



GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

Report Title	Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Committee Meeting Date:	29 January 2013
Directorate:	Borough Secretary's Department

1. Purpose

- 1 The report seeks General Purposes Committee's approval of proposed changes to polling districts and polling places in Northampton as shown in the map at appendix 1 and listed in appendix 2 subject to any changes that may be recommended by the Returning Officer as a result of public consultation on the proposals.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The General Purposes Committee is asked to note the outcome of the public consultation on the proposals, which will be published on 28 January 2013 and available online at www.northampton.gov.uk/pdreview and displayed in the One Stop Shop at the Guildhall and at the Northamptonshire Central Library (Level 1).
 - 2.2 The General Purposes Committee is asked to agree the proposed changes to the polling districts and polling places within the Borough in order that preparations can be made for the Northamptonshire County Council election to be conducted on the new county division boundaries.
 - 2.3 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.
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3. Issues and Choices

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 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 Returning Officer for the election.
- 3.1.2 A number of events have taken place in the last six months that have resulted in the necessity to review the polling districts that are in place across the borough in preparation for the County Council elections in May 2013.
- 3.1.3 Firstly, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England published its Final Recommendations on the Further Electoral Review of Northamptonshire County Council on 16th October 2012. The draft Order (the legal document which brings into force their recommendations) was laid in Parliament on the 20th November 2012 and is due to come into force in time for preparations to be made for the county elections in May 2013. The Further Electoral Review fundamentally altered a significant number of county division boundaries within the Borough, reducing the total number of divisions from 23 to 17. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England also recommended new warding arrangements for the Parish Councils of Duston and Upton, which will come into force as part of the order.
- 3.1.4 Secondly, in December 2012, Council agreed to the creation of two new Parish Councils in the borough. Elections to these councils will be held in May 2013. In addition to this, Council agreed to make amendments to the boundaries of the existing Parish Councils of Upton, Wootton & East Hunsbury, Great Houghton and Collingtree. These changes will come into force on 1 April 2013 and therefore need to be reflected in changes to existing polling district boundaries.
- 3.1.5 Furthermore, 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. As such, the Returning Officer would like to reduce the number of polling stations that are located on school premises and in mobile units and reduce the number of Polling Districts, especially those that are very small, in order to improve the efficiency of running elections.
- 3.1.6 In line with the Electoral Commission's guidance on running such reviews, there has been a period of consultation during which members of the public and councillors have been invited to give their views on the proposed changes. Additionally, the Chairs of the Northampton Disabled People's Forum, the disability charity SCOPE, Autism Concern, Deaf Connect and Northamptonshire Association for the Blind have been contacted in order to invite comments and representations from such persons as have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for people who have different forms of disability.

- 3.1.7 Subject to any amendments following consultation, it is being proposed that the number of polling districts reduces from 135 to 95, the number of polling places reduces by 17 and the number of polling stations reduces by almost 30%.
- 3.1.8 All polling stations that are being proposed have been used previously at an election or poll in the town, with the exception of those located at Spencer Dallington Community Centre and the Old Club House at Collingtree Park Golf Club. Both premises will be inspected to ensure that they are accessible to electors with different forms of disability.
- 3.1.9 A note will be put on all poll cards to alert electors to a possible change in the location of their polling station.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Resources and Risk

- 4.1.1 The proposals would reduce the number of polling station staff that would be required by approximately 10%. It would also reduce the cost of venue hire.

4.2 Legal

- 4.2.1 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.
- 4.2.2 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. These comments are listed in the document titled "List of current & proposed Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations" that is available to download from the website (www.northampton.gov.uk/pdreview) and is also displayed at the One Stop Shop and Northamptonshire Central Library.
- 4.2.3 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 All representations will be considered in light of any implications they may have on the council's ability to meet the requirements outlined above.

4.4 Consultees (Internal and External)

4.4.1 A notice launching the review was published on Monday 14 January 2013 and the proposals were subsequently made available to the public via the council's website (www.northampton.gov.uk/pdreview), as well as being displayed in the One Stop Shop and at Northamptonshire Central Library.

4.4.2 A copy of the notice and an invitation to respond to the review was also sent to the following individuals and groups:

- All Northampton Borough Councillors
- All Northamptonshire County Councillors representing Northampton
- The Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council
- The Chair of the Northampton Disabled People's Forum
- SCOPE Northamptonshire
- Autism Concern
- Deaf Connect
- Northamptonshire Association for the Blind
- Community Groups and Residents Associations across the town
- All Parish Clerks in Northampton

5. Background Papers

5.1 All background papers are available to view at www.northampton.gov.uk/pdreview and are also displayed in the One Stop Shop foyer at the Guildhall and on Level 1 of the Northamptonshire Central Library.

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