

Council

23 April 2026

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Vince Maple, Leader of the Council

Report from: Richard Hicks, Chief Executive/Returning Officer

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Summary

This report recommends changes to two polling stations in Watling, Rochester West and Borstal and Fort Pitt wards in preparation for the May 2027 Elections.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Council is requested to:

1.2. Approve the scheme of Polling Districts and Polling Places as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, in respect of Parliamentary elections and to designate the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places as the Polling Districts and Polling Places for Local Government elections.

1.3. Note the designation of all polling stations recommended by the Returning Officer, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

1.4. Note the maps showing the recommended new polling districts for Watling Ward, as set out in Appendix 3.

1.5. Note the maps showing the recommended polling places for Rochester West and Borstal and Fort Pitt Wards, as set out in Appendix 4.

1.6. Authorise the Chief Executive in conjunction with the Informal Working Group on Polling Districts and Polling Places to designate a Polling Place where no suitable polling station is available within the original Polling Place.

1.7. Note that the Chief Executive will consult with the Informal Working Group on Polling Districts and Polling Places if it is necessary to change any polling stations prior to the elections in May 2027.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. The duty to divide Medway into polling districts is a matter that cannot be determined by Cabinet under the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended). Therefore, this is a matter for Council.

3. Background

- 3.1. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide Medway into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district for UK Parliamentary elections. It also has to keep these arrangements under review. It is good practice to undertake the same exercise for local government elections and in doing so, every effort must be made to ensure that the polling district scheme mirrors as closely as possible that agreed for Parliamentary elections. A full polling district review was carried out for the implementation of new Ward arrangements in 2024. It is now only necessary to review two polling districts where the polling places are unavailable or unsuitable.

4. Polling Districts

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. In England, each parish is to be a separate polling district. This means that a parish must not be in a polling district which has a part of either a different parish within it, or any un-parished part of the local authority area within it, unless special circumstances apply. Those special circumstances could arise if, for example, the parish has only a small number of electors and it is not practicable for the parish to be its own polling district.
- 4.3. When a parish or community is not a separate polling district the special circumstances and the recommendation resulting from these should be clearly set in the review document for the Council or relevant committee to consider.

Polling Places

- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. 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'. The Electoral Commission 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 Stations

- 4.6. 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.
- 4.7. When assessing the suitability of a room or area for use as a polling station, the (Acting) Returning Officer should consider how the size and layout would allow for the most effective throughput of voters, including in those instances where there is a high number of electors in the polling station at any one time on polling day. Each polling station should be designed to provide suitable conditions for the elector to vote in private, for staff to conduct elections in an efficient and effective manner and for those entitled to observe the voting process to do so without compromising the secrecy of the ballot.

When designating polling districts, Local authorities must comply with the following legislative requirements:

- a) each parish in England is to be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply.
- b) 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.
- c) 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).
- d) 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.
- e) the Council must seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- f) 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. Where a polling place has been selected that is not fully accessible, then reasonable adjustments must be undertaken to provide access for all electors.
- g) 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.

- 4.8. Under Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 the Council must undertake a review of polling districts and polling places every 4 years at a minimum. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced the timing of compulsory reviews of Parliamentary polling districts and polling places which must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013. The last formal review was undertaken in 2023 and reported to Full Council in January 2024. Practice at Medway has been for an informal review of the scheme of polling districts and polling places to be undertaken and for the Returning Officer to conduct an informal review of the allocation of polling stations after each election.
- 4.9. This report is recommending changes to Watling ward, Rochester West & Borstal Ward and Fort Pitt Ward. It is proposing that we split a polling district in Watling Ward following feedback received from voters and ward councillors. It is also recommending that we change a polling station within the same polling district it is currently. There are no other changes to the scheme of polling districts and polling places that was approved in January 2024.

5. The Review and consultation

- 5.1. The informal working group met to discuss the recommendations outlined in this report. The working group comprises of Councillors Cook, Field, Gilbourne, Mahil, Maple, Perfect and Sands.
- 5.2. Following feedback from the UKPGE from Councillors, polling station staff and electors, it was decided that two polling places needed to be reviewed.

Watling Ward

Polling District GW1

- 5.3. Feedback received from one of the Ward Councillors advised us that voters in the north-west part of the polling district GW1 were not voting as the distance to walk to the polling station at Woodlands Academy was too far and that they preferred Priestfields Stadium where they used to vote.

The working group heard from officers that there were no other suitable premises in the centre of the polling district and therefore the working group are recommending that the polling district is split in half. The eastern part of the polling district would continue to vote at Woodlands Academy and the remainder of the Polling District would be allocated to Priestfields Stadium as shown in Appendix 3.

- 5.4. The result of these changes would be that the polling districts in Watling Ward would be reconfigured as shown in the table below.

The Returning Officer has confirmed he is content with these arrangements.

Revised polling district	Changes	Suggested polling station
GW1	Divided into two. Western part of the district becomes GW1	Priestfields Stadium, Redfern Avenue, Gillingham, ME7 2PE
GW2	The Eastern part of what was GW1.	Juniper Conference Room, Academy of Woodlands, Woodlands Road, ME7 2DU
GW3	Was GW2	Third Avenue Church & Community, 100 Third Avenue, ME7 2LU
GW4	Was GW3	Conference Room, Gillingham Golf Club, Woodlands Road, ME7 2AP
GW5	Was GW4	Star Meadow Sports Club, Darland Avenue, ME7 3AN

Fort Pitt and Rochester West & Borstal Ward

RFP1 and RRWB2

- 5.5. Electors in RFP1 and RRWB2 polling districts currently vote at The Hope Centre, 336- 338 High Street, Rochester, ME1 1BT however an alternate venue needs to be identified as the future of the venue is tentative. We also received feedback at previous elections from polling station staff that they had health and safety concerns making the building unsuitable.
- 5.6. Following site visits by officers, the Working Groups recommendation is to move the current polling station to Besties Café, Bellerophon House, Doust Way, Rochester, ME1 1HH. This space was previously used as the polling station. The reason we ceased use was because a former MP's office was opened in the same building. The office has now been vacated. The café has good accessibility and has the space to accommodate a double polling station. The proposed polling station is located in a densely populated area of the polling district as shown in Appendix 4.
- 5.7. The Returning Officer has confirmed he is content with this arrangement.

6. Advice and Analysis

- 6.1. Appendix 2 shows the proposed Scheme for polling districts and polling places for the whole of Medway. The Chief Executive/Returning Officer has given an undertaking that he will consult with the Informal Working Group if it becomes necessary to change the designation of a Polling Place where no suitable polling station is available within the original Polling Place and if it is necessary to change any polling stations prior to the elections on 6 May 2027.
- 6.2. This proposed scheme of polling districts and polling places is for the May 2027 Elections. After LGR, there will be a full Polling District and Polling Place

Review to coincide with new boundaries. We are also mindful that with the introduction of flexible voting, as currently being piloted in Tunbridge Wells, that at the next Polling District Review a much wider range of venues will be utilised as polling stations in advance of polling day.

7. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
No decision is made or it is delayed beyond 6 May 2027	Out of date scheme of polling districts and polling places in use for 6 May 2027 elections.	Submission of report to Council in April 2026.	DII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

8. Consultation

- 8.1. As this is an informal review of polling districts and polling places, officers have consulted with the informal working group. The Council's final decision on the schedule will be published on the website.

9. Climate change implications

- 9.1. [The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019](#) - item 1038D refers, and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 9.2. As far as possible, the working group has attempted to allocate voters to polling stations within walking distance to reduce the need to use cars.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1. The costs of Parliamentary elections (General), Police and Crime Commissioner elections and national Referendums are recharged to the Government. The Council meets the costs of local and Parish elections. In terms of costs of schools and other public buildings, only costs for the additional heating, lighting and caretaking costs can be charged; other private premises are subject to a hire cost which varies considerably. The total average cost of polling stations for a full election is in the order of £45,000 depending on if they all submit invoices. The average cost is affected by the high cost of providing a portable building, generator and associated equipment at three venues. The costs for the next election will be built into the budget process for 2027/28 and agreed with the Chief Operating Officer.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1. Section 3 of the report sets out the legal responsibilities and duties of the Council and the Returning Officer for conducting this informal review of the scheme of polling districts and polling places and the review of polling stations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Principles of review of polling districts and polling places
Appendix 2 - Scheme of polling stations as recommended by the Returning Officer for all elections
Appendix 3 – Watling maps
Appendix 4 – Rochester West & Borstal and Fort Pitt Ward maps

Background papers

None