

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2014

SUMMARY

This report sets out the existing arrangements for polling districts and places and proposed changes taking into account the submission of the Returning Officer and feedback from public consultation.

RECOMMENDATION

Council are asked to approve the proposed changes to Polling Districts and Polling Places.

DETAIL

1. Each Local Authority is required to carry out reviews of Polling Districts and Polling Places in its area.
2. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 changed the timing of these reviews and the next review must be held between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 with subsequent reviews held within a 16 month period starting on 1 October every fifth year after 1 October 2013. Ward boundaries are unaffected by the review.
3. The Council's last review was held in 2011 when a number of minor changes were made.
4. A Council's area is divided into polling districts with one or more districts making up a ward, with a polling place being the area or building within a polling district in which a polling station is situated.
5. The review considered:
 - The boundaries of polling districts – for example, are they well defined? Do they follow natural boundaries? Are there suitable transport links? Are there any obstacles to crossing polling district boundaries?
 - Polling Places – the location, size and accessibility of the polling place and its availability now and in the future
 - Polling Stations – the suitability and accessibility of the room or area for use as a polling station
6. In addition to the above considerations, during the European Elections 2014, the opportunity was taken to complete the Electoral Commission's evaluation templates in order to assess the suitability/ accessibility of the polling place/ station. Presiding Officers were also asked to record any complaints/ comments received.
7. Tees Valley Unlimited also provided electorate projections for the current polling district boundaries in each year and up to December 2018. This takes into account new housing and demolitions.

8. The Returning Officer's submission was published on 7 July 2014 and summarised the existing arrangements, key issues identified from the recent European Elections, any notable projected changes in electorate and made proposals for changes to polling districts/ places.

9. The proposals sought to combine polling districts where electorate was low, identify more appropriate polling places where adverse comments have been received on the location/ suitability of current venues and identify alternatives to using mobile stations which are expensive and unpopular with voters. The proposals took into account Electoral Commission Guidance that the number of electors allocated to a particular polling station should not exceed 2,500 not including postal voters.

10. The Returning Officers proposals resulted in an overall reduction of twelve polling districts/stations (including two mobile stations) and changes to two further polling places.

11. More detailed comments from the European Elections in relation to the suitability of existing polling stations will be taken into account in the planning for future electoral events.

CONSULTATION

12. The Statutory Notice publicising the review was displayed on/ sent to:

- Website
- Libraries
- Community Pharmacies
- GP Practice Managers
- Healthwatch
- Tees Active Leisure Centres
- Community Centres/ Village Halls

13. In addition, the Statutory Notice and the Returning Officer's submission was displayed/ sent to:

- Municipal Buildings
- Website (with accompanying plans)
- All Councillors
- MPs
- Parish Councils
- Disability Groups/ BME/faith community
- Other interested persons/ bodies

14. All correspondence sent to the Returning Officer as part of the review has been published on the Council's website. The table below contains a summary of the comments received and comments/revised proposals in response to the consultation feedback.

Ward	Feedback	Comments/ Revised Proposals
Bishopsgarth and Elm Tree	<i>Ward Councillor:</i> Support for combining BET 3, 4 and 5 Suggestions made for alternative venues to replace the mobile polling station in BET 1	Identify alternative to mobile station for BET 1
Eaglescliffe	<i>Eaglescliffe Parish Council:</i> Support for the use of Eaglescliffe Community Centre as an alternative polling station in EG 2, 5 and 6 <i>Preston Parish Council:</i> Support for existing polling arrangements	Confirm proposed change No change
Grangefield	<i>Ward Councillors:</i> GF1 - Happy to use Stockton Town Football Club. GF3 - Unhappy about the use of Grangefield Youth and Community Centre due to being difficult to access and the path up to the centre is dark at night – would prefer to use the Media Centre at Grangefield Academy GF4 – Recommend continued use of Hartburn Sea Scouts as it is too far to travel to GF3 and improvements have been made in the last few months.	Confirm use of Stockton Town Football Club Continue to use Grangefield Youth and Community Centre as the Media Centre is further for electors to travel to vote Retain GF3 and GF4 as separate polling districts and continue to use Hartburn Sea Scouts
Hartburn	<i>Ward Councillors:</i> Suggest dividing HB2 with electorate allocated to HB1 and HB3 which would remove the need for a mobile in HB2	Divide HB2 at Birkdale Road with electors on the east side voting at Elmwood Community Centre (HB1) and electors on the west side voting at Holy Trinity Primary School (HB3).
Mandale and Victoria	<i>Resident:</i> Concerns about use of Thornaby Academy due to building works	Building works now completed Confirm no change
Newtown	<i>Resident:</i> Request to alter ward boundaries between Grangefield and Newtown which cannot be altered as part of the polling district review	Cannot amend ward boundaries as part of this review
Norton North	<i>Ward Councillors</i> Objections to combining NN2 and NN3 on the basis that it would involve substantially increased travelling distances for a large	Retain original polling arrangements

	<p>number of residents</p> <p><i>Bluehall Residents Association:</i> Objections to combining NN2 and NN3 on the basis that residents outside of Norton Grange will not attend a polling station located on the Norton Grange estate</p>	
Norton South	<p><i>Ward Councillors:</i> Objection to combining NS3 and NS4 on the basis of Norton Road being too far for residents of Albany Estate to walk to vote</p>	Retain original polling arrangements
Norton West	<p><i>Ward Councillors:</i> Need to find an alternative polling place to replace the Education Centre for future elections</p>	Identify a suitable site for a mobile polling station
Roseworth	<p><i>Ward Councillors:</i> Object to proposed changes and suggest that RW3 and RW5 are combined instead with Kiora Hall continuing to be used at the polling place</p>	Combine polling districts RW3 and RW5 continuing to use Kiora Hall as the polling place
Stainsby Hill	<p><i>Ward Councillors and Thornaby Town Council:</i> Object to combining SH3 and SH4 on the basis that residents will find it difficult to travel to Thornaby Central Library and that The Roundel has nearby parking making it more convenient for disabled voters</p>	Retain original polling arrangements
Stockton Town Centre	<p><i>Stockton Parish Church Council</i> have offered the parish church hall as a polling station</p> <p><i>Ward Councillor:</i> Objects to combining STC2 and STC3 in view of the distance between both communities</p>	<p>Not required at this time.</p> <p>Retain Original Polling Arrangements</p>
Village	<p><i>Resident:</i> Comments that the village school (the old polling station) was a more accessible polling place for residents of the Green Lane area (particularly elderly residents) than the existing polling station at the Cricket Club</p>	School unavailable for use
Western Parishes	<p><i>The Wilson Centre</i> comment that the use of the existing Youth and Community Centre is unlikely to be available in the future and offer the use of the Wilson Centre as an alternative venue</p>	The Wilson Centre to be used as alternative polling station

Yarm	<i>Levendale Primary School</i> has indicated that the school will not be available for future elections due to disruption and safeguarding concerns.	Identify a suitable site for a mobile polling station
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REVISED PROPOSALS

15. Existing arrangements for all wards and the final proposals of the Returning Officer following consultation are attached at **Appendix 1**. The final proposals result in a reduction of seven polling districts/stations, a reduction of one mobile station and three further changes to polling places.

16. Cabinet considered the issue at its meeting on 9th October 2014 and a copy of the relevant minute extract is attached to the report at **Appendix 2**.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

17. These proposals will contribute to the running of an efficient election.

Legal

18. To review is required in order to comply with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

RISK ASSESSMENT

19. This report is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

20. The proposals take in account user and consultation feedback and Electoral Commission Guidance that the number of electors allocated to a particular polling station should not exceed 2,500 not including postal voters.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

21. The suitability of each polling place for disabled access was assessed as part of the review.

CONSULTATION

22. Consultation took place as set out in paragraphs 12 to 14 of the report. Cabinet considered and endorsed the proposed changes at their meeting on 9 October 2014.

Name of Contact Officer: Margaret Waggott
Telephone No: 01642 527064
Email Address: margaret.waggott@stockton.gov.uk

Name of Contact Officer: Judy Trainer
Telephone No: 01642 528158
Email Address: judith.trainer@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers: None
Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: Not Ward Specific
Property Implications: None