

Council – 23 April 2007

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Service Area: Electoral Registration

Wards: All wards

Summary of report

The purpose of this report is to establish a cross party working party to conduct the mandatory review of polling districts and polling places

Recommendations

- (1) That a Review of Polling Districts and Places Working Party be established, for the period 30 June 2007, to 31 December 2007, for the purpose of considering submissions received, issues raised and making recommendations for each polling district / polling place to council, in sufficient time for the inclusion of any changes in the new electoral registers published on 1 December 2007
- (2) That the Working Party membership be:
 - Council's Electoral Services Manager and Assistant Electoral Services Manager:
 - A representative (and substitute) from each political group within council
 - Two representatives from the Walsall's Disability Forum
- (3) That the Working Party appoint a chairperson at its first meeting

Resource and legal considerations

Council is required by Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as inserted by the Electoral Administration Act 006) to complete a review of all polling districts and places by 31 December 2007 and to carry out the same review every four years thereafter.

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.

There are approximately 220 polling districts in the three parliamentary constituencies within the borough. While the vast majority will undoubtedly remain unchanged, the review has to be transparent (by regulation, we have to publish all submissions, correspondence, reasons why a decisions have been made and minutes of all meetings).

Representations to the council have to be made by the Returning Officer. Council also has to actively seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. In addition, any elector may make representations and although not specifically provided for, local political parties will no doubt also wish to make representations.

The recommended approach

The recommended approach is to set up a cross party working party to consider any submissions, work through the issues and then make a single report with recommendations on each polling district and polling place to council.

The suggested composition of the working party is as follows:

- One representative from each of the three main political parties in council, plus a substitute (if any other political party gains seats in the 3 May election, they should be invited to appoint a representative also).
- Peter Allsop (Electoral Services Manager) – as the Returning Officer’s representative.
- Sue Wright (Assistant Electoral services Manager) – for her knowledge of polling districts and polling stations
- A maximum of two representatives from the disability forum

Council is required by law to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of polling districts / places. In addition, it must publish;

- All correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks 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.

The decision(s) of council can also be appealed to the Electoral Commission by not less than thirty electors in the constituency, any person who made representations to 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 in the area.

It is important to note that the outcome of an election cannot be questioned simply because any party to the review failed to comply with all or any aspects of the review process.

An outline of the timetable

1. Publish notice of the review – 30 March (this can be done before the council meeting as council is only being asked to approve the mechanism for conducting the review)
2. Deadline for receipt of submissions from the public – 31 May (this allows 60 days)

3. First meeting of the working party – 1st week in July (meet once a week until all wards covered)
4. Approval by council –September or November
5. Amend registers by 1 Dec (publication date for the new registers)

Citizen impact

Any change to electoral boundaries will inevitably affect the proximity of polling stations, and therefore the convenience for some voters and inconvenience for others

Environmental impact

Not applicable.

Performance and risk management issues

There are no significant risks and no performance issues.

Equality implications

Issues of access for disabled electors will be an important factor.

Consultation

The review is being publicly notified and electors and other interested parties are being given sixty calendar days in which to make submissions.

Background papers

The Association of Electoral Administrators' paper on "The review of polling places, polling districts and access arrangements" from their February 2007 conference



Signed:

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Date: 13th April 2007

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