



## GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Polling Places and Polling Station Review</b>
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**AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC**

<b>Committee Meeting Date:</b>	11 September 2012
<b>Directorate:</b>	Borough Secretary's Department

### 1. Purpose

- 1 The report seeks the General Purposes Committee's approval of amendments to polling places in six polling districts in Northampton for all elections, referenda and polls which will take place from November 2012 onwards.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The General Purposes Committee is asked to note the feedback and proposals outlined in appendix 1 and agree changes to the polling place that will be used by electors in the following wards and polling districts from November 2012 onwards:

Delapre & Briar Hill Ward	Polling District SDBD
East Hunsbury Ward	Polling Districts SNEHF and SNEHG
Rectory Farm Ward	Polling District NRFD
Semilong Ward	Polling District NSMA and NSMB
Talavera Ward	Polling District STVF
Westone Ward	Polling District NWT A

- 2.2 The General Purposes Committee is asked to delegate to the Returning Officer the ability to amend the polling districts, polling places and polling stations as required for operational purposes.

### **3. Issues and Choices**

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#### **3.1 Report Background**

- 3.1.1 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 will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the (Acting) Returning Officer for the election.
- 3.1.2 In early 2011, a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations was conducted in response to changes that were made to ward boundaries as a result of the Further Electoral Review of Northampton.
- 3.1.3 The review altered a significant number of polling districts, polling places and polling stations in the Borough in advance of the Referendum and Local Election in May 2011.
- 3.1.4 Between formal reviews, it is good practice to keep polling places and polling stations under consideration and for an evaluation of their suitability to be carried out after each election.
- 3.1.5 On Polling Day in May 2011, Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors conducted assessments on the suitability of the polling stations, as well as reported back any feedback from the public. Following the election, feedback was also sought from ward councillors regarding the suitability of the new arrangements. All feedback has been considered in order to identify whether it is necessary to make any changes to voting arrangements in preparation for the Police and Crime Commissioner and any subsequent elections.
- 3.1.6 Earlier in the year, the Electoral Registration Officer was informed that Bective Mobile, a polling station that had previously been used in Westone Ward was no longer available for use. As a result, a new polling station in this area has had to be identified.
- 3.1.7 Premises which have not been used before for polling purposes are indicated in appendix 1 as being “new”. New polling stations have been inspected and checked as to their suitability.
- 3.1.8 The rest of the premises have been used for polling in the past, and have been deemed of adequate size and accessible to disabled electors. In the main, the proposals in this report seek to reallocate electors to alternative polling stations in order reduce overcrowding in polling stations that are used for electors from multiple polling districts.
- 3.1.9 If changes are approved by the General Purposes Committee, a note will be put on the poll cards to advise electors of any new arrangements.

## **4. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **4.1 Resources and Risk**

- 4.1.1 The proposals do not have any impact on staffing levels and the additional hire charge of approximately £150 can be contained within the existing election budgets.

### **4.2 Legal**

- 4.2.1 The Police and Crime Commissioner Elections Order 2012 makes provision for the polling districts and polling places at Police and Crime Commissioner elections to be aligned with those used for Parliamentary elections.
- 4.2.2 Local authorities are required to divide every constituency into polling districts for the purpose of UK Parliamentary elections and to designate a polling place for each polling district. Polling places should be within the polling district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area outside the district.
- 4.2.3 The (Acting) Returning Officer must comment during any review of polling districts and polling places on both existing polling stations and the polling stations that would probably be used if any new proposal for polling places were accepted.
- 4.2.4 The (Acting) Returning Officer is required to decide how many polling stations are required for each polling place and must allocate electors to the polling stations in such a manner as he or she thinks most convenient.

### **4.3 Equality**

- 4.3.1 As part of the review process, local authorities must:
- Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
  - Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable the polling places are accessible to those who are disabled, and
  - When considering or reviewing the designation of a polling place, have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
- 4.3.2 An Equalities Risk Impact Assessment has been conducted in respect of these proposals and considered the issues outlined above. No issues have been identified that require reporting to the committee.

### **4.4 Consultees (Internal and External)**

- 4.4.1 The (Acting) Returning Officer has been consulted on the proposals for changes to polling places and has confirmed that in light of the feedback that has been received regarding the polling places that were previously used, he is supportive of the proposals as they are deemed to improve the electors' voting experience and has no further comments to add.

- 4.4.2 Consultation took place with both Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors on Polling Day in May 2011. This included the conduct of assessments on the suitability of the polling stations, as well as reports of any feedback from the public. Further feedback was also collected from ward councillors regarding the suitability of the new arrangements after the election had taken place. All of the feedback has been reviewed in order to identify whether it is necessary to make any changes to voting arrangements in preparation for the upcoming Police and Crime Commissioner election and any subsequent elections.
- 4.4.3 Ward councillors in the affected wards have been informed of the proposals and any feedback that has been received is noted in appendix 1.

## **5. Background Papers**

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- 5.1 The Equalities Risk Impact Assessment is available on request from the Democratic & Chief Executive Services Manager.

**Cassie Triggs, Democratic & Chief Executive Services Manager, ext. 7680**