

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT BY RETURNING OFFICER

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	26 NOVEMBER 2018	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR LOVELOCK	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP
SERVICE:	ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION	WARDS:	BOROUGH-WIDE
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1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 Further to Minute 30 of Council on 21 October 2014, the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (the 2006 Act) requires the Council to undertake a review of its polling districts and polling places every four years. The last review was undertaken in 2014.
- 1.2 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (the 2013 Act) introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The next compulsory review must now be started and completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive). Subsequent compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2018. That is, the next review must be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.
- 1.3 A project plan and timetable for the review of polling districts and polling places is attached at **Appendix A**. The review will take place over the winter, with the results being reported back to Full Council on 26 March 2019.
- 1.4 The schedule of the Council's current polling places and polling stations, with my initial representations as Returning Officer, is attached at **Appendix B**.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the project plan and timetable for the 2018 review of polling districts and polling stations be agreed as set out in Appendix A.
- 2.2 That the Returning Officer's initial representations on the Council's current polling districts and polling stations, as set out in Appendix B, be received.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The 2006 and 2013 Acts do not provide for a review of constituency or ward boundaries, and the review of polling districts and polling stations must therefore take place within the existing constituency and ward boundaries.
- 3.2 The Council's ward boundaries were last reviewed in 2007 (Minute 30 refers), as required by the 2006 Act. This established the current boundaries of polling districts,

and the location of polling places within them. There have been no further changes to ward boundaries to date. However, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England review the position annually, based on the electoral register for the authority published on 1 December each year, and have given the Council notice that they intend to include Reading in their review programme for 2019-20.

3.3 Since the polling place review in 2014, some changes have been made to polling places:

- The polling place for Battle polling district 1, has changed from Cranbury College to Emmanuel Methodist Church;
- The polling place for Mapledurham ward, has changed from the Mapledurham Pavilion to Caversham Heights Methodist Church;
- The polling place name for Caversham polling district 3, has changed from Amersham Road Community Centre to The Weller Centre;

3,4 The location of the polling station for Norcot polling district 1, at St George's Church, has changed from St. Georges Church Hall to St. Georges Church, and will move into a new community facility being built at St George's Church.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

4.1.1 A polling district is a sub-division of a constituency or ward. A polling place is a geographical area within a polling district in which a polling station can be located: there is no legal definition of the term "polling district", which therefore can be defined tightly (the building in which the polling station will be located) or widely (the entire polling district). It is possible to have a polling station outside the polling district in special circumstances, in which cases the polling place must be clearly specified.

4.1.2 The review is required under Section 16 of the 2006 Act, which amends Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983. Under Section 18C of the amended 1983 Act, a review of each polling district and polling place must be completed before the end of a period of four years starting with the completion of the previous review. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 changed the timing of compulsory reviews of Parliamentary polling districts and polling places, aligned to the timetable for five-yearly General Elections. Under this, the current review must be completed by 31 January 2020.

4.1.3 The end results must be published in the next new electoral register. Therefore the results of the 2018 review will be incorporated into the new electoral register published on 1 December 2019.

4.1.4 The responsibility for signing off the review rests with full Council. The legal position is that Sections 18 and 31 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 allow constituencies and wards to be divided into polling districts. Under the Functions and Responsibilities Regulations issued under Section 17 of the Local Government Act 2000, these are functions which cannot be exercised by the executive. Council could delegate these functions to a Committee (or to an officer) but to date it has not done so.

4.1.5 The process is based on parliamentary constituencies. Under Schedule A1 of the Parliamentary Election Rules it involves a number of specified stages:

The Council must:

- Publish notice of review
- Consult with Returning Officer(s) for parliamentary constituencies in Council areas - and publish these when received (within 30 days of receipt)
- Seek representations from persons with an expertise in relation to access and disability - who must also have an opportunity to comment on the Returning Officer's representations
- Any elector may also make representations - which may include proposals for specified alternative polling places
- On completion of the review, compile and adopt a revised scheme - which must be published, with reasons given for decisions.

The Returning Officer must:

- Make representations about the location of polling stations within polling places
- Allocate electors to polling stations (after review)

4.1.5 A suggested project plan and timetable for the process is attached at **Appendix A**. This is focused on completing the review by full Council on 29 March 2019.

4.1.6 The current schedule of polling stations and polling places is attached at **Appendix B**. In this I indicate, as Returning Officer, my initial views about their suitability.

4.2 Projected Growth

4.2.1 Appendix B includes indicative information on projected new residential developments in individual wards and polling districts, based on the Council's Residential Planning Commitments report as at 31 March 2018. The Commitments report shows planning consents given for a total of 3,975 new dwellings (hard commitments - of which 1,206 were under construction), with the possibility of a further 2,981 dwellings on sites identified as suitable for housing (soft commitments). These figures are for all consents and give a total of 6,956 new dwellings with hard or soft commitments. The electoral register currently has 72,283 dwellings, so if all of these dwellings were to be built, it would represent an increase of nearly 10% in dwelling numbers across the Borough.

4.2.2 The sites listed in Appendix B are for developments of 20 or more dwellings. The majority of the new residential development is projected to take place in two wards: Abbey (3,600) and Whitley (2,100).

4.3 Comments on Polling Places

4.3.1 Appendix B also includes my initial comments on polling places. Most are acceptable. However, the following should be noted:

Polling District	Polling Place	Comments
Battle A	Battle Library	May not be available May 2019 due to planned building works.
Kentwood CC	Norcot Community Centre	Due to be demolished - new build to be residential with community facility Not available May 2019.
Southcote FB	Southcote Library	Building to be closed. Need new polling place for May 2019

4.3.2 The growth of residential development in Whitley ward is predominantly to the west of Basingstoke Road, especially to the west of the A33 relief road (Green park, Madejski stadium). This suggests the need for a new polling district and polling place in that part of the ward.

4.4 Polling Station Electorates

4.4.1 Appendix B further includes details of the current electorate for each polling district, broken down by absent (postal) voters and voters in person. This is relevant to the review because the Electoral Commission guidance is that polling stations should not have more than 2,500 electors who vote in person at the polling station.

4.4.2 Polling places can host more than one polling station, and 22 (out of 51) do (two host 3 polling stations).

4.4.3 From an initial scan of Appendix B, the following polling places may require a change of arrangement:

Polling District	Polling Place	Comments
Battle A (1 PS)	Battle Library	2,448 voters in person Will need 2 polling stations
Katesgrove B (2 PS)	Christchurch Centre Millman Road	1,579 voters in person Could reduce to 1 polling station
Kentwood C (2 PS)	St Mary Magdalen Hall	1,849 voters in person Could reduce to 1 polling station
Norcot EA	St Michael's Primary	1,627 voters in person Could reduce to 1 polling station
Redlands RA	Redlands Primary	1,859 voters in person Could reduce to 1 polling station

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The electoral registration process and elections support the promotion of the participation of Reading people in local democracy.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 Appendix A sets out the arrangements for wider consultation. A notice of the review has to be published in three places, which I propose to do at the Civic Offices, Central Library and local libraries, and on the Council's website: this report is also giving public notice of the review.

6.2 There is a statutory requirement to seek representations from persons with an expertise in access and disability issues, which I propose should be done through the Council's Access Forum.

6.3 Other consultation is discretionary. I propose to consult with all Councillors and political party agents. I also propose to consult the polling places themselves. I will also consult with residents and tenants' associations. The public will be able to express their views generally through the Council website.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 A significant element of the review is to consider the suitability of the existing polling stations in terms of access. Section 16 of the 2006 Act has amended Section 18D of the 1983 Act to require the authority to take sufficient account of the accessibility of disabled persons to polling stations (S18(2)(b)).

7.2 Disability audits of the Council's 51 polling places (75 polling stations) were undertaken in 2008 and 2011 by the Council's Property Service, as part of the last two reviews. These have been reviewed subsequently each year in the light of experience at that year's elections. At each election, I ask Presiding Officers to report back on access issues in their polling stations; and my Deputy Returning Officers also look at access as part of their polling station inspections. This information will be given to Property Services to inform their audit.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Paras. 4.1.2 and 4.1.4 above set out the legal basis for the changes dealt with in this report.

8.2 The provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1983 require that every Parliamentary Constituency must be divided into polling districts and that each District Council must divide its area into polling districts for that part of the Constituency within its area. Reading falls within the area of two Parliamentary Constituencies - Reading East and Reading West.

8.3 In exercising its powers, the Council is required to give all electors "such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances". In addition, in choosing polling places, only places which are accessible to electors who are disabled must be chosen so far as is reasonable and practicable.

8.4 Unless there are special circumstances, the polling place for any polling district should be located in the district itself.

8.5 A polling place is usually the building to which people go to vote and polling stations are the locations within the building at which electors obtain their voting papers.

8.6 The Returning Officer is required to provide a sufficient number of polling stations in each polling place and to allocate electors to the polling stations in such manner as he or she thinks most convenient. There is now a total of nearly 19,000 postal voters in local elections in Reading. The review should therefore focus on the remaining 97,400 electors who are not postal voters and will need to vote in person at their local polling station.

8.7 For the 2011 Referendum on Alternative Voting, the Chairman of the Electoral Commission, in her capacity as Chief Counting Officer, introduced a national specification for the ratio of the number of electors in person in a polling district to polling stations, and polling staff. This required a maximum limit of 2,500 electors in person per polling station (who are not postal voters); and 2 Poll Clerks if the number of electors in person was over 1,500. Since then, the Electoral Commission has requested that Returning Officers bear in mind the predicted turnout per election type and staff their polling stations accordingly, bearing the above ratio in mind as guidance.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The 2018/19 budget for electoral registration is £327k, and the budget for elections is £90k: the cost of the review will be met from within this.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Electoral Commission Guidance - Review of Polling Places, Polling Districts and Polling Stations.

PROJECT PLAN AND TIMETABLE

Date	Activity	Action	By
By end September 2018	Officer reviews	To consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maps of existing polling districts • Population projections per ward and district - based on planning consents • Turnout figures per district 	CB, ES Team
Monday 26 th November 2018	Policy Committee	Polling Station and Polling District Review Report that sets out the process and timetable for the review Publish Returning Officer's initial representations	CB
29 th November 2018	Access Forum	Consultation with representatives of access and disabilities groups	ES Team
Monday 3 rd December 2018	Publish Notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Civic Offices • At Central Library/Local Libraries (Updated List) • On website (Electoral Services page) 	ES Team
Monday 3 rd December 2018	Consultation starts (30 calendar days)	Write to all on the Key Contacts List	ES Team
Wednesday 2 nd January 2019	Consultation ends	Collate feedback	ES Team
Mid January 2019	Returning Officer / ERO review	To obtain results of consultation (Via email and Website) To include report back on representations from access and disability organisations, and result of access review of polling stations	CB, ES Team
End January 2019		Returning Officer to review initial representations, and make proposal for new scheme to full Council (Chris to let Claire and Jane have his comments on feedback received from the Consultation)	CB
1 March 2019	Publish notice of Returning Officer's representations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Civic Offices • At Central Library/Local Libraries (Updated list) • On website (Electoral Services page) 	ES Team
26 th March 2019	FULL COUNCIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consider RO's representations - and any comments made on them • To consider representations from Access Forum and other bodies • To determine any changes to polling districts and polling places in light of the above • New (2019) electoral register to be based on new scheme 	CB

SCHEDULE OF POLLING PLACES - NOVEMBER 2018

<i>APPENDIX B Polling District</i>	<i>Current Polling Place</i>	<i>Electorate</i>	<i>Absent voters</i>	<i>Voters in person</i>	<i>Turnout at Polling Place</i>	<i>Projected growth in dwellings (hard and soft planning commitments - for 20+ dwellings)</i>	<i>Returning Officer's Comments</i>
ABBEY							
L	<i>New Hope Community Church Centre York Road, Reading, RG1 8DU</i>	1,893	283	1,610	26.89%	Coopers' Site, Kings Meadow Rd (315) Napier Road (250)	OK
LA 2 polling stations	<i>Sir Herman Gollancz Hall Clifton Street, Reading RG1 7YE</i>	4,465	496	3,959	17.58%	Friar Street [2 sites] (53) Friar St / Greyfriars Rd (135) 29-35 Station Road (33) Station Hill [2 sites] (472) Weldale St / Chatham St (427) Chatham St / Eaton Place (150) North St (40) 9-27 Greyfriars Rd (60) 143-145 Oxford Road (20)	OK No parking
LB	<i>Wesley Church Hall Queen's Rd / Watlington St</i>	1,759	222	1,537	22.82%	Jackson's Corner (33) King's Point (103) Clarendon House, Queens Rd (49) Abbey Square [2 sites] (1070)	OK Limited on-street parking
LC	<i>St John & St Stephen Parish Centre Orts Road, Reading, RG1 3JN</i>	1,284	166	1,118	23.35%	Gas Works Road (20) Princes House, London Road (26) Kenavon Drive (765)	OK
BATTLE							
A 2 polling	<i>Cranbury College Cranbury Road</i>	3,612	394	3,218	25.05%		OK Polling stations re-located

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stations	Reading RG30 2TS						from Cranbury Centre since last review. Next to Battle Library, and not in polling district - on north side of Oxford Road Improved access and parking
AB	<i>Battle Library</i> 420 Oxford Road Reading RG30 2ES	2,765	317	2,448	26.58%	Portman Road (former Battle Hospital Site (95))	OK Building works planned for spring 2019 - may affect use as PS in May 2019.
AC	<i>Oxford Road Community School</i> 146 Oxford Road, Reading, RG1 7PJ	1,357	124	1,233	25.63%		OK
CAVERSHAM							
M 2 polling stations	<i>New Bridge Nursery School</i> Montague Street, Caversham, RG4 5AU	2,783	428	2,355	33.42%		OK
MA	<i>Thameside Primary School</i> Wolsey Road, Caversham RG4 8BY	2,072	351	1,721	33.82%	St Martin's Precinct (40)	OK
MB	<i>Amersham Road</i>	1,914	284	1,630	27.97%		OK

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	<i>Community Centre Amersham Road, Caversham RG4 5BP</i>						Formerly Caversham Children's Centre Building re-designed since last review Security issues
MC	<i>Caversham Primary School Hemdean Road, Caversham, RG4 7RA</i>	764	157	607	41.16%		OK School has reservations about use as polling place Site shared with Thames WB (2) - held in separate room from Thames Ward PSs - to avoid confusion of electors and votes cast
CHURCH							
N 2 polling stations	<i>Reading Scout & Guide Joint HQ 163 Northcourt Avenue, Reading RG2 7HG</i>	4,380	365	4,015	19.20%		OK - can be cramped as double station
NA	<i>The Ridgeway Primary School Willow Gardens Reading RG2 7EL</i>	1,579	299	1,280	23.50%		OK
NB	<i>South Reading Youth & Community Centre</i>	1,333	148	1,185	22.56%		OK Not in ward - on other side of Northumberland Ave

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	252 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, RG2 7QA						
NC	<i>Christ the King Church Hall</i> 408 Northumberland Avenue, Reading, RG2 8RN	1,054	186	868	25.32%		OK Not in ward - on other side of Northumberland Ave
KATESGROVE							
B 2 polling stations	<i>Katesgrove Primary School</i> Dorothy Street, Reading, RG1 2NL	3,700	373	3,327	24.01%	Crown St / Silver St (80) New Century Place [2 sites] (135) Crown St / Southampton St (25) 21 South Street (35)	OK Polling station now in new building off Katesgrove Lane Access also from Henry Street, but long route involving hill
BA 2 polling stations	<i>Christchurch Centre</i> Milman Road, Reading, RG2 0AY	1,742	163	1,579	27.83%		OK Very restricted parking
BB	<i>The Palmer Academy</i> Northumberland Avenue, Rdnng	1,690	172	1,518	23.00%		OK
KENTWOOD							
C 2 polling stations	<i>St Mary Magdalen Hall</i> Rodway Road, Tilehurst,	2,200	351	1,849	33.56%		OK

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	RG30 6EQ						
CA	<i>United Reformed Church Hall Polsted Road, Tilehurst, RG31 6HP</i>	1,596	250	1,346	37.74%		OK
CB	<i>Meadow Park Academy Norcot Road, Tilehurst, RG30 6BS</i>	1,608	235	1,373	33.06%		OK
CC	<i>Norcot Community Centre Lyndhurst Road, Tilehurst, RG30 6UB</i>	1,956	300	1,656	25.76%		Due to be closed and demolished from November 2018 - to be replaced by flats with dedicated community space as part of new build after 18 months. Should not be available as PS in May 2019, and need to establish that community space will work as PS in future elections
MAPLEDURHAM							
Y	<i>Mapledurham Pavilion Upper Woodcote</i>	2,522	490	2,032	Av 39%		OK Moved since last review as Pavilion no longer available

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	Road, Caversham Heights, RG4 7LB						Not in ward - on other side of Woodcote Road
MINSTER							
D	<i>Coley Primary School</i> Wolseley Road, Reading, RG1 6NJ	1,333	156	1,177	27.48%	5-9 Berkeley Ave Lok'n Store (112)	OK
DA 2 polling stations	<i>All Saints Hall</i> Downshire square, Reading, RG1 6NJ	2,942	544	2,398	26.42%		OK
DB 2 polling stations	<i>Coley Park Community Centre</i> 140 Wensley Road, Coley Park, Reading RG1 6DW	3,349	544	2,805	27.85%	Government Buildings, Wensley Rd (38)	OK
NORCOT							
E 2 polling stations	<i>St George's Church Hall</i> St George's Road, Reading	3,560	461	3,099	24.88%		OK Church hall demolished. PS moved to new community building as part of church
EA 2 polling stations	<i>St Michael's Primary School</i> Dee Road, Tilehurst, RG30 4AS	2,028	401	1,627	26.03%		OK

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EB	<i>Ranikhet Primary School Spey Road, Tilehurst, RG3 4ED</i>	1,839	255	1,584	24.62%	Dee Park - Spey Rd (108)	OK
PARK							
P 2 polling stations	<i>New Town Primary School School Terrace, Reading, RG1 3LS</i>	2,857	276	2,581	42.17%	Alexander House, Kings Road (56)	OK Difficult parking Polling Place moved to cafeteria - separate building accessed from Cholmeley Road.
PA 3 polling stations	<i>Alfred Sutton Primary School 148 Wokingham Road, Reading, RG6 1JR</i>	4,262	504	3,758	38.52%		OK
PEPPARD							
V 2 polling stations	<i>Emmer Green Youth & Community Centre Grove Road, Emmer Green, RG4 8LN</i>	3,534	708	2,826	36.59%	Lowfield Road (34)	OK Proposed Lowfield Road development should be in VA polling district - move whole of Cemetery to VA
VA	<i>The Milestone</i>	2,746	402	2,344	36.68%	199-207 Henley Road (39)	OK

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2 polling stations	Centre Northbrook Road, Caversham Park Village, RG40 0PF						
VB	Micklands Primary School Micklands Road, Caversham	1,279	200	1,079	34.82%		OK
REDLANDS							
R 2 polling stations	St Luke's Hall Erleigh Road, Reading	3,312	191	3,121	27.06%	Aspen House 300 Kings Road (78)	OK No free on-street parking
RA 2 polling stations	Redlands Primary School Lydford Road, Reading, Rg1 5QH	2,022	163	1,859	27.47%		OK No parking
RB	Hexham Community Centre 1A Bamburgh Close, Whitley, RG2 7UD	1,198	205	993	32.11%		OK
RC	Museum of English Rural Life Redlands Road Reading	769	126	643	28.01%		OK Earley Charity Room

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SOUTHCOTE							
F	<i>Southcote Primary School Silchester Road, Southcote, RG3 3EJ</i>	1,881	323	1,558	32.45%	Elvian School (83)	OK
FA	<i>Manor Primary School 110 Ashampstead Rd Southcote, RG30 3LJ</i>	1,754	384	1,370	26.47%		OK
FB	<i>Southcote Library Hall Southcote Lane, Reading RG30 3BA</i>	1,429	188	1,241	22.89%		Building to be closed from November 2018. Need to establish alternative venue.
FC	<i>Prospect School Honey End Lane, Tilehurst, RG30 4EL</i>	1,427	319	1,108	25.23%	Alice Burrows (27)	Restrictions on access to toilets for election staff
THAMES							
W	<i>Highdown School Surley Row, Emmer Green, RG4 8LR</i>	1,119	184	935	33.73%		OK - consult re exam times when elections fall outside of May.
WA 2 polling stations	<i>St Andrew's Hall Albert Road, Caversham,</i>	3,393	597	2,796	41.55%		OK

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	RG4 7PW						
WB 2 polling stations	<i>Caversham Primary School</i> Hemdean Road, Caversham, RG4 7RA	2,838	671	2,167	35.29%		Site shared with Caversham MC - Caversham polling station is separate room.
TILEHURST							
G 2 polling stations	<i>Moorlands Primary School</i> Church End Lane, Tilehurst, RG30 4UN	2,759	432	2,327	29.66%	Conwy Close (57)	OK
GA 2 polling stations	<i>Park Lane Primary School</i> School Road, Tilehurst, RG31 5RD	3,407	504	2,903	31.30%		OK
GB	<i>Tilehurst Village Hall</i> Victoria Road, Tilehurst RG31 5AB	995	106	889	42.51%		OK
WHITLEY							
S & SC 2 polling stations	<i>Whitley Park Primary & Nursery School</i> Basingstoke Road, Reading,	3,863	590	3,273	17.85%	Kennet Island Phase 3 (93) Longwater Ave - Pingewood Business Park (700) Land north of Manor Farm Road (550)	OK Combine S and SC polling districts Volume of development west of A33 Relief road suggests

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	RG2 0JA						need for new polling district and polling place (see also SB)
SA 2 polling stations	<i>Geoffrey Field Infant School</i> Exbourne Road, Reading, RG22 8RH	2,894	412	2,482	20.37%		OK
SB	<i>Whitley Wood Community Centre</i> Swallowfield Drive, Reading, RG2 8JD	1,600	197	1,403	22.50%	Worton Grange, Imperial Way (142) Land at Madejski Stadium Shooters Way (624)	OK Volume of development west of A33 Relief road suggests need for new polling district and polling place (see also S / SC)

Total electorate (local) - 116,417

Ward average: 7,761 (not including Mapledurham)

Mapledurham: 2,522 (less postal voters = 2,032)

Electoral Commission ceiling per polling station - 2,500 electors who vote at polling station