

MINUTE EXTRACT

Cabinet Meeting – 9th October 2014

1. Title of Item/Report

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2014

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that 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.

Each Local Authority was required to carry out reviews of Polling Districts and Polling Places in its area.

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 were unaffected by the review.

The Council's last review was held in 2011 when a number of minor changes were made.

A Council's area was 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.

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

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.

Tees Valley Unlimited also provided electorate projections for the polling district boundaries in each year and up to December 2018. This took into account new housing and demolitions.

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.

The proposals sought to combine polling districts where electorate was low, identify more appropriate polling places where adverse comments had been received on the location / suitability of current venues and identify alternatives to using mobile stations which were 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.

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.

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

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

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

All correspondence sent to the Returning Officer as part of the review had been published on the Council's website. A table within the report contained a summary of the comments received and comments / revised proposals in response to the consultation feedback.

Existing arrangements for all wards and the final proposals of the Returning Officer following consultation were attached to the report. 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.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the recommended changes to Polling Districts and Polling Places be approved.