

## DESIGNATION OF POLLING PLACE – WARD OF HEATHLANDS

### Executive Summary

The Council is responsible for the designation of polling places across the Borough and must comply with the following access requirements in accordance with the Elections Act 2022 for all polling places;

- ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.

Following the conclusion of the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023, officers have continued to work with Surrey County Council, partners and The Lighthouse Barnsbury regarding the feasibility of the installation of a permanent ramp at The Lighthouse Barnsbury. To date the accessibility issues unfortunately have not been resolved, therefore The Lighthouse Barnsbury is not a viable option to be used as a polling place at the Woking Borough Council and Police and Crime Commissioner elections on 2 May 2024.

The Council is asked to agree the designation of Woking Sportsbox as the polling place for the Barnsbury polling district (D5) in the Heathlands Ward, to take effect in advance of the 2024 Woking Borough Council, Police and Crime Commissioner and Parliamentary General elections.

It is recognised that The Lighthouse Barnsbury premises would be preferable as the designated polling place within the Barnsbury polling district from a location perspective. Officers will continue to liaise with The Lighthouse Barnsbury and Surrey County Council and in the event that the current circumstances change will reconsider whether it would be suitable for use as a polling place in the future.

### Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

- (i) the Council's appreciation be expressed to The Lighthouse Barnsbury for its assistance in recent years; and
- (ii) the Woking Sportsbox be designated as the polling place for the Barnsbury polling district (D5) in the Heathlands Ward;

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendations set out above.

**Background Papers:** None.

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## Designation of Polling Place – Ward of Heathlands

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## Designation of Polling Place – Ward of Heathlands

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council is responsible for the designation of polling places across the Borough.
- 1.2 The current designated polling place for the Barnsbury polling district (D5) in the Heathlands Ward is The Lighthouse Barnsbury on Ash Road. The venue was used as an alternative polling place for the May Polls held in 2023 to the Barnsbury Primary School due to feedback received from the Headteacher and parents of the school. Concerns over safeguarding and the disruption caused to pupils was raised following the May Polls in 2022.
- 1.3 Whilst the current designated polling place is centrally located within the polling district, it is not accessible to all electors. The main entrance/exit is not accessible by ramp and there is no level access available, therefore making this venue inaccessible to disabled electors. A temporary ramp to the polling place was installed for the May 2023 Poll at no cost, however any future installations would be at a significant cost to the Council per election.
- 1.4 Following the conclusion of the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023, Officers have continued to work with Surrey County Council, partners and The Lighthouse Barnsbury regarding the feasibility of the installation of a permanent ramp at The Lighthouse Barnsbury. To date the accessibility issues unfortunately have not been resolved, therefore The Lighthouse Barnsbury is not a viable option to be used as a polling place at the Woking Borough Council and Police and Crime Commissioner elections on 2 May 2024.

### 2.0 Polling Place Designation

- 2.1 The Returning Officer of an Authority can designate a polling station but only the Council (or suitable Sub-Committee) can designate a polling place. The Electoral Commission definitions are given below:

#### Polling Place

- 2.2 “A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.
- 2.3 We are aware that some authorities designate the entire polling district as the polling place. However, Section 18B(4)(e) of the RPA 1983 states that ‘the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station’. We therefore consider that polling places should always be defined more specifically than simply the polling district - for example, by designating the name of the polling place (normally a particular building or area and its environs).”

#### Polling Station

- 2.4 “A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for the election.”

#### Polling District

- 2.5 “A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election.”

#### Identifying a Suitable Polling Place

- 2.6 Local authorities must comply with the following legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places:

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- the Council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors;
- the polling place must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified in the district); and
- the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station.

### Accessibility

2.7 Local authorities must also comply with the following access requirements, they must:

- seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
- seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled.

2.8 The Council must have regard to the accessibility to disabled persons of potential polling stations in any place which it is considering designating as a polling place or the designation of which as a polling place it is reviewing.

### **3.0 Proposed Polling Places**

- 3.1 Woking Sportsbox is located on Egley Road adjacent to the Hoe Valley School and is therefore within the Barnsbury polling district.
- 3.2 Woking Sportsbox has a large foyer/cafe area available and suitable to be used as a polling station. Multiple polling stations can be accommodated with ease if required and Woking Sportsbox is capable of accommodating all voters going into and out of the polling stations even in the event of a high turnout.
- 3.3 A residential development is currently being built on the land on the west side of Egley Road, under 0.5 miles of Woking Sportsbox, which will include 86 dwellings and a 62-bed care home building. Once completed and occupied the electorate of Barnsbury polling district will significantly increase.
- 3.4 Woking Sportsbox is accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place and has excellent disabled access, by way of level access, automatic double doors and multiple designated disabled parking bays.
- 3.5 Woking Sportsbox has a large car park and a subsequent overflow car park available which can be accessed and used by electors at peaks times (school drop off/pickup) on polling day.
- 3.6 The Headteacher of Hoe Valley School has been consulted over the use of Woking Sportsbox as a polling place and no objections or concerns have been raised by the school.
- 3.7 Electors within the Barnsbury polling district will be notified of the change of polling place in writing, by email or by letter. The Marketing and Communications Team will also issue a press release to raise awareness among electors.

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### 4.0 Corporate Strategy

- 4.1 Ensuring that all Polling Stations are fully accessible to all residents of Woking Borough Council is a priority of the (Acting) Returning Officer and the Electoral Commission. The Woking Strategy For All highlights the importance of engagement with all residents of the Borough and the Council will continue to seek to improve access to the electoral process.

### 5.0 Implications

#### Finance and Risk

- 5.1 In regard to risks, the Council is required to appoint polling places within each polling area. The decision to designate a site as a Polling Place falls to the Council rather than the Returning officer. The Council needs to make a decision now to enable the Returning Officer to issue polling cards to local electors, advising them of the location of their polling station. The poll cards are to be issued before the Council next meets; if a decision is not reached at the meeting on 8 February 2024, an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council will need to be arranged in the coming weeks for the purpose of designating one of the two options as the Polling Place.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.2 Designating Woking Sportsbox as the polling place for Barnsbury polling district ensures that all electors in the area have suitable facilities for voting.
- 5.3 Woking Sportsbox is accessible for all electors in the polling district.

#### Legal

- 5.4 The Council has a duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983 to designate a polling place for each polling district.

### 6.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 The proposed designation of Woking Sportsbox as a polling place was raised with Ward Councillors and the Leader of the Council.

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