



REPORT TO: Civic Affairs Committee

29 October 2019

LEAD OFFICER: Liz Watts – Chief Executive, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Executive Summary

1. This report presents the results of a statutory review of the Council's Polling Districts and Polling Places and asks Civic Affairs Committee to recommend to council that the existing polling arrangements are retained.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Civic Affairs Committee recommends to council that the current schedule of polling districts and polling places is retained with no changes.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. A public consultation exercise resulted in only two responses, details of which are in the body of the report.

Details

4. Polling districts are the "building blocks" of electoral areas (such as parishes, wards, divisions and constituencies). It is the Council's job to keep these building blocks under review, primarily to ensure convenient and effective local democracy for its residents.
5. South Cambridgeshire is wholly divided into polling districts. The Council must define a polling place for each of those districts, within which the Returning Officer will site their polling station.
6. The Council last undertook a full review in 2013, with an interim review taking place in 2016 to address a handful of issues raised by the re-warding of the Council by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
7. Every council is required to complete a new full review of their arrangements now.

8. In South Cambridgeshire, each parish is made up of either one or two polling districts. There are no parishes made up of three polling districts. Nearly all polling districts already contain their own polling station.
9. The Returning Officer keeps polling arrangements across the district under constant review and is always happy to consider alternative polling arrangements where such are proposed.
10. The Returning Officer has not received any complaints from residents about polling arrangements as they currently exist.
11. Because of these factors, the Returning Officer did not propose in the public consultation to make any changes to the current arrangements.
12. The consultation ran for around 6 weeks. It was sent to all councillors and to all parish councils via the parish council e-bulletin. It was also hosted on the council's consultation portal and was sent to various disability groups and the Acting Returning Officer of the South East Cambridgeshire parliamentary constituency.
13. Two consultation responses were received. The first was from Camsight, a Cambridgeshire based charity that supports people with low vision and blindness to enhance independence and improve well-being and inclusion. Camsight raised some valid points around the process of voting for people with low vision, and we are happy to consider how we can light our polling stations more effectively. Their other points were related to the voting process and cannot be changed as they are driven by statute.

The other response came from Waterbeach Parish Council and related to the availability of car parking at the polling station. When this was discussed further, it became clear that there is a slight lack of parking, but that this is counter balanced by the centrality of the station in the village when compared with alternatives. The preference was to retain the current arrangements.

There were no other responses, which would imply a general level of satisfaction with our current polling arrangements.

14. Arrangements will need to be made to establish a new polling district for Northstowe. Currently residents there vote in the Longstanton polling station. The process for establishing this polling district will be tied to the forthcoming Community Governance Review so that we can ensure polling district and town/parish boundaries align.

Options

1. Civic Affairs Committee could choose to recommend to Council re-adoption of the existing arrangements with respect to polling districts and polling places.
2. Alternatively, the Committee could choose to recommend to Council alternative arrangements to those existing, but the Committee must be alive to the impact of their recommendations and ensure that effective local government can continue.

Implications

15. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Legal

16. The Council has a legal responsibility to undertake a review of its polling districts and polling places now.

Equality and Diversity

17. The Returning Officer keeps polling arrangements under constant review and is always open to considering adopting alternative arrangements when these are preferable – especially with regards to the accessibility of polling stations.

18. As part of this review, the Returning Officer consulted with a variety of organisations with expertise of disabled and older people, and a response from Camsight was received.

Consultation responses

19. The responses received are appended to the report.

Effect on Council Priority Areas

20. This review is a statutory requirement.

Appendices

Appendix A: Existing polling district arrangements, proposed for retention

Appendix B: Consultation responses

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