

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Councils have been required by law to review the polling districts and polling places within their areas at least once every four years. The last review in New Forest District took place in 2010, with a few changes in polling district boundaries and polling stations coming into effect for the 2011 quadrennial district and parish elections, which were combined with the referendum on the parliamentary voting system.
- 1.2 The next review would have been due to take place in 2015 for implementation in 2016, but the legislation has been amended to provide that a review must be carried out and completed during the period of 16 months beginning with 1 October 2013, and then every five years after that. The Government has apparently made the change in order to ensure that any anomalies with polling districts and stations are addressed before the 2015 Parliamentary and local elections, which will be the first run on registers prepared under the new system of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Any changes to polling districts and polling places will not take effect until the December 2014 register is published.
- 1.3 The review may not start until 1 October 2013, and this report is to ask the Committee to take the preparatory step of setting up a Working Party so that the review may commence promptly on 1 October 2013. There are many demands on the Electoral Services Team in 2014 and beyond arising from IER and it would be helpful to be able to complete the polling districts/places review as soon as possible.

2. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE REVIEW

- 2.1 For the information of members, the following are responsible for polling districts, polling places and polling stations which will be examined as part of the review:
 - The designation of polling districts (a geographical subdivision of an electoral area, such as a parliamentary constituency or a district ward), usually known by distinctive letters such as LA, RD, etc, is a matter for the Council (on the recommendation of this Committee).
 - The designation of polling places (the geographical area in which a polling station is situated) is a matter for the Cabinet. It has been the practice to designate the whole of a polling district as the polling place in order to maintain flexibility if a particular polling station is unavailable for any reason.
 - The designation of polling stations (the buildings where polling takes place) is a matter for the Returning Officer
- 2.2 Polling districts, polling places and polling stations are interlinked. Adjustments to any one will often affect the others. It has therefore been the practice for this Committee to take the lead on the review and to submit appropriate recommendations to the Cabinet, the Council and to the Returning Officer.

3. ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE REVIEW

- 3.1 The Returning Officer does not have power to “requisition” buildings other than schools for use as polling stations and has to rely on the goodwill of the owners of premises to make them available. Some polling stations in the District are not ideal but most are adequate. Feedback from polling station staff and polling station inspectors at elections in and since 2011 does not suggest significant difficulties but a few stations should be looked at as part of the review. These include some of the low usage stations where members might wish to take a view on whether or not they should be continued.
- 3.2 It is also desirable to make some minor changes to polling district boundaries to correct some anomalies that have arisen following new housing developments.
- 3.3 A summary of the procedure to be followed in conducting the review is:
- Publish formal notice of the holding of the review. This will include background information on the review
 - Returning Officer to make representations to the authority, including information as to the location of polling stations (both existing and proposed)
 - Within 30 days publish the Returning Officer’s representations (the first two steps may be combined)
 - Actively seek representations from persons it thinks have particular expertise in relation to:
 - Access to premises; or
 - Facilities for persons who have different forms of disability(Although there is no formal requirement for this, Parish and Town Councils should also be consulted.)
 - Consider all representations received and make recommendations to General Purposes and Licensing Committee, the Cabinet and the Council. (It might be advisable to consult further with Parish & Town Councils at this stage.)
 - On completion publish all correspondence in connection with the review together with any decisions and the reasoning for these decisions
 - Any changes to polling districts and polling places will take effect from the December 2014 register

4. PROPOSALS FOR A WORKING PARTY

- 4.1 When the last Working Party was established, in 2010, it comprised five members, four Conservative and one Liberal Democrat. Despite the recent changes in the political composition of the Council, if a Working Party of five is established on this occasion, it should again comprise four Conservative and one Liberal Democrat Group members.
- 4.2 Suggested terms of reference for the Working Party are set out in the recommendation below.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Creation of a Working Party to oversee the proposed review would mean additional member travel and printing costs, but these are likely to be minimal. There will be costs associated with consultation with parishes and other interested parties but these will be contained within existing budgets.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL, CRIME & DISORDER AND EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Siting polling stations close to centres of population reduces the need to travel to polling stations by car and should be borne in mind when the review is undertaken. There are no crime and disorder implications. Ensuring equal access for all is also an important consideration when considering polling stations and will be taken into account.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That a Working Party be established to oversee the review of polling districts and polling places that must be completed within a period of 16 months from 1 October 2013, and to make recommendations to the Committee.
- 7.2 That the Committee determines the size and political composition of the Working Party and appoints members to serve on the Working Party.
- 7.3 That the terms of reference of the Working Party be:

To oversee the review of the polling districts and polling places in New Forest District under Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and to make recommendations to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee.

Further information:

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Background Papers:

Published documents