
REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Leader

Responsible Director - Paul Wildsmith, Director of Corporate Services

Purpose of Report

1. To report the outcome of a recent review of Polling Districts and Polling Places for the Darlington and Sedgefield Parliamentary Constituencies.

Information

2. New Regulations require each local authority to undertake a review of polling districts and polling places on a four-yearly cycle. The first review must be completed by 31st December, 2007.
3. Members will be aware that the Council reviewed its polling places prior to the General Election in 2005 and again prior to the local elections earlier in the year (Minutes 96/Nov/05 and 82/Mar/07 refer).
4. The emphasis of the new review (and also in previous reviews the Council has undertaken in relation to polling places) is on convenience of access for electors, but particularly for electors with any type of disability.
5. Polling districts (the geographical sub-division of the electoral area) were last reviewed following the Ward Boundary Review in 2001 (a periodic electoral review undertaken by the Local Government Commission for England) and the electoral register has been published since that date with the revisions reflected at the Ward Boundary Review.

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

6. Notices advising of the Review were placed in public buildings and on the Council's website (see **Appendix A**) in August 2007. All Members of the Council, local political parties; and Darlington Association on Disability were also advised that a Review was taking place.
7. In accordance with the Regulations, the two Acting Returning Officers for the Parliamentary Constituencies within the Borough (Darlington and Sedgefield) were invited to comment on the current polling places and their comments were published on the Council's website (see **Appendix B**), together with other representations received (see **Appendix C**).

Representations/Comments Received

8. Representations/comments were received from Darlington Association on Disability (who is supportive of the work the Council has undertaken) and from six individuals (see **Appendix C**).
9. The six individual representations received were from parents objecting to school closures when polling takes place (the representations were received during the lead up to the Referendum when some schools were utilised for polling). As can be seen from the Acting Returning Officer's comments on the representations it is suggested that, in future, Officers liaise with Head Teachers to ensure a full risk assessment is undertaken to see if the school can remain open on polling day whilst maintaining school safety.
10. The views of the Acting Returning Officer on the representations received were then published for three weeks and further comments invited. No further representations were received by the deadline of 29th October, 2007.

Proposals

11. As no representations or comments have been received regarding any of the Polling Districts within the Borough it is not intended to make any changes and the Electoral Register will be published on 1st December, 2007, in the current Polling District format.
12. In relation to Polling Places it is recommended that the recommendations of the two Acting Returning Officers (as detailed at Appendices B and C respectively) be implemented.

Legal Implications

13. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

14. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

15. The issues contained within this report are required to be considered by Council.

Recommendations

16. Council are requested to :-

- (a) note that no changes are proposed to Polling Districts and that the Electoral Register will be published on 1st December, 2007 in its current format;
- (b) endorse the recommendations of the Acting Returning Officers for the Darlington and Sedgefield Parliamentary Constituencies in relation to polling places and request the officers to implement the recommendations; and
- (c) authorise the publication of the proposals for polling places.

Reason

17. The recommendations are supported by the following reason :-

To ensure that the Council meets the requirements of the Polling District and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006.

**Paul Wildsmith,
Director of Corporate Services**

Background Papers

Electoral Commission Circular No. EC28/2007 dated 26th June, 2007

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