

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**27 SEPTEMBER 2007**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

### **COUNCIL DECISION**

**Corporate and Social Inclusion - Lead Cabinet Member - Councillor Laing**

#### **REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS**

1. Summary

The Council is required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to undertake and complete a review of all polling districts, polling places and polling stations in the Borough by 31 December 2007.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the contents of the report be noted and the changes proposed in Appendix 4 be approved.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places in the Borough are accessible to all electors.

4. Members Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence,

provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;

- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

**Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.**

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**SUMMARY**

The Council is required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to undertake and complete a review of all polling districts, polling places and polling stations in the Borough by 31 December 2007.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the report be noted and the changes proposed in Appendix 4 be approved.

**BACKGROUND**

Previous reviews

1. Polling places and stations have been reviewed on a regular basis to comply with previous statutory requirements.
2. Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a number of changes to the Representation of the People Act 1983 in respect of the way in which reviews of polling districts and polling places must be undertaken.

First review

3. Under the new legislation, every local authority must have undertaken and completed a review of all of the polling districts, places and stations in its area by 31 December 2007.

Subsequent reviews

4. Following the first review, the Council must then complete a further review of every polling district place and station before the end of the period of four years starting with the completion of the first review. In effect, this means that by 31 December 2011, every authority must have undertaken two full reviews of the electoral arrangements in its area.
5. It is important to note that if it wishes to do so, the Council may undertake reviews of all or some of the designated polling districts and polling places at any time, but must undertake a review of each within four years of the previous review.

## DETAIL

### The review process

6. Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 sets out the steps the Council must follow in undertaking any review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations. In conducting the review authorities must:
- Seek to ensure that all the 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 they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

### Summary of review process

7. The first stage of the review process involved giving notice of the review. The notice was published in the reception area of the Municipal Buildings and a copy distributed to all public buildings and featured on the front page of the Council's Website. In addition the notice was distributed to the Returning Officer, the Electoral Registration Officer, all Members, Parish Clerks, Disability access groups, Viewpoint focus groups and BME groups.
8. In the early stages of the review Electoral Services compiled the background information required to produce the final proposal contained at Appendix 4. The information included the following:
- Electorate figures, broken down to street level
  - Details of existing polling places and an indication as to their overall suitability for the purpose
  - Details of potential alternative polling places and details of other locations that might appear suitable
  - Maps which to assist in the designation of polling district boundaries
  - Housing trajectory figures supplied by the Planning Service illustrating significant areas of development.
  - Population estimates and analysis from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Joint Strategy Unit (JSU).
  - Comments received during the recent review of the 2007 Election.
  - Public buildings available for use from Property Services.
  - Recommendation from Internal Audit following the review of the 2007 Election.
9. The consultation period followed in August during which time we sought representations from the Returning Officer, all Members, Parish Clerks, Disability access groups, Viewpoint Focus groups and BME representatives. The representations made have informed the final proposal document at **Appendix 4**.

10. Following consideration by CMT we will publish the Returning Officers comments and proceed to Cabinet and Council following which and once agreement has been reached we will publish all correspondence, representations and minutes together with details of the results of this review.

### The consultation stage

11. It should be noted that prior to this review and in preparation for the 2007 Elections the Council gave extensive consideration to voting arrangements in the Borough, consulting members and taking in to account the work from the review of Elections in 2005. During 2006 a comprehensive exercise to eliminate the use of mobile stations and where possible make use of public buildings which provide better access for the public and improved facilities for staff and electors was completed. Some improvements in voting arrangements resulted and this is evident in the feedback from the 2007 Elections.
12. The current review under the 2006 Act sought representation from a range of people and organisations including the Returning Officer, all Members, Parish Clerks, Disability access groups, Viewpoint Focus groups and BME representatives.
13. A compulsory submission was received from the Returning Officer whose comments can be viewed at **Appendix 2**. The Returning Officer's report is required to focus on the suitability of the existing and proposed polling stations in relation to;
  - Access for all electors including those with any disability
  - Facilities for the required staff, tables, booths and notices
14. The Returning Officer has to comment on all existing polling stations used at the elections and any new polling stations which would probably be chosen if the new proposals were accepted by the authority.

### Submissions from other persons and bodies

15. The Council was required to actively seek representations from such persons which it thought had particular expertise in relation to access to premises, or facilities for persons who are disabled.
16. Disability awareness groups were therefore specifically consulted although none have made any representations during this review, however the viewpoint focus groups did represent the diverse makeup of our community.
17. In addition, we received comments from electors in the Borough and additional information from sources of expertise including the Council's Planning and Property services, Internal Audit, the ONS and the JSU.

### Outcome of consultation stage

#### The Returning Officer's report

18. The Returning Officers (RO) report is shown at **Appendix 2** and can be summarised as follows;
  - The RO made reference to the work carried out prior to the recent elections to review the facilities for voting. The exercise primarily concentrated on ensuring voting facilities were accessible for all and as such looked to use where possible and practicable public buildings. Where this was not possible and resulted in the

use of mobile stations appropriate access equipment to facilitate voting for all was purchased. However the RO's comments during this review reinforce the need to re-examine all areas where mobile stations have been used, with the view to using if possible and practicable an appropriate building public, rather than a mobile.

- The RO agreed with comments received from councillors proposing changes to the Village, Mandale and Victoria wards which result in boundary changes between polling districts MV2 and MV3.

### Councillors proposals

#### Mandale and Victoria Ward

19. A proposal has been received to redraw the boundaries of the polling districts within Mandale and Victoria and Village wards. The detail of this report is shown at **Appendix 3** and can be summarised as follows;
20. Polling districts MV1, MV4 and MV5 remain unchanged. The boundaries of MV2 and MV3 are redrawn to redistribute the electorate and to allow for the demolition and new build planned for those areas to be absorbed.
21. The table below shows the existing and proposed electorate.

Polling district	Existing electorate	Proposed electorate
MV1	511	511
MV2	2188	1752
MV3	1401	1837
MV4	1152	1152
MV5	1800	1800
Total	7052	7052

22. Although MV1 has a small electorate it covers a large area and we are not proposing any changes. Although there are new builds in MV4 and MV5 there are also demolitions and we feel they are well proportioned and are not proposing any changes. By altering the boundary between MV2 and MV3 the electors are more evenly distributed. Changing the boundary will also allow the possibility of using other buildings for polling stations.

#### Village Ward

23. Polling district VL4 remains unchanged. The boundaries of VL1, VL2, and VL3 are redrawn to redistribute the electorate and to allow for the demolition and new build planned for those areas to be absorbed.
24. The table below shows the existing and proposed electorate.

Polling district	Existing electorate	Proposed electorate
VL1	1102	1238
VL2	1749	1922
VL3	1047	738
VL4	1118	1118
Total	5016	5016

25. The area marked VL3 on the proposed boundary Appendix 3.6 still has a significant number of houses to be built and therefore the number of the electorate will increase significantly.

### Planning statistics

26. Through liaison with Planning Services and the Spatial Planning team we have analysed housing trajectory figures which demonstrate possible areas of significant development over the next four years. The projections are based on developer information and officer's knowledge/ assumptions. Possible areas of significant change are in the wards of Hardwick, Ingleby Barwick, Mandale and Victoria, Stockton Town Centre, Parkfield and Oxbridge. We are proposing changes in line with the above representation to the Mandale and Victoria Ward and we will continue to liaise with Planning Services to monitor development and undertake further reviews as appropriate and necessary.

### JSU comments

27. The Register Generals population estimates for Mid-2006 show that the population of Stockton is steadily increasing. The population has increased from 187,700 in 2005 to 189,100 in 2006, and overall increase of 2.8% since 2001. The JSU predict this figure will continue to rise steadily at a similar rate. The population change in this area is largely made up of adult population both international and national with the majority being national inward migration that would therefore be eligible to register to vote.

### Viewpoint findings

28. A Viewpoint questionnaire was sent out seeking feedback about the May elections. It was sent to all members of the viewpoint panel, which equated to 1437 individuals. A response rate of 51% was achieved, a total of 736.
29. The key findings from the Viewpoint panel questionnaire are shown below,
  - When respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the location of the Polling Station there was a net satisfaction rate of 83% and when asked about access to the Polling station there was a net satisfaction rate of 82%.
  - There was a 93% net agreement that Polling Station staff were friendly and helpful in the recent elections. There was an 89% net agreement that staff were well informed and organised.

### Viewpoint focus group

30. To gain the views of a representative sample of the general public in order to review Polling Districts Places and Stations across the Borough a focus group consisting of Viewpoint Panel Members was held.
31. The group were asked their views on the location of the Polling Station where they voted in the recent elections. In the main all were pleased with the location of the station and some had chosen to vote by post.
32. The group had strong views about schools being polling stations with one person saying "why can't they use their personal development day when an election is called". The group all thought that schools were generally the best place to vote as they were always well known venues within the community. Community centres were also cited as a good idea as one person commented "voting should be central to the community".
33. They all agreed that mobile polling stations were not a good idea. It was thought that facilities were inadequate for staff especially considering the length of time involved.

34. The group thought that public houses should be considered as a location for a polling station, as long as you did not have to go through the bar to vote. One person said “he would not go to a pub to vote and that he didn’t think you should be able to vote in a pub”.
35. Local authority buildings were also suggested as a place to vote as well as church halls as long as the access to them was good. Other ideas provided were scout huts and libraries.
36. The group thought that church halls were central to the community but access to them can be difficult. Church halls are usually separate from churches so that religious issues are not encountered.
37. All of the above representation have been taken into account and informed the authority’s proposal contained at **Appendix 4**. This illustrates the following:
  - the polling district and number of electors
  - whether or not changes are proposed and the details if applicable
  - the polling station used in May 2005
  - alternatives identified at 2006 review
  - action taken/comments received on proposals
  - Polling station used in May 2007 elections
  - Summary of any comments from this consultation together with relevant comments from elections 2007 review
  - Returning Officer Comments/Recommendations

#### Next steps

38. In order to meet the timescales set out in the legislation and also to make any necessary amendments to the polling districts prior to the publication of the 1 December 2007 Register of Electors, the following timetable is proposed:
  - 10 September 2007 – CMT
  - 27 September 2007 – Cabinet meeting
  - 17 October 2007 – Council meeting
  - 1 December – Publish Electoral Register

## **FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial**

39. There will be costs associated with publicising the review, administration costs for maps and consultation. These are all expected to be contained within existing budgets.

### **Legal**

40. A duty to comply with the 2006 Electoral Administration Act.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

41. The risk of the review not being completed by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007 has been managed through adoption of a project management approach.



42. The risk of the review not taking sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations has been managed by actively seeking representations from persons or organisations that have particular expertise in relation to facilities for persons who have different forms of disability as part of the review process.

## **COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

43. Liveability

## **CONSULTATION**

44. The review sought representation from a range of people and organisations including the Returning Officer, all Members, Parish Clerks, Disability access groups, Viewpoint Focus groups and BME representatives.
45. The review also liaised with specialist in the Planning Service, Property Service, Audit Service, JSU and the ONS to gain information to inform the Councils proposals.
46. The proposed revised arrangements will be consulted upon with CMT, Cabinet and Council.

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### Background Papers:

The review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006  
Ward maps showing location of stations.  
Elector statistics by Polling District at street level.  
Details of existing polling district boundaries and an indication of their overall suitability.  
Comments/feedback from 2006 polling station review.  
Comments/feedback from May 2007 Election  
Comments/feedback from Viewpoint questionnaire.  
Audit recommendations

### Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

None

### Property Implications: