

Suggestions for changes and alternative polling stations

Leggatts Ward

DA – The Orchard Primary School, Gammons Lane, Watford, WD24 5JW

Response received: The executive head teacher acknowledged the requirement for the council to have polling stations and the need for the school to assist in this democratic role but asked if the council could consider –

1. relocating the 2 polling stations located within the school from the main hall to the nursery classroom. And
2. (Following Officers visit on 14/11/2023, to check the alternative accommodations suitability and receipt of the floor plan/measurements which unfortunately proved to be an unsuitable alternative. The school was notified of the findings together with an alternative suggestion, which was rejected and followed by the school's acceptance for continued use of the school hall for polling purposes with) Request for permission to keep the school open on the days when polls are held in the future.

Officer's response: Following receipt of the initial response the Electoral Services Manager and Officers visited The Orchard Primary School on 14/11/2023. The pros and cons for requests 1 and 2 above have been set out below. Based on these, officers are of the opinion that changing the (school hall) location of the 2 polling stations required within this Polling Place would not be a viable option. Unfortunately, the suggested alternative (nursery classroom) accommodation with revised side gate entrance/exit was simply too compact to allow the large number of electors allotted to attend the dual polling stations to effectively enter, vote, and exit safely as required, which could in turn have a negative impact on voter turnout effectively and safely.

1. Request for relocating polling stations within polling place -

Pros: Orchard Primary School's location within polling district DA (plus DD) is very central and its main hall has very good facilities for the high number of electors allotted to vote at the 2 polling stations within the polling place, including those requiring level disability access into and departure from the building.

Cons: Relocation of required 2 polling stations from the main hall to the smaller nursery classroom with single entrance/exit point would not be suitable due to the high allotted electorate (approximately 2,400). Following visit, receipt of floor plan and measurements, and careful consideration the finding was advised to, and accepted by the executive head teacher who agreed for continued use of the school's main hall for polling requirements.

2. Request from school to remain open on days whenever election polls are held -

Pros: As per the practice in other school polling places this can work to effectively enable both a school's education of pupils and the conduct of election polls together.

Parents attending to deliver and collect their children from the school can also assist to increase voter turnout.

Consequently, it was agreed that The Orchard Primary School will remain open on future polling dates commencing 2/5/2024 with the understanding that all voters must be permitted to attend, vote, and leave their polling station within the polling place without difficulty, in addition to the school being responsible to ensure appropriate action/precautions are taken to safeguard the children during the period the school is open and overlapped with the polling hours.

Cons: Historically with the school closed electors were able use the school car park throughout the day, but as at other school polling places which remain open it is likely that parking will be more limited during school hours.

Recommendations: 1. that The Orchard Primary School (school hall) be retained as the Polling Place for Polling District DA (plus DD), and
2. acceptance of the executive head teacher's request for the school to remain open on days when election polls are required.

Oxhey Ward continued

**LB – Bushey and Oxhey Infants School, Aldenham Road, Bushey, Watford,
WD23 2QH**

Response received: The council received two responses regarding this polling station, as set out in Appendix 1A.

Both responses were received from Hertsmere Borough residents who reside within the Hertsmere Bushey North Ward, and I believe have children who attend Bushey and Oxhey Infants School. Currently these representations are not valid considerations on account of neither being registered electors for Watford Borough or within the Watford parliamentary constituency. However, I must advise that from the next UK wide Parliamentary elections Hertsmere Borough Council's Bushey North Ward will become part of the Watford constituency which will in turn qualify the electors within this Ward to make eligible representation at future reviews in the same way as all Watford Borough registered electors.

Officers' response: Upon commencement of the current Polling District and Places Review it is believed that Bushey and Oxhey Infants School advised their pupil's parents to contact the council to express their views if they did not want the school to be closed on polling days. During the review no response was received from either Bushey and Oxhey Infants School or any currently eligible registered elector including those allotted to vote at the venue.

Pros: Bushey and Oxhey Infants School's location within polling district LB has been a very good facilities for the high number of electors allotted to vote at the 2 polling stations within the polling place, including those requiring level disability access into and departure from the building.

Appendix 2

Without representation from either the school itself or any eligible elector allotted to vote thereat, including many likely parents with children who attend the school it is difficult to justify the need for change.

Use of public premise such as schools for polling stations is generally cheaper than other premise as already paid for by taxation and therefore not eligible to charge for more than a reasonable additional heating, lighting, and caretaking fee.

Cons: Change of venue could cause initial confusion for some of the electorate, and any change of venue could/is likely to increase future election costs for the Borough.

Recommendation: that Bushey and Oxhey Infants School be retained as the Polling Station for Polling District LB