

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS 2023 **(ACTING) RETURNING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The scheduled local elections in May 2024 will be combined with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex. A UK Parliamentary election is required to be held by January 2025 and there is the possibility that this could be combined with the local government elections on 2nd May 2024.

Wherever possible electors should continue to vote at their existing polling station so that disruption and any confusion about where to vote can be kept to a minimum. However I'm mindful that many of the proposed changes are as a result of the Local Government Boundary Commission Electoral Review and are therefore for the most part unavoidable.

Castle Point Borough Council normally elects by thirds and the all-out elections in May 2024 will present a number of challenges. Firstly there is a change from 14 wards to 13 wards and some of the remaining wards have been renamed and boundary lines adjusted meaning that many of the electorate are either voting in a different ward or location than they did previously. The changes will also affect the total number of candidates and the voting process for electors i.e. voting for three candidates rather than one. Communication of new voting arrangements to electors in advance of the issue of poll cards for the elections is key and increased signage on polling day, particularly at new polling station venues or in those wards with new boundaries, should lessen the impact of any changes and support the delivery of successful elections.

Provision of polling stations in the borough has generally run well at previous elections with no major issues. Although as (A)RO I have a legal right to use schools as polling stations on polling day wherever possible I would rather use alternative locations to avoid causing any disruption to the school timetable however in some wards there are unfortunately no suitable alternative venues available for use.

The proposal would provide for 29 polling places with a total of 38 polling stations. My comments on the proposals are set out below and have been informed by the following:

- It is the statutory responsibility of the Returning Officer for the particular election to provide a sufficient number of polling stations and allot the electors to those polling stations in such a manner as the Returning Officer thinks is the most convenient.
- The accessibility of venues for disabled voters, under the Elections Act 2022 the Returning Officer is required to take all reasonable steps to provide equipment to support disabled voters to vote independently and in secret at the polling station.
- The capacity of the venue to accommodate the new checking processes following the introduction of Voter ID under the Elections Act 2022.
- Electoral Commission guidance on polling station staff ratios based on the number of electorate.

WARD	POLLING DISTRICTS	POLLING STATION & POLLING PLACE	(ACTING) RETURNING OFFICER'S COMMENTS
Appleton	AA2, AB2, AD1, BF3	Main Hall, Kents Hill School, Kents Hill Road Junior School, Kents Hill Road, Benfleet, SS7 5PS	Agree with proposal.
	AF2, AF5, BJ	St Mary's Church Hall, 376 High Road, Benfleet, SS7 5HN	Agree with proposal.
Canvey Island Central	AJ	Methodist Church Hall, Methodist Church, Waarden Road, Canvey Island, SS8 9AB	Agree with proposal.
	AK1	St Nicholas Church Hall, St Nicholas Church, Long Road, Canvey Island, SS8 0JR	Agree with proposal.
	AS2, AT2, AT3	Main Hall, Canvey Junior School, Long Road, Canvey Island, SS8 0JG	My preference would be to locate polling stations in the same ward as this is a legislative requirement unless there are special circumstances which make it desirable to designate an area outside the district. This would eliminate the potential risk of ballot papers for the wrong ward in the wrong ballot box. However moving an electorate of 1452 to a different location carries a risk of causing voter confusion. I need to undertake a risk assessment of this site versus another site e.g. St Nicholas Church Hall before a final decision is recommended.
Canvey Island East	AL1, AM, AO2	Clubhouse, Canvey Football Club, Park Lane, Canvey Island, SS8 7PX	Agree with proposal.

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Canvey Island East	AL2, AP3	St Anne's Church Hall, St Annes's Church, St Annes' Road, Canvey Island, SS8 7NR	Agree with proposal
Canvey Island North	AN	Clubhouse, Canvey Island Rugby Club, 100 Dovervelt Road, Canvey Island, SS8 8EJ	Agree with proposal.
	AO1, AP2	War Memorial Hall, High Street, Canvey Island, SS8 7RB	Agree with proposal.
Canvey Island South	AP1	Main Hall, Lubbins Park Primary School, May Avenue, Canvey Island, SS8 7HF	King George V Pavilion should be explored as an alternative polling station to move away from using the school on polling day. The hall has good facilities and is in a central location for the electorate in the district. There is a small lip/step to the main entrance door at the hall but this may be overcome by providing a small ramp on election day.
	AQ	Hall at Cisca House, Long Road, Canvey Island, SS8 0JA	Agree with proposal.
	AT1	Canvey Junior School, Long Road, Canvey Island, SS8 0JG	Agree with proposal.
Canvey Island Winter Gardens	AK2, AS1, AU1	School Hall, Northwick Park Primary & Nursery School, Third Avenue, Canvey Island, SS8 9SU	Agree with proposal.

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Canvey Island Winter Gardens	AU2, AV1	Studio 1, Waterside Farm Sports Centre, Somnes Avenue, Canvey Island	Due to the volume of electorate now voting at Northwick Park School I agree that additional venues should be explored to use as polling stations in this area. Waterside Farm as a location is very accessible and there is plenty of parking on site however the election count is located in the centre and Studio 1 is used for the storage of equipment in the evening. The sports centre is also well used by the public during the day and can be very busy at times. The Jubilee Hall (located behind the sports centre) would be a more suitable venue and should be explored as a potential polling station.
	AV1, AV3	Winter Gardens Baptist Church Hall, Hilton Road, Canvey Island, SS8 9QA	Agree with proposal.
Hadleigh St. James	BC1, BD	St Barnabus Church, Woodfield Road, Hadleigh, SS7 2EJ	Agree with proposal.
	BE	Hadleigh Old Fire Station (HOFS), 20 High Street, Hadleigh, Benfleet, SS7 2PB	This is a more suitable location for the elector than the current polling station in terms of accessibility and parking.
St George's	AZ, BK3	Committee / Team Room Woodside Pavilion, Woodside Park, Benfleet, SS7 4PA	Agree with proposal.
	BA, BB	St George's Church Hall, Rushbottom Lane, Benfleet, SS7 4DN	Agree with proposal.

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St Mary's	AF1	Richmond Small Hall Richmond Avenue, Benfleet, SS7 5HE	Agree with proposal.
St Mary's	AG1	Benfleet Methodist Church, High Road, Benfleet, SS7 5LH	Agree with proposal.
St Mary's	BF2, BG	Richmond Hall, Richmond Avenue, Benfleet, SS7 5HE	Agree with proposal.
St Michaels	BC2, BC3, BN1	Lounge, Westwood Court, Beresford Close, Hadleigh, SS7 2SU	Agree with proposal.
St Michael's	BO1	St Michael's Church, St Michael's Road, Daws Heath, Benfleet, SS7 2UW	This is a good location for the electorate in this polling district and offers good facilities in terms of accessibility and parking. Whilst Daws Heath Social Club is also a suitable venue for use as a polling station parking on site is limited so a reduction in the number of electorate at the venue would be an improvement. There is the potential to also move the electorate from BO2 and BP to this location however the social club is nearer for a number of voters in those districts and all of the electorate are accustomed to voting at the location.
St Michael's	BO2, BP	Daws Heath Social Club, Daws Heath Road, Benfleet, SS7 2UA	Please see comments for St Michael's Church above. Agree with proposal.

WARD	POLLING DISTRICTS	POLLING STATION & POLLING PLACE	(ACTING) RETURNING OFFICER'S COMMENTS
Tarpots	AA1, AB1, AD2, AF4, BF1, BF4	Holy Family Church, 661 High Road, Benfleet, SS7 5SF	Agree with proposal.
Tarpots	BK2, BL2	Thundersley Methodist Church Hall, Kennington Avenue, Benfleet, SS7 4BS	Agree with proposal.
Thundersley North	AF3, BK1	Small Hall St. Peter's Church, Church Road, Benfleet, SS7 3HG	Agree with proposal.
Thundersley North	AW, AX1	External classroom, Thundersley Primary School, Hart Road, Benfleet, SS7 3PT	Agree with proposal.
Thundersley North	AY2	Foyer, Runnymede Hall, Kiln Road, Benfleet, SS7 1TF	Agree with proposal.
Thundersley South	AF6, AG2, AH	Reception Meeting Room, The King John School, Shipwrights Drive, Benfleet, SS7 1RQ	Agree with proposal.
Thundersley South	AX2, AY1, BN2	Runnymede Hall, Kiln Road, Benfleet, SS7 1TF	As the foyer of the hall is already being used as a polling station in Thundersley North Ward there may be some confusion for the electorate about how to access the main hall however this can be overcome with additional signage at the hall.