

REPORT TO: Civic Affairs Committee
LEAD OFFICER: Acting Returning Officer / Chief Executive

5 December 2013

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Purpose

1. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act (2013) placed a duty on local authorities to carry out a full review of their parliamentary polling districts and polling places within 16 months of October 2013. The same polling districts and places are used for local government elections.
2. The last review of this kind was carried out in 2011.
3. The review commenced on 1 October 2013 and is now reported to this committee, with a view to making a recommendation to Full Council in January. This would allow for any potential changes to be made to the register of electors when it is revised in February.
4. Details of the review were sent by email to all District Councillors and Parish Clerks. It was also sent to the Council's Equality and Diversity Officer and the Acting Returning Officer at East Cambridgeshire District Council. Full details of the review (along with polling district maps) were available on the Council website.
5. This is not a key decision.

Recommendations

6. The Civic Affairs Committee is asked to recommend to Council that no changes be made to the polling districts and places currently in place in South Cambridgeshire, noting that there will be a need for future local reviews in areas of concentrated development.
7. A full list of current polling districts can be viewed at appendix 1.

Reasons for Recommendations

8. This recommendation is based on the low response rate to our consultation, which reflected no concerns regarding existing arrangements.

Background

9. Electoral Commission guidance indicates that in England, each parish should form its own polling district unless there are special circumstances.
10. There are relatively few exceptions to this rule in South Cambridgeshire, and where exceptions do exist, residents and councillors continue to raise no concerns.

11. Due to the rural nature of the district, polling places in South Cambridgeshire have always been aligned along the same boundaries as polling districts.
12. A full review of polling districts and places took place relatively recently. No issues have been reported over the last two years, or during the consultation period. As such, the Committee is asked to recommend to Council that existing polling districts and places be retained.

Considerations

13. The only issue raised during the consultation period was by Milton Parish Council, regarding the use of the Bowls Pavilion as polling station. Polling stations are not a formal part of the review, but the Returning Officer is always keen to receive feedback where more appropriate venues exist. In this instance, the Parish Council recommended use of the Community Centre, in particular for busier polls, as the Bowls Pavilion has a somewhat limited capacity. This is something that the Returning Officer is aware of, and will likely review before the Parliamentary Election in 2015.
14. The Acting Returning Officer for East Cambridgeshire District Council passed no comment on our polling districts, other than to query the use of mobile polling stations. These continue to be used only where no alternatives exist, and awnings are used to ensure level access.

Growth Areas

15. There are a number of areas in South Cambridgeshire which are likely to see increasing populations as a result of concentrated residential development.
16. In the longer term, at least some of these developments are likely to require polling districts of their own (eg. Northstowe and Trumpington Meadows).
17. This review has not considered the need to separate these areas into new polling districts at this time. As these developments start to form, smaller locally based polling district reviews will be carried out that will best reflect the needs of these growing communities.

Options

18. The Committee could choose not to recommend retention of existing arrangements, or could recommend alternatives.

Implications

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

Financial

20. There are no financial implications.

Legal

21. The Council must complete a review by April 2015 at the very latest.

Staffing

22. There are no staffing implications.

Risk Management

23. There are no risk implications.

Equality and Diversity

24. The Council's Equality and Diversity Officer has commented on the review. He continues to be satisfied that the Returning Officer uses the most appropriate buildings available in the district.

Climate Change

25. There are no climate change implications.

Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)

26. Only five responses were received. Few concerns were raised, and these have been addressed within the report. All responses can be viewed at appendix 2.

Effect on Strategic Aims

Aim A - We will listen to and engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money

27. Adoption of appropriate polling districts and places are vital in helping our residents to engage with the democratic process.

Background Papers

No background papers used

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