

**FOR PUBLICATION**

**REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING  
PLACES IN THE BOROUGH OF CHESTERFIELD (EC000)**

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MEETING: EMPLOYMENT AND GENERAL COMMITTEE

DATE: 3 NOVEMBER 2014

REPORT BY: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

WARD: ALL

COMMUNITY ASSEMBLIES: ALL

BACKGROUND PAPERS NONE

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**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1. To report on the statutory review of polling places and polling districts and seek approval to revised proposals.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a requirement that each authority must undertake a review of parliamentary polling districts and places within a period of 16 months beginning with 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013 and every fifth year thereafter. The last review was conducted in 2011 and therefore the next must be completed by January 2015.

- 2.2. A polling district is a geographical sub-division of a larger electoral area such as a ward, county division, parliamentary constituency, etc.
- 2.3. A polling place is an area within the polling district in which a polling station is located. There is no legal definition of polling place so it could be defined very widely (perhaps even the whole polling district) or quite narrowly (the building concerned). The polling station is the actual room or part of the building where voting takes place. So, for example, where voting takes place at a school, the polling station is the room in which voting takes place, the polling place is the school itself or building in which the room is located and the polling district is the wider area within which the building is located.
- 2.4. The designation of polling districts and polling places is, by law, the responsibility of the Council for the area. The designation of polling stations is a matter for the Returning Officer who may, if he/she chooses, provide more than one polling station within a polling place. This has been our long standing practice for some polling places.

### **3.0 THE PROCESS FOR THE REVIEW**

- 3.1. The steps that must be taken in carrying out a review, and the persons to be consulted, are determined by legislation.
  - (a) A review begins with the Council drawing up its proposals and publishing notice, at its offices and on its website, that the review is to be held. For this review that was done on 25 July 2014.
  - (b) The Returning Officers for any other parliamentary constituencies partly contained in this Borough must be consulted on the Council's proposals and invited to make comments on them. A copy of the proposals was sent to the Returning Officer for North East Derbyshire who had no comments.
  - (c) Representations on the proposals must be sought from persons having particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different

forms of disability. To this end views were sought from the Chesterfield Equality and Diversity forum whose comments have been taken into consideration.

- (d) Electors have the right to make representations and details were published in the press, on the council's website and through the Community Assemblies on how people could view the proposals and make comments.
- (e) In addition, comments were sought from Members of Parliament for the constituencies affected by the review, from borough councillors, parish councils and local political parties and election agents and these views have been taken into consideration.
- (f) Once all consultations necessary have been carried out the Council must consider the responses and decide whether to confirm its proposals with or without modifications. The results of the review must be published. There is then an opportunity for various categories of persons/bodies (parish councils, not less than 30 registered electors in a constituency, etc.) to make representations to the Electoral Commission that the Review has not been properly conducted. If the Commission agrees, following consideration of comments made on the objection by the Returning Officer, it may direct the Council to make any alterations it sees necessary to the polling places designated.

3.2. The approach taken in carrying out the review of this Council's polling districts and polling places has been based on the electoral team's knowledge of the existing districts and places, informed by comments from the public, the owners of premises used as polling stations, the views of local councillors and feedback from presiding officers and inspecting officers in recent elections. These sources have identified a number of cases, almost all relating to polling places, where the situation is not ideal. Efforts have been made to address some of these in the review. A full audit of current polling places and polling stations was carried out on polling day 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2014 from which the draft proposals were drawn up.

3.3. A total of 10 comments were received from members and members of the public in support of current arrangements.

#### **4.0 ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES**

4.1. Returning Officers have been required for some years now to have regard to accessibility issues for people with disabilities when designating polling places. Extensive guidance and direction in this regard is issued by the Electoral Commission. All of the premises used for polling stations in this Borough are accessible 'so far as is reasonable and practicable'. Sometimes portable ramps are provided to assist voters confined to wheelchairs. Polling station staff are also asked to give whatever assistance is possible should this be required. This issue is one upon which feedback is sought from presiding officers after each set of elections.

4.2. It cannot be said, however, that every polling station is completely accessible to all voters no matter what their degree and kind of disability. For example, adequate parking very close to the entrance may not be available; there may be a ramped entrance but there may still be a lip or threshold to cross; the access path to the station may not be as smooth and even as would be desirable. In some locations it is only possible to use a mobile polling station which has more limited accessibility than larger, fixed premise.

4.3. The recent elections in May revealed that there are still several polling stations where access for disabled people is less than satisfactory in various ways. Those stations will be kept under review with a view to improvements being obtained, or alternative premises identified, in time for the next scheduled elections. However, most of the issues identified have been addressed in revised polling place proposals. In particular the number of mobile units used as polling stations has been reduced from 4 to 1. The one remaining is that sited on Hady Lane, adjacent to the pavilion.

4.4. This report recommends that the Returning Officer be authorised to designate different polling places for those where there are currently concerns should this prove possible.

## **5.0 PROPOSALS**

- 5.1. The existing arrangements for this Borough are set out in the appendix which also contains the proposed amendments to polling places and polling districts and the reasons for the changes.

## **6.0 CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1. In writing this report the following standard corporate issues have been considered:
- Risk Management
  - Equalities
  - Financial implications
  - Health and Safety

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1. That the proposals arising from the 2014 review of polling places and polling districts detailed in Appendix 1 of the report to the meeting be approved;
- 7.2. That the Returning Officer be authorised to designate different polling places for those where there are currently concerns should this prove possible.

For further information on this report contact Peter Clark  
01246 345806

Sandra Essex

Democratic Services Manager