

Council – 10 January 2011

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2011

Service: Electoral Services

Wards: All Wards

1. Summary of the Report

The Council is obliged to undertake a review during 2011. This report identifies options that enable this to happen, sets out a timetable and invites nominations to a working group.

2. Recommendations

The Council is asked:

- a) to indicate which of the options outlined in paragraph 4 below it will follow for a review of polling districts and polling places;
- b) to agree to the establishment of a Member working group and seek nominations for a lead member and alternate from each political group.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council is required by Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as later amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) to complete a review of all its UK Parliamentary polling districts and places every four years. The next review must be completed by the end of 2011.
- 3.2 There are 225 polling districts in the three Parliamentary constituencies within the Borough. The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts and polling places for UK Parliamentary Elections and the Returning Officer must provide sufficient polling stations for each polling place.
- 3.3 The review is primarily concerned with polling districts and polling places for those parts of the UK Parliamentary constituencies that lie within the Council's boundaries. Constituency boundaries are currently aligned with the ward boundaries of local authorities and the review will also apply to the local government elections in the Borough as the locations

of polling districts and polling places are and will be the same for both types of elections.

- 3.4 Representations to the Council can be made by the (Acting) Returning Officer. Any elector may make representations and although not specifically provided for, local political parties will no doubt also wish to make representations. In addition, the Council must actively seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise.
- 3.5 The review must be transparent and the Council is required to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of polling districts/places. In addition, it must publish:
- All submissions and correspondence
 - All correspondence sent to any person whom the authority believes has particular expertise
 - All representations made by any person in connection with the review
 - The minutes of any meeting held by the Authority where details of the review have been considered
 - Details of the actual designations of polling districts/places as a result of the review
 - Details of where the results of the review have been published.
- 3.6 The decision(s) of the Council may be appealed to the Electoral Commission by not less than thirty electors in the constituency, any person who made representations to the Council during the review or any person who is not an elector in the constituency who the Commission feels has sufficient interest in the accessibility of disabled persons to polling places.
- 3.7 It is important to note that the outcome of an election cannot be questioned simply because any part to the review failed to comply with all or any aspects of the review process.

4. **Definitions**

Polling district – a geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts. There are no size constraints.

Polling place – not defined in law but taken to be a small area, such as a building or the grounds of a school etc. If a local authority does not define a polling place, then by default the polling district becomes the polling place. This is the approach the Council has previously adopted as it gives the Returning Officer a lot more flexibility to locate the polling station, especially if time is short in the build up to an election.

Polling Station – the place where polling actually takes place and it is located in the polling place. It is the Returning Officer's responsibility to determine how many polling stations are required for each polling place. The polling place can be located outside of its polling district.

In practice, the review starts with the polling station and works backwards to ensure that the polling district has suitable locations for polling stations within it.

4. **Options**

The last comprehensive review was undertaken in 2007. It can be argued that no significant issues have arisen since then which warrant such an extensive review in 2011.

The Council is invited to consider which of the two options outlined below it wishes to undertake.

Option 1

Conduct a targeted review. Here the review would only deal with polling districts/places where:

- There are known disability issues
- There are portacabins currently used
- There are a significant number of submissions received about a polling station
- The current polling station is different from that used in 2007 and where there has been, since the completion of the 2007 review or projected to be, a significant change in the population of an area.

Option 2

Conduct a comprehensive review of the type undertaken in 2007. This would involve:

- A full report on every polling station (completed by the respective presiding officer by 5 May 2011)
- An evaluation of every report
- A response from the Returning Officer on every polling station
- A formal consideration of every polling station
- A report to Council that deals with every polling station

5. **Outline of Timetable**

Whichever form of review is undertaken, the timetable below would need to be followed:

- Publish notice of the review – 28 February 2011 to enable it to be included in the Council Tax booklet
- Deadline for receipt of submissions from the public – 1 June 2011
- First meeting of the working party – first week in July (the working party would meet once a week until all wards are covered).
- Final proposals approval by the Council – September or November 2011
- Amend registers by 1 December (publication date for the new registers)

6. **Member Working Party**

To progress the detailed stages of the review it is proposed that a Member Working Party is established. Its role will be to make recommendations to Council for adoption.

It is suggested that each Party Group nominate a lead member for the Working Party and also an alternate should the lead member be unavailable for any meeting.

The Working Party will be advised and supported by the Electoral Services Manager and his team, and the Council's Equality & Diversity Consultant.

7. **Staffing**

If option 1 is approved, it is anticipated that no additional staffing resources will be required to conduct the review.

8. **Financial Implications**

It is anticipated that the costs associated with the review can be contained within existing budgets.

9. **Equality Implications**

Issues of access for disabled electors will be an important factor and must be taken into account.

10. **Consultation**

The review will be publicly notified (via the Council Tax booklet, local media, libraries, Council web page, with copies to interested groups). Electors and other interested parties will have until 1 June 2011 in which to make submissions from formal publication on 28 February 2011.

11. **Background papers**

Electoral Commission circular EC19/2010 Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations, published July 2010.

Further information can be obtained from Peter Allsop, Electoral Services Manager (01922 652012).

Paul Sheehan
Acting Returning Officer

23 December 2010