

**REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES
BASILDON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

COMMENTS OF THE RETURNING OFFICER

Introduction

I am writing to provide my comments regarding the suitability of existing polling stations that fall within the Borough of Basildon Council for which I am the Returning Officer.

I am the Returning Officer for the following wards for Basildon Borough Council: -

- Billericay East
- Billericay West
- Burstead
- Castledon & Crouch
- Fryerns
- Laindon Park
- Langdon Hills
- Lee Chapel South
- Nethermayne
- Pitsea North West
- Pitsea South East
- St Martins
- Wickford North
- Wickford Park

My comments focus on the suitability of the existing and any proposed polling station in relation to:

- Access for all electors including those with a disability
- Facilities for the required staff

My comments have been informed by the following:

- The outcome of the previous statutory review of polling places and polling stations undertaken by the council which found that the vast majority of the polling stations provided good access for all electors including those with a disability
- Previous visits to polling stations on various occasions to assess their suitability
- Any complaints received from electors at previous elections
- The findings of polling station supervisors who undertook an assessment on polling day in May 2023

No complaints were received from electors at the last election in May 2023 and electors found they had the benefit of voting at the same polling station which they were familiar with. Whilst the council has the option of moving a polling place, electors could find it more difficult to get to the new one and consideration should be given as to whether a change in polling district or place will bring a benefit to the electors in that area.

Specific Issues

I am mindful that there will be changes in wards and subsequently polling districts and polling places arising from the recent Electoral Review which will need to be considered as part of the review but I set out below issues which I am aware of that have arisen in connection with the existing polling districts and polling places.

Ward: Billericay East

Polling District: BB Norsey

Polling Place: Mayflower School, Stock Road, Billericay CM12 0RT

Mayflower School is used as a polling place and is a 'double polling station'. Previously we have used the two demountable classrooms that are separate from the main school building. The school has since raised concerns over safeguarding for the pupils and if we are to continue to use the demountable classrooms then the school will have to close to the pupils on polling day.

Complaints were received from the parents when the school did close for a previous election and concerns raised that if the school does have to close for elections, this will cause disruption to the pupil's education and families in arranging care.

At the May 2023 polls we used an alternative classroom at the front of the school, but this caused issues for the staff to accommodate the electorate as it was too small to accommodate a double polling station. After several meetings with the school, it has been agreed that they will allocate two classrooms at the front of the school which have access to them without entering the main school premises and has a ramp for wheelchair access.

I have considered this option and I am confident that this can work for future elections for both the electors, election staff and the school, but monitoring will be necessary to ensure no difficulties are encountered in the future.

Ward: Nethermayne (from May 2024 will be Langdon Hills)

Polling District: Westley Green

Polling Place: Lee Chapel South Community Centre, The Knares, Basildon SS16 5SA

Westley Green polling district was created in 2019 from the outcome of the new development in Dry Street with over 700 new properties being built. It was proposed that the polling place for the new polling district be temporarily designated as "the Polling District"; this was to provide the ability for the Returning Officer to locate a portacabin on appropriate land in the polling district or use Lee Chapel South Community Centre until the school or community centre in this area is built which can then be allocated as the polling place although the centre is not ideally located for electors in the Westley Green polling district.

Ward: Pitsea South East

Polling District: Rokescroft

Polling Place: Maydells AP Scheme, Maydells, Pitsea SS13 3HS

The current polling place is designated as The Place, Northlands Pavement, Pitsea. As Returning Officer I have been advised that these premises will not be available in May 2024 and the premises will be demolished for redevelopment. An alternative location has been identified at Maydells AP Scheme, Maydells, Pitsea SS13 3HS. This alternative is in proximity of the existing polling place, has good access and can accommodate electors and staff and so I would consider to be reasonable and appropriate.

Ward: Wickford Park

Polling District: North Crescent

Polling Place: St Andrew's Church, London Road, Wickford SS12 0AN

I am aware of a new proposed polling district in the Wickford Park ward arising from the outcome of the recent Electoral Review which has taken in a part of the Wickford Castledon ward.

I note that St Andrew's Church, London Road, Wickford has been identified as a suitable polling place.

Conclusion

Aside from the above comments mentioned above I consider that all polling places in the Borough of Basildon are suitable in relation to access for all electors including those with a disability and facilities for the staff are being met.

Scott Logan

Returning Officer, Basildon Borough Council