

# Administrative Committee

7 October 2021



<b>Title</b>	Use of Polling Stations at May 2021 election
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note
<b>Report Author</b>	Victoria Statham, Group Head of Corporate Governance
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	All Wards
<b>Exempt</b>	No
<b>Exemption Reason</b>	N/A
<b>Corporate Priority</b>	This item is not in the current list of Corporate Priorities but still requires a Committee decision
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Committee is asked to:</b>  Note the steps taken to implement the Polling Station review and to ensure a Covid secure election took place.
<b>Reason for Recommendation</b>	A request from the Administrative Committee to discuss the issue.

## 1. Key issues

- 1.1 The 6 May 2021 elections went ahead, for Surrey County Council Councillors, The Police and Crime Commissioner and a by-election for the Staines ward, despite the continuing pandemic situation. Government guidance specified the robust measures that the Council were required to take to hold a Covid secure election. There were stringent safety measures in place to fulfil the requirements to protect staff, the public and all the candidates and those involved in this democratic process.
- 1.2 On the 19 December 2019 the Council agreed a change to some Polling Stations as set out in that report which can be found at **Appendix A** of this report. These revisions were never put into practice because of the cancellation of the 2020 elections.
- 1.3 To ensure that this election was run in a safe and lawful way elections staff undertook a risk assessment of each polling station. Each premises had to have suitable entrance and exit points and be large enough to have social distancing. To have those essential elements in place it was necessary to make some additional changes to the stations that we used at those elections. The risk assessment of Shepperton Village Hall (which previously had 4 Polling Stations within that one Polling Place) showed that with a

potential 5,000 voters these could not be safely processed at that centre. The elections team also encountered issues in contacting some of the venues and some have permanently closed. Attached at **Appendix B** is an explanation of the changes made and **Appendix C** is the full list of polling stations for these elections.

- 1.4 The format of Poll Cards is set by the Electoral Commission but the change was highlighted upon them. A change in their normal station was specified in bold text. We were conscious that not everyone would take that information on-board, so comprehensive communications were undertaken directing residents to ensure they check their Polling Cards as to where they should attend.
- 1.5 All reasonable steps were taken to advise the public of the change in Polling Stations. All forms of media were use including newsletters, notice boards, social media and large signage at suitable affected Polling Stations.
- 1.6 Inside the polling stations several measures were in place to ensure the safety of all those working and voting. Each member of staff had masks and a visor. There were screens between the staff and the voters. Voters were encouraged to bring their own pen to mark their ballot paper and those provided in the station were sanitised between uses. Hand sanitiser was available at the entrances and exits. There was a limit of 3 voters in each station at any one time. With this limit we were conscious that this could cause queues outside of premises, but electors are used to that in these times and they were generally very understanding of the situation and the ned for the precautions that were taken.
- 1.7 There was very successful drive to encourage people to vote by post and we received a great number of new applications. These were processed to ensure all those who were eligible and wanted to were able to vote by post.
- 1.8 The count was also subject to a number of measures to ensure this was also Covid secure. The polling day and the count was very successful in achieving this aim.

## **2. Options analysis and proposal**

- 2.1 The use of the Polling Stations is kept under review for each election.

## **3. Financial implications**

- 3.1 The costs of the election are carefully monitored and are appropriately re-charged to the relevant organisations.

## **4. Other considerations**

- 4.1 None

## **5. Equality and Diversity**

- 5.1 Each Polling Station is assessed for accessibility for all electors both before the election taking place and during the day.

## **6. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 There are no specific measures.

## **7. Timetable for implementation**

- 7.1 Not applicable as the election has taken place.

**Background papers: There are none.**

**Appendices:**

**Appendix A** Report and appendices from Council 19 December 2019.

**Appendix B** List of changes to Polling Stations

**Appendix C** Polling Stations by Electoral Area