



## GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

Report Title	Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019
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**AGENDA STATUS:** PUBLIC

<b>Committee Meeting Date:</b>	18 March 2019
<b>Policy Document:</b>	No
<b>Directorate:</b>	Borough Secretary

### 1. Purpose

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- 1.1 To advise the Committee on the Polling District and Polling Place Review to be carried out between April 2019 and 31 January 2020.

### 2. Recommendations

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- 2.1 That the Committee is aware of the timetable for the Polling District and Polling Place Review.

### 3. Issues and Choices

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#### 3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 It is a statutory requirement to conduct periodic reviews of polling districts and polling places. Such reviews are required at specific time intervals and also when changes are needed due to circumstances, such as the results of a periodic review.
- 3.1.4 Polling Districts and Polling Places in Northampton were reviewed in 2014 and the current review is required to be conducted between October 2018 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive).

- 3.1.5 The statutory responsibility for reviewing polling districts and polling places rests with the Council for the Borough and Northampton. The General Purposes Committee has the delegated authority to approve the review.
- 3.1.6 The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is the Borough Secretary and he is responsible for amending the Register to reflect changes in polling districts.
- 3.1.7 It is the responsibility of the Local or Acting Returning Officer to comment during any review of polling districts and polling places on both existing polling stations and the polling stations that would likely be used if any new proposals for polling places were accepted. The election rules require that the Local or Acting Returning Officers decide how many polling stations are required for each polling place and they must allocate electors to the polling stations in such manner as they think most convenient, In Northampton the main LRO/ARO is the Borough Secretary, but the ARO for that part of the Borough that falls within South Northamptonshire Constituency is the Chief Executive of South Northamptonshire Council. From now on in this respect the term Returning Officer is used to refer to LRO/ARO.
- 3.1.8 A **Polling District** is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election. Each Parish is required to be a separate polling district.
- 3.1.9 A **Polling Place** is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district. Polling places should always be defined more specifically than simply the polling district – for example by designating the name of the polling place, normally a particular building or area and its environs.
- 3.1.10 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 relevant Returning Officer for the election.
- 3.1.11 As part of the review the Council must consider access requirements and must
- Seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
  - Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled
- 3.1.12 The Council must have regard to accessibility to people with disabilities of potential polling stations it is considering designating as a polling place or reviewing the designation of.
- 3.1.13 The Council must follow a formal process as follows:
- Publish a notice of the holding of a review

- Consult the (Acting) Returning Officer for Northampton North, Northampton South and South Northamptonshire and the LRO
- Publish all representations made by the Returning Officers within 30 days of receipt
- Seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons with different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the Returning Officers
- On completion of the review the Council must make a decision and give reasons for its decisions and publish all the papers involved in the consultations and in deciding. It must also state where the results of the review have been published.

3.3.14 The key dates for this process will be:

- 30 March – Publication of Notice of Review
- April to September – consultation and analysis stage, leading to preparation of the Returning Officer’s proposals. This will include seeking comments from interested parties on existing arrangements
- 17 September - General Purposes Committee to review the results of consultation and the Returning Officers’ proposals and the Committee’s comments
- 20 September- 22 November Public consultation on the Returning Officer’s proposals and the Committee’s comments
- 5 November- General Purposes Committee to determine the Council’s final decision, which is then published.

3.3.15 At all stages responses to consultation and details of proposals will be published on the Council’s website.

3.3.16 Consultation is expected to include all interested groups or bodies including

- Electors
- Candidates
- Agents
- Political Parties
- Councillors
- Other elected representatives
- Local disability groups

- National disability groups

3.3.17 For Northampton, officers would specifically seek to include the relevant members of the Forums, Parish Councils and Residents Associations.

3.3.18 There is a right for the electors to make representations to the Electoral Commission if they feel that the Council's final decision has failed to properly address accessibility or other reasonable requirements.

3.3.19 The process for carrying out the review is laid down in some detail by the Electoral Commission. The Committee needs to follow that process but may augment the process, particularly with regard to the extent of consultation, as long as doing so does not affect the balance of the process.

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

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### **4.1 Policy**

4.1.1 There are no new policy implications

### **4.2 Resources and Risk**

4.2.1 The resources necessary to conduct the review will be funded from base budget

### **4.3 Legal**

4.3.1 The Council needs to conduct a review now to ensure compliance with legislation

### **4.4 Equality**

4.4.1 The review will include specific focus on access and disability issues as described in the report

## **5. Background Papers**

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5.1.1. Electoral Commission "Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling places and Polling Stations" guidance

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