

Test Valley Borough Council Review of Polling District TE 2026

(Acting) Returning Officer's Recommendations

1. Introduction

This sets out the (Acting) Returning Officer's Submission to the above Review, giving options for alternative polling stations and details of possible polling stations that have been ruled out, and makes recommendations on these options.

2. Background to (Acting) Returning Officer's recommendations

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure polling districts, polling places and polling stations remain suitable, accessible and convenient for electors.

The review of the Harroway No.3 (TE) polling district has been prompted by concerns arising from the use of Harrow Way School as a polling station at the May 2026 elections, where new access-controlled security measures required electors to be admitted through locked gates by school staff while the school remained operational. Although these arrangements were successfully managed on polling day, they gave rise to accessibility concerns and complaints from polling staff, electors and political parties, raising questions about the long-term suitability of the venue.

Alternative venues and arrangements have been explored, with a number of potential options identified, each offering different benefits and challenges in terms of accessibility, capacity, parking, location and elector convenience.

3. Alternative Polling Station Options

Option 1: Andover Community Church

Andover Community Church already operates as a polling station and could easily accommodate an additional polling station. The venue benefits from good accessibility and parking provision. However, it is located outside the TE polling district and may be less convenient for some electors travelling on foot. It is, on average, approximately 11 minutes' walk from properties within the polling district.

On balance, it is considered this is the most suitable option for electors in the TE polling district as, in addition to the above, it is on the main route into town and will, as a result, be known to voters.

Option 2: St Thomas' Church and Community Hall

St Thomas' Church and Community Hall, which is already used as a polling station and is located approximately 12 minutes' walk from the existing polling station location, also benefits from good accessibility and parking provision. However, for electors towards the lower end of the TE polling district, the distance is more significant to travel if walking, at approximately 20 minutes.

Option 3: Salto Centre / St Thomas' Church and Community Hall

The Salto Centre on Charlton Road has been considered as a potential venue, although it is located outside the TE polling district. However, the Centre experiences significant activity on Thursday evenings, resulting in parking constraints, safeguarding concerns and high pedestrian movements throughout the site.

For these reasons, it is not considered that this location would be suitable as a polling station.

Option 4: Munnings (Stubbs) Court

This option would allocate TE electors to the existing polling station at Munnings (Stubbs) Court, which is currently located within a portacabin. The venue is relatively close to the current polling station; however, elector numbers would increase significantly (by approximately 1,200).

As this venue has limited on-street parking and insufficient space to accommodate a second polling station if required, it is not considered that it would be appropriate to allocate additional electors to this station.

Option 5: Portacabin on land at Apple Tree Grove/Tollgate Road

A suggestion has been made to place the portacabin on green space at the junction of Apple Tree Grove and Tollgate Road. This land is close to the current location of Harrow Way School, making it convenient for electors travelling on foot. However, there is limited parking, the cabin would be noisy for residents living nearby and it sits outside of the TE polling district, in the TD polling district.

This could lead to confusion for the electors that live near this proposed site, as those residing in the TD polling district are allocated to a different venue (St Michael and All Angel's Parish Hall, off Colebrook Way), which is not currently capable of accommodating an additional 1,200 electors. Consideration could also be given to the placing of an additional cabin at the site for these electors, but this would significantly increase the cost of polling station provision, as well as seeing approximately 3,000 electors being allocated to the site.

Additionally, the land is owned by Aster Group. Enquiries have been made as to whether the space would be available for use. They have stated that they cannot provide blanket approval to use the land for every election and that requests would need to be made each time there is a poll. Every time there is a need for the land to be used, it would be subject to an internal consultation at Aster, and any letting would be subject to conditions about making good any damage.

As there is no guarantee that permission would be granted, it is not felt that this would be a suitable long-term arrangement.

Other Options

Additional venues have been considered, including St Ann's Hall, St Andrew's Centre, St Michael and All Angels' Parish Hall and the former temporary polling station site on King George Road. These options have been discounted due to issues including capacity constraints, uncertainty regarding future availability, convenience for electors and concerns relating to safety and suitability.

Andy Ferrier
Chief Executive and (Acting) Returning Officer
Test Valley Borough Council

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