

**CABINET**

**2nd NOVEMBER 2011**

**REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a duty for all polling districts and polling places to be reviewed by the end of 2007 and then at least once every four years thereafter.
- 1.2 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council may divide the City wards into polling districts and designate at least one polling place for each district. It also has to keep these arrangements under review. The boundaries of Local Government wards are not covered by this review as they are determined by the Boundary Commission for England.
- 1.3 The Council have carried out informal reviews of polling districts and places each year since the ward boundaries were last reviewed and changed in 2007.
- 1.4 As part of the informal reviews extensive consultation was held with council members, candidates, election agents and local members of Parliament. Arising from that, amendments were made to some polling districts and polling stations to improve access and comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.
- 1.5 Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a number of changes to the 1983 Act in respect of the way reviews must be undertaken. The most important change is that the Council had to conduct a full review by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007 and every four years thereafter. This does not however prevent changes being made at any time before the next full review.
- 1.6 Members may recall that Cabinet agreed the current polling districts within the city on 7 November 2007.
- 1.7 The Electoral Commission has no role in the review process itself. However, it can consider comments if people do not think the review has met the reasonable requirements of electors or taken sufficient account of the needs of disabled electors. The following can appeal to the Commission:-
  - 30 or more registered electors
  - any person who made comments during the review
  - any non-electors who has expertise in access to premises or facilities for disabled people

As a result, the Commission may direct the Council to alter polling arrangements arising from the review and can make these alterations itself if the Council does not do so within two months

## **2. DESCRIPTION OF DECISION**

- 2.1 To recommend to Council that the proposed changes to Polling Districts and Polling Places as set out in Appendix 4 are approved.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Attached at Appendix 1 to the report is a list of polling stations that were allocated to each polling district before the review took place.
- 3.2 Appendix 2 to the report sets out the groups that have been consulted on the recommendations.
- 3.3 Appendix 3 to the report sets out the representations received and the comments from the Electoral Registration Officer.
- 3.4 Appendix 4 to the report sets out any changes made to the current polling arrangements in the city.

## **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 In carrying out the consultation process the Council has followed the advice of the Electoral Commission on how the review should be conducted. In general terms, the Council was required to announce when the review would take place. This involved consulting with the Returning Officer, who made representations on existing and proposed polling arrangements. The Council has since published the Returning Officer's proposals and invited comments which will then be considered before a final decision is made.
- 4.2 On the 1 September 2011 the Council announced that a review was to take place and invited comments to be submitted no later than 23 September 2011. The consultation sought comments from people who have particular expertise in the area of disabled access.
- 4.3 The review was advertised on the Council's website, the Notice of Review and list of current polling stations were displayed in Hetton Centre Library, Houghton Le Spring Library, Sunderland Civic Centre main entrance and The City Centre Customer Service Centre requesting comments on how improvements could be made to polling stations.
- 4.4 The Notice of review was also sent out to all ward councillors, The 2011 Local Government Election Agents, the 2010 Parliamentary Election Agents, Members of Parliament for the 3 constituencies in Sunderland and various Diversity Groups as noted in Appendix 2.

## **5. ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 All comments have been considered and site visits carried out where appropriate and the Returning Officer's final recommendations are contained in Appendix 4.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no financial implications for the Council.

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The proposals have taken into account as far as possible the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## **8. OUTLINE TIMETABLE**

Notice of start of review	1 September 2011
Representations received deadline	23 September 2011
Report to Cabinet	2 November 2011
Report to Council	30 November 2011

## **9. REASONS FOR DECISION**

9.1 To comply with Section 16 of The Electoral Administration Act 2006 this requires the completion of a full review by 31st December 2007 and then at least once every four years thereafter.

## **10. ALTERNATIVE OPTION**

10.1 The Council does not comply with Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1 Consultees comments on the Returning Officer's recommendations. Electoral Administration Act 2006.