

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

1.0 Summary:

- 1.1 Every council in England and Wales must undertake and complete a review of all of the polling districts and polling places in its area every five years.

This report seeks authority to approve the proposals made as a result of the Polling Place Review which was undertaken in accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

2.0 Recommendations

That Council;

- 2.1 Approves the proposals in respect of this review as set out in Appendix A.
- 2.2 Delegates authority to the Returning Officer to make, where necessary alterations to the designation of any Polling Place prior to the next full review in consultation with Ward Members and Group Leaders.

3.0 Report Detail

3.1 TERMINOLOGY

- 3.2 **Polling district:** the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or European Parliamentary electoral region into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined, which is convenient to electors. In Melton, each ward is divided into a number of polling districts which each have letter codes e.g. A, AB based on the ward in which they are located.
- 3.3 **Polling place:** the location (normally the building) in which polling stations will be sited by the Returning Officer.
- 3.4 **Polling station:** the room where the poll takes place (e.g. community room), which must be located within the polling place. The polling station is chosen by the Returning Officer. It is publicised in the Notice of Situation of Polling Stations and communicated to electors via their poll cards and is also published on the Council's website.

3.5 Where possible, every polling district should have its own dedicated polling place and all electors in that polling district are assigned to vote at the polling station located in that place.

3.6 It should be noted that the terms 'polling place' and 'polling station' are often used interchangeably and most people consider the polling place (such as a community centre) to be the polling station. However, it is possible to have more than one polling station per polling place (e.g. two sets of staff, two ballot boxes, two electoral registers); and these double stations are often provided in polling districts with a large number of electors or where there is a high turnout or a large number of people voting at certain times of the day.

3.7 **THE DESIGNATION OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

3.8 The designation of the district's polling districts and places is the responsibility of the Council.

3.9 The allocation of polling stations within polling places is not a Council function and is the responsibility of the Returning Officer for the election concerned. However, in practice, the location of likely polling stations is a key consideration when identifying polling places and the boundaries of polling districts, particularly in those areas of the district where there are no suitable premises.

3.10 Polling districts for local government elections are not automatically part of the statutory review. However, the Electoral Commission advises that the polling districts for UK parliamentary and local government elections should always be the same, and it therefore follows that any review of parliamentary polling arrangements should be conducted simultaneously with one of local government arrangements. Consequently, polling districts and polling places adopted by the Council for parliamentary elections will also be effective for local government elections.

3.11 **AIMS OF THE REVIEW**

3.12 In conducting a review the Council must:

- (a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
- (b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places it is responsible for are accessible to all electors;
- (c) have regard to the accessibility of disabled persons to potential polling stations in the polling place;
- (d) other than in special circumstances, locate the polling place in the polling district it serves; and
- (e) ensure the polling place is small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the polling district how they will be able to reach the polling station.

3.13 The focus of the review was to identify wherever possible polling places/polling stations which met set criteria, relating to:

- (a) Location
- (b) Facilities
- (c) Accessibility

(d) Health and Safety

3.14 POLLING PLACE/STATION REVIEW

3.15 When assessing the suitability of polling places/stations an assessment of the following issues are taken into account:

- (a) Location and accessibility to electors within the polling district •
- (b) Size – can it accommodate more than one polling station if required?
- (c) Accessibility – is the building accessible to all those entitled to vote at the polling station?
- (d) Availability – is the building readily available in the event of an unscheduled election?
- (e) Facilities available in the venue including parking, heating, lighting, toilet facilities and security

3.16 During the elections in May, Polling Station Inspectors undertook visits to polling places/stations and completed assessments. The purpose of these visits was to ensure that the polls were being administered correctly as well as assessing the suitability of existing arrangements and to evaluate alternative polling stations in light of comments and representations received throughout the consultation process.

3.17 Between 23rd September 2019 and 25th October 2019 the Returning Officer produced a consultation against the current arrangements. This was sent by email to all elected members, Member of Parliament, Member of European Parliament, County Council members for Melton, Parish Councils and was also available on the website. Advertisement was undertaken on social media to promote engagement.

Following the conclusion of the consultation, the Returning Officer made comments and proposed amendments. Consultation on his comments closed on 30th November 2019. No representations in response to the comments were made apart from parents at Swallowdale School who made representations about the use of the school. The Council does try to avoid schools and will only use where there are no suitable alternatives.

3.18 The outcome of the consultation and the views of relevant Officers have been used to inform the final recommendations.

FUTURE REVIEWS

3.19 The next statutory review needs to be undertaken before January 2025. However, on occasion, it may be necessary to change the designation of a polling place outside of the statutory review process. This can arise as a result of premises being closed, or where better facilities are identified.

3.20 The Council is therefore requested to authorise the Returning Officer, in consultation with group leaders and ward members to make changes to the designation of polling places which occur outside of the formal review process.

4.0 Consultation and Feedback

4.1 Consultations were carried out with the MP, MEP, all elected members of the Council, dual hatted members, relevant accessibility groups, Parish Councils and

the electorate of Melton.

5.0 Next Steps

5.1 If approved, Appendix A will be used in future elections.

5.2 At each election, Polling Inspectors complete an assessment of Polling Stations using Electoral Commission documents. They will continue to do this and this will be assessed after the conclusion of each election.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications resulting from the review.

7.0 Legal and Governance Implications:

7.1 The Polling Place Review which was undertaken In accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

8.0 Equality and Safeguarding Implications:

8.1 Attempts are made to avoid the use of schools. Where unavoidable, close liaison with the schools ensures a clear separation between the children and the polling station.

8.2 In determining where polling places should be located, the Council must seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting and that as far as is reasonable and practical, polling places are accessible to all electors. These issues were considered when making the recommendations.

9.0 Community Safety Implications:

9.1 There are no implications arising from the report.

10.0 Other Implications

10.1 There are no other implications arising from the report.

11.0 Risk & Mitigation:

11.1 If the review is not approved then there may not be suitable polling places for future elections.

Background Papers:

None

Appendices

None

Report Timeline:

Dated:

Equalities Check & Challenge

Advice was sought at the commencement of the review.

SLT Sign off

N/A

Previously Considered by Cabinet

N/A

Director Approval

02/12/19

Chief Finance Officer Sign Off	4.12.19
Monitoring Officer Sign Off	4.12.19
Consultation with Portfolio Holder	N/A

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