

ITEM 16: APPENDIX K

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 01/04/2014

Title:

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

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Robert Knowles]
[Wards Affected: All]**

Summary and purpose:

The purpose of this report is to outline the requirement to undertake a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations, and the arrangements for conducting such a review. The report recommends an amendment to the Scheme of Delegation to enable the Returning Officer to vary a designated polling place in cases of urgency.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

It is important to the Council that we understand our residents' needs, we consult with them and ensure our services are designed to meet peoples' needs across the Borough. The Council is committed to providing customer-focused services at the best value for money.

Financial Implications:

The review should be carried out within existing resources. The costs of hiring polling stations rather than using schools could increase future elections costs.

Legal Implications:

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory review of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) outlines the steps that must be carried out to conduct a review.

Introduction

1. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. As a result the Council is required to start and complete a review within a period of 16 months that started on 1st October 2013 and concludes on 31 January 2015. UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries cannot be changed by this review.

2. Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 sets out the steps that the Returning Officer is required to complete during the 16 month period.

Roles and responsibilities

3. The statutory responsibility for reviewing UK Parliamentary polling districts and places rests with each relevant local authority for so much of any constituency as is situated in its area.
4. The Returning Officer is required to comment on both existing polling stations and the polling stations that would likely be used if any new proposal for polling places were accepted. The Returning Officer must also decide how many polling stations are required for each polling place and allocate electors to the polling stations in such a manner as he thinks is most convenient.
5. The Electoral Commission does not play a role during the review process but once the Council has published the results of its review, specified interested parties may make representations to the Commission to reconsider any polling districts and polling places. The Commission may direct the Council to make any alterations to the polling places that it thinks are necessary, and such alterations must be made within two months.

Definition of terms

6. 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. In England, each parish has to be a separate polling district. This means that a parish or community must not be in a polling district which has a part of either a different parish or community within it, or any un - parished part of the local authority area within it, unless special circumstances apply. Those special circumstances could arise if, for example the parish/community has only a small number of electors and it is not practicable for the parish/community to be its own polling district.
7. 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. Section 18B (4) (e) RPA 1983 states that “the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station.” As a result the Electoral Commission advise that polling places should always be defined more specifically than simply the polling district – for example, by designating the name of the polling place as a particular building or area.
8. 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.

Scope of a compulsory review

9. This is a review of UK Parliamentary polling districts, places and polling stations and so polling districts and places for other elections are not automatically part of the compulsory review. However, as polling districts and polling places for other elections are based on UK Parliamentary polling arrangements, the requirements of any other elections that are held within the local authority area should be taken into consideration as part of the review.

Accessibility considerations

10. As part of the review, the Council must try to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and that every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.

Conduct of the review – notification and consultation

11. The Council will publish a notice of the holding of a review on its website, in the local press and at each of the Town Council offices of Godalming, Haslemere and Farnham. The notice will invite views from all residents and invite suggestions as to alternative places that may be used as polling places. The Council will consult with the Returning Officer for the Guildford Parliamentary Constituency which is partly in the Waverley Borough Council area. The Council will also send a copy of the notice to interested parties including Councillors, MP's, MEP's, political parties and disability groups.
12. The consultation stage is intended to allow for representations and views to be made on the existing and proposed arrangements for polling districts and polling places. Representations must be made in writing, either by post, e-mail or fax. Waverley Borough Council's Returning Officer will make a comment on proposed polling stations and these representations will be placed on the Council's website, copies will be held at reception and copies will be circulated to the Town Council offices of Godalming, Haslemere and Farnham Town Council for public display. The Returning Officer's submission will include information as to the location of polling stations within polling places. The Council will seek views from those who have expertise in access issues on the Returning Officer's representations together with electors, political parties, Councillors and other elected representatives.

Timing of the review

13. The review will commence on the publication of the notice on Monday 9 June 2014 and the deadline for submission of comments will be Friday 18 July 2014.

Completion of the review

14. A report will be prepared for consideration by the Council outlining the representations received. If the review results in the alteration of one or more polling districts, the Electoral Registration Officer will make the necessary alterations to the electoral register. Once the Council has made a

determination, details of any new polling districts and polling places will be published together with the reasons for choosing each particular district and polling place. All correspondence received by the Returning Officer in connection with the review will be published. Where changes are made, those electors affected will be advised.

Conclusion

15. The review gives an opportunity to ensure polling places are still convenient for electors and to check that they are accessible to the whole community. Ultimately having convenient polling places can contribute to a good turnout at elections.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. approval be given to the Returning Officer carrying out a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations in the terms set out in the report;
2. the timing of the review is such that the consultation period runs from Monday 9 June 2014 to Friday 18 July 2014 inclusive; and
3. the Council be recommended to approve that the Scheme of Delegation be amended to authorise the Returning Officer to vary a designated polling place in cases of urgency.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

CONTACT OFFICER:

Name: Tracey Stanbridge

Telephone: 01483 523413

E-mail: tracey.stanbridge@waverley.gov.uk