



Report to Council

Subject: Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations 2011

Date: 5 October 2011

Author: Head of Strategy and Performance

1. Purpose of the Report

- To consider and approve changes arising from a review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations.
- To seek approval for amendments to the Council's Constitution to allow the Chief Executive to change polling places at short notice to cater for a situation in which a polling place become suddenly unavailable.

2. Background

Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, requires that a review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations is carried out every four years. Such reviews should ensure that all electors have reasonable access to a polling station, and ensure that the buildings which are used as polling stations have facilities to cater for people who have different types of disability.

A review fell due in 2011, and members will be aware that the Council has carried out that review over the Summer. The findings of the review are set out in a report at **Appendix 1**.

The approach taken to the review was to keep changes to a minimum and only suggest modifications where absolutely necessary, given that the Parliamentary Boundary Review (as reported to Cabinet 4 August) will require a further review to be carried out at its conclusion (see section 4 below). A further consideration was the fact that feedback from the previous two elections indicated general contentment with current polling arrangements.

A six week consultation period took place between 15 July and 26 August and included: -

- All Gedling Borough Councillors
- Gedling Access Group
- Local MPs
- All Nottinghamshire County Councillors for Gedling
- All Parish Councils in Gedling
- Returning Officers for Sherwood and Gedling Constituencies
- Presiding Officers
- Managers/Owners of all polling stations
- The public via “Contacts” magazine and the website

The Acting Returning Officers for Gedling (John Robinson) and Sherwood (Andrew Muter) made comments on the stations taking account of any representations received. All representations received were investigated fully and where appropriate alternatives were explored.

3. Proposals

The Officer Steering Group that conducted the review concluded that just one change should be made to existing arrangements. Other changes were proposed during the consultation and the reasons for not proceeding with these are set out in the accompanying report.

The one change relates to Kingswell Ward – representations were made that Ernehale Junior School should no longer be used a polling station and a number of alternatives were suggested, one of which was the neighbouring Ernehale Infants School, which has a Community Room. All options were investigated by the Steering Group, and it was concluded that the entire campus of the Ernehale Infants and Junior Schools be assigned as the polling place for Kingswell L2 (See appendix B of the consultation report for map). This will offer the Returning Officer the flexibility to choose the building to be used for each election, in liaison with the two schools and with a view to using the Infants School at the next election.

During the course of the review, one other matter has arisen which could present a problem in the future. Current constitutional arrangements require Council approval to designate polling places. In normal circumstances, this works well, but it is possible that, on a limited number of occasions, an alternative polling place may be required at short notice – for example, if building that is scheduled to be used as a polling place is damaged in the run up to an election. In a situation such as this, there may not be sufficient time to call a meeting of Council to designate an alternative polling place - therefore it is proposed that the Chief

Executive be authorised to designate a new polling place should one become unavailable at short notice before an election.

4. Resource Implications

As outlined above, there is a statutory requirement to carry out this review every four years.

The Government is looking to move towards five-year terms for Parliament under the Fixed-Term Parliaments Bill. It is also reviewing current parliamentary constituencies (see separate item on this agenda).

Together, these are likely to mean that Polling District, Place and Station reviews will in future need to be carried out every five years, with the first review under these new arrangements needing to be carried out within 16 months from 1 October 2013 (the anticipated date for new constituencies to be in place). Further reviews will be required every five years after that.

5. Recommendation

It is **recommended** that the Council: -

- Agree that the entire campus of the Ernehale Infants and Junior Schools be assigned as the polling place for Kingswell L2
- Agree that no further changes be made to polling places and polling stations as a result of this review
- Authorise the Chief Executive to designate an alternative polling place should one become unavailable at short notice before an election
- Note possible changes to future requirements for the review of polling districts and places being proposed by the Government.