

POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW – DESIGNATION OF POLLING PLACES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will be aware that a review of the polling districts and polling places is currently taking place. The review is required under Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and must be completed by 31 December 2007. A review has to be undertaken at four yearly intervals in the future.
- 1.2 The review has been publicised on the Council's website, with individual consultation documents being sent to all Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, local political parties and disability groups. Documents have also been available at all of the Council's Information Offices.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The following are definitions of the terms used in this report:
 - (a) A "polling district" is a subdivision of a larger electoral area such as a Parliamentary constituency, into a smaller area within which a polling place may be defined. In New Forest District, polling districts are denoted by letters, for example LA, BI, etc.
 - (b) A "polling place" is an area in which a polling station is situated. A "polling place" may be defined as widely as a polling district, or as tightly as a particular building.
 - (c) A "polling station" is the room or building where the poll is held.
- 2.2 Various pieces of legislation dictate that the designation of:
 - (a) polling districts is a matter for the Council. The Council at its last meeting delegated this function to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee. The Committee has appointed a Working Party to review the issues and representations received, for recommendation to the Committee;
 - (b) polling districts is a matter for the Executive;
 - (c) polling stations is a matter for the Returning Officer for the elections.
- 2.3 The 2006 Act stipulates that, in undertaking the review, relevant authorities must seek to ensure
 - (a) that all the electors in the electoral area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
 - (b) that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.

3. DESIGNATION OF POLLING PLACES

- 3.1 In order to provide flexibility in the event of buildings not being available when elections are held, the Council has in the past designated the whole of each polling district as the polling place for that district. It is then for the Returning Officer to designate a polling station for each election. The Returning Officer tries to use the same polling stations to ensure continuity for electors, but this is not always possible. If a “polling place” is defined as a particular building and it is not available, a procedure laid down in legislation (which involves the giving of public notice to the electors) must be followed.
- 3.2 To avoid unnecessary bureaucracy, the Returning Officer considers it advantageous to retain the current practice of designating the whole of the polling district as the polling place, and recommends this course of action to the Cabinet. Views on this proposal were sought as part of the consultation on the review and no comments on this particular matter have been received.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Designating the whole of the Council’s polling districts as polling places would save the cost of giving public notice in the event of the non-availability of particular buildings that might otherwise have been delegated as polling places.
- 4.2 It is estimated that the review will cost in the region of £2,000. This was one of the range of new electoral registration and elections requirements introduced in 2006 for which the Government identified an amount of £55,000 in the Council’s 2006/07 Rate Support Grant.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None arising directly from this report, but equality and diversity implications at particular polling stations will be considered by the General Purposes and Licensing Committee and the Working Party it has established, for recommendation to the Returning Officer.

7. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 7.1 To follow

8. RECOMMENDATION:

- 8.1 That the polling places in New Forest District be designated as the whole of the polling district within which they are situated.

For Further Information Please Contact:

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Background Papers:

Published documents