

REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE - 10 FEBRUARY 2021

PART I – NOT DELEGATED

5. **POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES – RETURNING OFFICER TEMPORARY DELEGATED AUTHORITY (CED)**

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 Approval is being sought to grant temporary delegated authority to allow the Returning Officer for Three Rivers to make any urgently required temporary changes to polling places in the District for the forthcoming local government elections, currently scheduled for Thursday 6 May 2021, in the event of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, meaning that changes to voting arrangements for voters are urgently required.

2. **Details**

- 2.1 Combined local government elections are scheduled to take place in Three Rivers on Thursday 6 May 2021, to include County Council, previously postponed Police & Crime Commissioner and District Council elections. In addition a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum in Chorleywood, and if contested parish polls in Watford Rural and Batchworth parish areas will take place. Other casual vacancies may also occur before May which would be combined with these polls should any vacancies be declared by the date of the Notice of Election, planned for Friday 19 March 2021.
- 2.2 At the conclusion of these elections any enforced polling station changes will be returned back to the previously agreed polling scheme, and a report made to the next Regulatory Services Committee meeting.
- 2.3 In the event of any changes the Returning Officer will advise all necessary parties involved in the elections including Voters, Election Agents and Candidates standing for election.
- 2.4 These temporary awarded powers are to take effect for the combined local elections currently scheduled to take place on Thursday 6 May 2021, but will also apply should these poll be postponed to a later date.

3. **Background**

- 3.1 Under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 the local authority has a duty to review the polling districts and places every 4 years. The last review was held in 2019 and changes approved by the Regulatory Services Committee in February 2020.

4. **Financial, Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications**

- 4.1 None specific.

5. **Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The Representation of the People Act 1983 section 18D requires that local authorities designate the polling places within their Parliamentary constituencies. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, Returning Officers have the right to use certain public buildings for use as polling stations at elections.
- 5.2 Section 18B (4) of the RPA 1983 states that in conducting a review of polling places the authority must:
- a) Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
 - b) Seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
- 5.3 In addition the polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district.
- 5.4 The Returning Officer will ensure that all legal requirements are complied with in the event that late changes to polling stations are required.

6. **Recommendation**

- 6.1 The Committee recommend temporary delegated authority be given to the Returning Officer in order to make any necessary changes to polling places that may occur during the coronavirus pandemic to enable voters to carry out their democratic right to vote at local government elections scheduled this May.

Report prepared by: Michael Summerville, Electoral Services Manager.

Background Papers

Guidance from the Electoral Commission and Association of Electoral Administrators.

APPENDICES / ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: List of current polling places.