

Summary of Representations in relation to the Woking polling place review – St Johns East polling district, Al-Asr Centre (2 of 2)

On 25 January 2016 the Commission received a representation from the appellant in relation to the Council's review of the polling districts and polling places in the Woking parliamentary constituency carried out in 2015. The Commission received additional representations from the appellant on 17 February, 1 March and 3 May 2016. The appellant's representations to the Commission included copies of correspondence to the Council and Surrey Police. The representations fell into the following ground of appeal:

That Woking Borough Council did not conduct the review so as to meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency of any body of those electors.

The appellant made a representation that there had been a lack of appropriate consultation in the original choice of the Al-Asr Centre as a polling place.

The appellant raised concerns that the use of the Centre would discourage electors in the area from voting in person. He stated that he had applied for a postal vote as a result of the outcome of the polling place review. His concerns related to the general use of the Centre as a place of worship. He stated that he feared that electors might be intimidated, harassed or excluded from a polling station situated in the Al-Asr Centre on grounds of their sexuality, dress or "moral behaviour" and that many people would be unwilling to "enter the premises of a homophobic organisation which segregates women and does not support fundamental aspects of equality in Britain". He also stated that many others, who did choose to attend the Centre in order to vote, would have to modify their behaviour to gain access and may be subjected to a search to detect if any "forbidden items" are on their person such as pork or alcohol. He added that there would be a possibility of disorder, harassment or intimidation of electors occurring at the polling station and the police might have to enforce electors' right to access the building on polling day. He was concerned that the organisation running the Centre had hostile views towards others for reasons of sexuality, gender or religion and was that therefore there might not be equal access for all electors.

In correspondence with the Council, which formed part of his representations to the Commission, the appellant acknowledged that electors have not been refused admission to the Al-Asr Centre or hindered in any way for the reasons outlined above, and that polling station staff would not allow any such refusal of admission or hindrance. In this letter the appellant clarified that his concern is that both the Al-Asr Centre staff and those who worship at the Centre have homophobic beliefs and are opposed to equality for women and that for that reason he considered that many people would be deterred from voting in person or at all.

The appellant provided correspondence from four electors in the St Johns East polling district who stated that they did not wish to attend the Centre to vote in person and had applied for postal votes.

The appellant also raised concerns about a “complete lack of parking” at the Al-Asr Centre, as well as insufficient space for queuing inside the Centre, resulting in long queues down the road at the UK Parliamentary general election in 2015.

The appellant also raised issues which fell outside of the Commission’s remit in considering a polling place review appeal:

The appellant suggested that the previous polling place, Goldsworth Primary School, would be more suitable as a polling place. In particular, he considered that the larger size, superior on-site parking facilities and central location of the School made it a preferable polling place, compared to the Al-Asr Centre.

The appellant queried what arrangements are in place should the Al-Asr Centre cease to be available for use as a polling place at short notice.

The appellant raised other concerns relating to the establishment of the Al-Asr Centre, planning permission, noise nuisance, and general day-to-day parking problems in the vicinity of the Centre.

The appellant also raised concerns around the administration of elections generally in Woking.