

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

20 October 2014

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

1. Summary Statement

- 1.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires Local Authorities to review all polling districts and polling places in their area every 4 years. The current review commenced in the Autumn of 2013.
- 1.2 Public notice of the review was published on 14 October 2013 both throughout the Borough and on the Council's website and circulated to other stakeholders such as local disability groups inviting comments. Submissions were invited by 2 December 2013.
- 1.3 Consultation on the proposals ran until 2 December 2013 (7 week period) and notice was given to all Councillors, Members of Parliament and special interest groups. The views of polling station staff were also taken into consideration.
- 1.4 The recommendations arising from the 2013/14 polling districts and places review is attached as **Appendix 1** with the more detailed report attached as **Appendix 2** – both documents updated with comments received from the elections during 2014. Further information about the review and a map per Ward are available on CMIS, the Council's website and will be available at the meeting.
- 1.5 A list of the proposals and all representations received arising from the consultation period, together with the Council's response is included in the Appendix. Any amendments to the original proposals as a result of the consideration of the representations received have also been included.
- 1.6 The Leader of the Council in consultation with the Deputy Leaders and Chief Executive as Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer, took the decision to trial the new venues at the May polls and use this as an opportunity to gather further feedback to the changes – these are summarised within the Appendix. In fact due to the Police and Crime Commissioner election being called in August, the electorate have now

experienced the changes on two separate occasions. On both occasions changes were highlighted to the electorate on their poll cards and no direct feedback was received by the Election Office from the public objecting or protesting to the changes other than a couple of calls for a postal vote in a couple of instances.

- 1.7 The proposals will come into force following consideration by the Council on 13 January 2015, however any actual changes to polling districts will not be reflected until publication of next year's register of electors on 1 December 2015. This will have no negative impact on the polls in May and caused no problems in this year's elections either.
- 1.8 Following approval of the new scheme any person may object by writing to the Electoral Commission stating clearly why it is felt the council did not properly undertake the polling district review.
- 1.9 The next review will be undertaken in 2018/19. However, the Returning Officer considers its polling places every time there is an election as often some venues are not available for one reason or another and as a result, local consultation takes place with key stakeholders to consider and agree a replacement venue either on a temporary or permanent basis going forward. Also, when new venues become available, the Returning Officer welcomes comments from members and other key local stakeholders on the possibility of moving to a new possibly more suitable venue.
- 1.10 Following approval of a new scheme, affected electors will be informed of their new polling place, if appropriate, and given the opportunity to register to vote by post, should that be more convenient. All polling places are listed on our website. However, the electorate have already experienced the new venues at the polls in May 2014 and again in August 2014. Due to the short notice nature of this Police and Crime Commissioner election in August this year the usual arrangements of local consultation unfortunately could not take place. Likewise consultation at other Councils in the West Midlands police area did not take place as the Returning Officer had to find and book a number of temporary alternative venues in a very tight time frame in order to get poll cards printed and despatched in accordance with the legal timetable. The new venues that were used for this election are highlighted in the Appendix.
- 1.11 Any changes will be reported to the meeting as the Electoral Services Team are still under discussion with some potential polling venues.

Further details are attached for your information

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Council be recommended to approve the 2014 polling districts and polling places, as set out in Appendix 1, with the creation of revised polling districts taking effect from the publication of the revised electoral register on 1 December, 2015.

Jan Britton
Chief Executive and Returning Officer

Contact Officer
Philip Hardy
Electoral Services Manager

Phone 0121 569 3242 or e-mail phil_hardy@sandwell.gov.uk

3. Strategic Resource Implications

- 3.1 The cost of electoral administration is contained within existing budgets. The move from temporary huts to permanent structures is estimated to result in a gross saving of approximately £25,000 per election. This figure will be reduced to account for staffing and rent for the permanent facilities but will still produce a significant overall saving. The move to have more permanent structures was a key aim of the review for a number of reasons, notably that they are generally unsuitable venues for our staff and for the public and should only be used as a last resort and the Returning Officer continues to look to find alternative places.

4. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 4.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 required local authorities to review all polling districts and polling places in their area before the end of December 2007 and thereafter every 4 years. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The next compulsory review must now be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 (inclusive). Subsequent compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.
- 4.2 Following approval of the new scheme any person may object by writing to the Electoral Commission stating clearly why it is felt that the Council did not properly undertake the polling district review.

5. **Implications for the Council's Scorecard Priorities**

- 5.1 The review of Polling Districts and Polling Places contributes to the successful administration of elections. Changes to polling places may have an impact on customer satisfaction and therefore this may be reflected through the Council's Scorecard.

6 **Background Details**

There are no further background details.

Source Documents

Electoral Administration Act 2006

Electoral Commission's Guidance 2013

Returning Officer's proposals and Notice

Representations received