
REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Stephen Harker, Councillor Stephen Harker
Efficiency and Resources Portfolio

Responsible Director - Paul Wildsmith, Director of Resources

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider a review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations, to comply with the requirements of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

Summary

2. The Electoral Administration Act places a duty on all local authorities to review Polling Districts and Polling Places every four years.
3. This report outlines the proposed content and structure of the review, the timescales involved, and a suggested programme of consultation. Members are requested to note the review, and endorse the process outlined in the attached **Appendix A**.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that the structure of the review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations, the timescales involved, and the suggested programme of consultation, be endorsed.

Reason

5. To comply with the requirements of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

Paul Wildsmith,
Director of Resources

Background Paper

Electoral Commission Circular EC19/2010.

Linda Todd : Extension 2354

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	This report has no implications to address Health and Well Being for the residents of Darlington.
Carbon Emissions	There are no direct implications to Carbon Emissions which this report needs to address.
Diversity	There are no direct implications to Diversity which this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	All Wards are equally affected.
Groups Affected	All Groups are equally affected.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	There are no links.
Efficiency	There are no efficiency proposals identified as part of this review.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. Each local authority is responsible for dividing its area into Polling Districts for UK Parliamentary Elections, and designating Polling Places for each Polling District. A Polling District is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts. A Polling Place is the building or area in which Polling Stations are selected by the Returning Officers, and a Polling Station itself is the room or area where voting actually takes place.
7. All local authorities must review their UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places every four years. Returning Officers are required to make representations to the local authority in relation to existing Polling Stations and the Polling Stations that would likely be used based on the proposed arrangements for Polling Places.
8. Members will be aware that the Council last formally reviewed its Polling Places in 2007, and that a light touch inspection of Polling Places took place prior to the Local Elections earlier this year (Minutes 52/Nov/2007 and 58(2)/Mar/2011 refer).
9. Some Members might recall that submissions received at the last review in 2007 all related to the use of schools as polling places. Parents who made the submissions were concerned when schools had to close on polling days.
10. Work has been on-going with Head Teachers since to 2007 in attempt to keep as many schools as possible open on Election Day. At the local elections in May this year, 9 of the 18 school premises used remained open in full or in part.

The Review Process

11. In conducting a statutory review, local authorities must follow a set of rules outlined in legislation. These are:
 - (a) The authority must publish notice of holding a review;
 - (b) The authority must consult the Returning Officer in a constituency which is wholly or partly in its area;
 - (c) The Returning Officer must make representations to the authority which must include information as to the location of Polling Stations (existing or proposed) within Polling Places (existing or proposed);
 - (d) The local authority must publish the Returning Officer's representations within 30 calendar days of receipt, in such manner as is prescribed;
 - (e) The authority must 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. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the Returning Officer's representations;

(f) Any elector in a constituency situated in whole or in part in the authority's area may make representations;

(g) Representations made by any person in connection with a review of Polling Places may include proposals for specified alternative Polling Places;

(h) On completion of the review, the authority must give reasons for its decisions in the review and publish such other information as is prescribed.

12. As part of the review process, local authorities must also seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have reasonable facilities for voting, where reasonable and practicable that Polling Stations are accessible to those who are disabled, and consider needs of disabled people when considering the designation of Polling Places.

13. To assist in conducting the review, the Electoral Commission recommend a number of criteria for assessing the suitability of the current and proposed arrangements. Consideration should be given to electorate figures within Wards and existing Polling Districts, projected population changes and new developments within Polling Districts, the availability of current and proposed Polling Places, the suitability of current Polling Places and an indication as to whether they remain fit for purpose, alternative buildings that may appear suitable, advice and guidance from local disability groups and disability organisations, and consultation with the public, elected members and other interested parties in relation to the current and proposed arrangements.

14. Sufficient time should be allowed during the course of the review to enable the necessary site visits, and to allow all stakeholders to gather feedback from their own groups, comment on existing arrangements, respond to proposed arrangements, and suggest alternative arrangements accordingly.

15. It is, therefore, proposed that the review be formally commenced on Monday, 5th September 2011, with the required notice being published and displayed at the Town Hall on the Council's website, on Friday, 2nd September 2011. A full outline of the review timetable is attached to this report at **Appendix A**.

Conclusion

16. This report asks Members to consider a review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations. Submission of the final proposals will be made to Council in November, 2011.