist Church is 1242.

The rear access to the Methodist Church does provide easy access for a large residential area immediately at the rear of the venue.

Alternative locations were sought in this area but no other venues were deemed suitable as appropriate alternatives. Locating an additional polling place at the Chesham Town Hall was considered as an option but this was ruled out as although the Town Hall could easily accommodate another polling place it would result in a significant walk or further journey for electors in the immediate area of the Methodist Church. This may then result in more electors considering a change in location to be unsatisfactory.

District Councillors representing Hilltop and Townsend ward were consulted on their views of the suitability of this polling place.

4.3 Little Missenden Village Hall

Due to the Buckinghamshire County Electoral Review 2012 which merged the Little Kingshill and Little Missenden parish wards to form one ward which came into effect from October 2014 it was considered whether two polling places should be retained in this ward ie. Little Kingshill Parish Hall and Little Missenden Village Hall.

The current electorate eligible to vote at Little Missenden Village Hall is 599. The current electorate eligible to vote at the Little Kingshill Village Hall is 658. Therefore the combined electorate for Little Kingshill and Little Missenden is 1257.

Following further discussion with the ward member and the Chairman of the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee it has been agreed that the two polling places will remain to minimise disruption to the electorate in this ward.

4.4 Seer Green Parish Hall

The Interim Democratic and Electoral Services Manager has been advised that the Parish Hall will no be available in the future for use as a polling place.

The Interim Democratic and Electoral Services Manager has visited alternative locations in the Seer Green ward namely Seer Green Jubilee Hall and Seer Green Scout Hall. Each location is suitable in terms of accessibility and facilities available. The Jubilee Hall is within the confines of the Seer Green C of E Combined School and although separate access to the hall is available, facilities within the Hall are used on a daily basis by the school and therefore if this location was used as a polling place the school would be required to partially close for some activities. In accordance with the Electoral Commission Guidance closure of schools due to use of premises as a polling place should be avoided where possible.

The alternative location in Seer Green is the Scout Hall, Park Place, which, although is near to the Chiltern Montessori School in the village and shares a car park it does not impede on the school facilities and premises. The Scout Hall is completely separate from the school and has good accessibility and facilities.

The electorate eligible to vote in Seer Green Ward is 1755.

5. Consultation

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager has consulted with the relevant ward members on the proposed changes for the polling places. As a requirement of an interim polling place review political parties within the Chiltern District have also been consulted.

6. Options

- i) That no change be made to the location of polling places
- ii) That a polling place remains at Chesham Grammar School but this would result in potential negative feedback from electors and staff at this venue.
- iii) That a polling place at Little Missenden Village Hall but this would cause unnecessary disruption for the electorate in the Little Kingshill and Little Missenden Ward.
- iv) That the Jubilee Hall Seer Green is used as a polling place but this would result in partial closure of the Seer Green C of E Combined School.

7. Corporate Implications

There are no identified direct corporate implications as a result of this report.

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

The report links to the need to maintain accessibility for all electors to polling places within the District.

9. Next Step

If the recommendations are agreed by the Committee the necessary changes will be made to the electoral software to reflect the changes in the system and on the correspondence sent to electors in the District.

Background Papers:	Bucks County Electoral Review 2012 Electoral Commission Polling Place Review Guidance 2012
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