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The person dealing with this matter is Paul Thorogood

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Patricia Narebor
Deputy Director Legal and Democratic Services
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Bexleyheath
Kent DA6 7AT

Dear Patricia

Review of polling districts and polling places.

Thank you for your letter of 2 August. I am writing to you as the Acting Returning Officer for the parliamentary constituencies of Bexleyheath and Crayford and Old Bexley and Sidcup in respect of the review of polling districts and polling places being undertaken by the Council. Whilst the review is of the polling districts and polling places for parliamentary elections, I support the intention that the same districts and places should be used for other electoral contests since this will bring consistency and avoid any confusion for electors.

I have carefully considered the information provided and the Council's proposals that the polling districts and polling places within the parliamentary constituencies of Bexleyheath and Crayford and within Old Bexley and Sidcup should be substantially the same. I agree with this approach.

I am also aware that the polling districts and polling places agreed by the Acting Returning Officer in the Royal Borough of Greenwich responsible for the Erith and Thamesmead constituency are those previously agreed by the London Borough of Bexley and support their adoption for other electoral contests, in addition to UK parliamentary elections. Confirmation will be sought from Returning Officer in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. I also note that you will be recommending to the Royal Borough of Greenwich and their Acting Returning Officer that there should be a change in polling place in polling district BV2E.

Polling Districts

I agree with the Council's proposals that most polling districts should remain unchanged. The current districts continue to meet the requirements set in the Electoral Commission Guidance, with well-defined boundaries, suitable transport links and with voters able to cross the polling districts without obstacle. I have considered the data relating to elector numbers and do not believe that these require any changes to polling districts, although I am suggesting some changes to polling stations below to ensure that the number of electors can be suitably managed within the polling place.

I have considered the proposed changes to polling districts in Northumberland Heath. I am mindful of the difficulties in identifying a suitable polling place in polling district NH1B. I agree that the proposed changes are appropriate and confirm my intention to use the Club House on Northumberland Heath Recreation Ground as the polling station within that polling place for the modified polling district NH1B.

Polling Places and polling stations

I note that the Council must seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and have regard to the needs of electors who are disabled.

The guidance stipulates that in assessing the suitability of a room or area for use as a polling station, I must consider several factors to ensure the most efficient throughput of voters, especially considering the new requirements for checking voters' photographic identification. Specifically, the following conditions should be ensured:

- **Efficient Voter Throughput and ID Checking:** The size and layout of the polling station should facilitate a smooth flow of voters, minimising congestion, and queues, especially during peak times. Consideration must be given to the time required for checking photographic ID.
- **Privacy for Voters:** Each polling station must provide suitable conditions for voters to present their photographic identification and cast their vote in private if requested.
- **Efficient Conduct of Elections:** The layout should support election staff in conducting their duties efficiently and effectively.
- **Observation of Voting Process:** The design should allow entitled observers to monitor the voting process without compromising the secrecy of the ballot.

All Polling Places and Polling Station have been reviewed considering feedback from Presiding Officers appointed for both the 2024 Greater London Assembly Elections and the Parliamentary election in July, and all polling places and stations were also inspected by staff from the Electoral Services Team. Whereas inevitably, there were some issues raised which will need to be resolved between the managers/owners of polling places, I believe that all the polling places, and the polling stations within them, proposed in Appendix 1 are suitable.

I also agree the changes set out in Appendix 2, noting that changes in the Erith and Thamesmead constituency will need to be confirmed by the Royal Borough of Greenwich for parliamentary elections.

I shall also wish to consider any representations made during the consultation period and to respond to any issues raised, as well as working with the Electoral Services Team to implement any changes to how we conduct elections suggested, particularly by those supporting or representing people with disabilities, to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place and polling station is accessible to electors who are disabled.

I also know that there are very few polling places that are suitable to host polling stations in each polling district and that the Electoral Services Team has made extensive enquiries to identify suitable polling places.

In confirming the polling stations within the polling places proposed, I consider that the polling stations meet the requirements set out by the Electoral Commission and legislation including in respect of accessibility for disabled voters. Where necessary,

Electoral Services staff will implement temporary measures (e.g. temporary ramps), provide any equipment needed to support electors and staff in polling stations will be trained and available to assist electors.

I have also reviewed the information about projected numbers of electors. According to Electoral Commission guidance, no polling station should be allocated more than 2,250 electors. This excludes postal voters and those not eligible to vote. Where a polling district has been allocated more than 2,250 electors, the electorate is split between two polling stations in the same venue. This is known as a double polling station.

As set out in Appendix 1 I intend to continue to use the existing double polling stations indicated by an "X" suffix to the polling station code in Appendix 1.

Having reviewed the analysis of projected elector numbers, I also propose that double polling stations in the polling places described in Appendix 2 should be established by the Electoral Services Team when the numbers of registered voters, taking into account postal votes, means that this would support the effective and efficient management of the election.

Summary

I agree the initial proposals for polling places and the proposed changes which are set out in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, respectively. I will wish to review any responses made during the consultation period before these proposals are finalised.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Thorogood', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Paul Thorogood

Acting Returning Officer