
POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS REVIEW

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Stephen Harker, Efficiency and Resources Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Ada Burns, Chief Executive

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 Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006 as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 in advance of the Local and Parliamentary Elections in May 2015.

Summary

2. The above Act places a duty on all local authorities to review Polling Districts and Polling Places every four years.
3. Following a review of the electoral arrangements for Darlington the Local Government Boundary Commission for England will publish its final recommendations in August 2014 and this review will commence once those recommendations are known.
4. 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 and timetable as detailed in **Appendix A** attached to this report.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that the structure of the process and timetable of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations, the timescales involved, and the suggested programme of consultation as detailed at Appendix A, be endorsed.

Reason

6. To comply with the requirements of the Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006 as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

Ada Burns
Chief Executive

Background Papers

No background papers were referred to in the compilation of this report.

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 Impact	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

7. 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.
8. 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. This review is being held a year ahead of schedule so that it takes place in advance of the Local and Parliamentary Elections in 2015.
9. The Council last formally reviewed its Polling Places place prior to the Local Elections in 2011 (Minute 58(2)/Mar/2011 refers).
10. Following a review of the electoral arrangements for Darlington the Local Government Boundary Commission for England will publish its final

recommendations in August 2014 and this review will commence once those recommendations are known.

11. Submissions received at the last review in 2011 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.
12. 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 European Parliamentary Election in May this year, 8 of the 17 school premises used remained open in full or in part.
13. Schools are only identified for use when there is no suitable alternative facility for a polling station. The Council has a responsibility to ensure that all electors have reasonable access to a Polling Place, which includes siting Polling Places within the appropriate Polling District, ensuring Polling Places are conveniently situated so as not to disadvantage or dissuade voters from voting, and ensuring that Polling Places comply with the Equality Act 2010.

The Review Process

14. 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.

15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. It is, therefore, proposed that the review be formally commenced on Monday, 1st September 2014, with the required notice being published and displayed on the Council's website. A full outline of the review timetable is attached to this report at Appendix A.

Conclusion

19. 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 2014.