

Committee: Electoral Working Group

Agenda Item

Date: 6 August 2014

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Title: Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places
and Polling Stations

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Item for decision

Summary

1. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the completion of the next compulsory review of polling districts and places by 31 January 2015. In any case, the new warding scheme means that changed arrangements must be put in place before the local government elections in May 2015. In practical terms, the revised scheme must be agreed in advance of the publication of a revised register of electors on 1 December 2014. The proposed timetable will enable the Council to adopt a new scheme on 21 October 2014.

Recommendations

2. Agree a timetable, process and terms of reference for the review of polling districts and places to be carried out, as set out in this report.

Financial Implications

3. *There are no Financial Implications arising from this recommendation:*

Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

All papers referred to in the preparation of this report are already published.

Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	By publication on the Council's website and by direct consultation with all interested parties
Community Safety	No direct impact
Equalities	Take account of the need to designate only, wherever possible, fully accessible buildings

Health and Safety	See under 'equalities' above
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The Council must comply with legislation in conducting compulsory reviews
Sustainability	No impact
Ward-specific impacts	All wards
Workforce/Workplace	No implications

Situation

Background

6. Polling district reviews must take place every five years. The next review must be completed by no later than 31 January 2015. The Working Group will be asked to agree a timetable and process for how this should be done.
7. A further complication in agreeing revised polling arrangements is the new warding scheme to operate at district elections from May 2015. The wards are those set out in The Uttlesford (Electoral Changes) Order 2014 made on 20 May 2014. This will have a particular impact in Saffron Walden and Stansted where ward boundaries have shifted but will also affect some rural parishes.
8. The new polling district arrangements should be adopted so as to operate from 1 December when the revised register of electors will be published. The proposed timetable has been drawn up with this in mind to enable the new scheme to be agreed at the Council meeting on 21 October.
9. The review will coincide with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and this will present a considerable challenge in terms of staff resource.

Duties and Definitions

10. The review will involve a detailed examination of all polling arrangements throughout Uttlesford. The aim of the review is to agree a polling scheme that will provide the most convenient facilities for electors as is practicable. There is a continuing legal duty to ensure that every polling place is accessible to disabled electors.
11. A **polling district** is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a Parliamentary constituency into smaller units. The dual purpose of this sub-division is to provide convenient facilities for voters and, at the same time, to provide for the sensible administration of elections.
12. Each parish is to be a separate polling district unless there are special circumstances. There are some small parishes such as Chickney, Tilty and Wenden Lofts which break this rule because they have such small numbers of electors that separate arrangements are not practicable.

13. By way of contrast, some larger urban parishes such as Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted, have to be broken up into smaller areas to prevent unmanageable numbers of electors having to visit the same polling place.
14. Although the rules refer only to Parliamentary constituencies, the arrangements made have always taken full account of district and parish ward boundaries. In this way polling arrangements for all types of elections and the electoral registers reflecting those arrangements can be identical. This means that no polling district boundary should cross a county division or a district or parish ward boundary.
15. For full details of existing polling districts, please refer to appendix A.
16. A **polling place** is the building or area within each polling district in which polling stations must be located. A polling place must be designated within each polling district so that the polling stations provided are within easy reach of the electors registered there.
17. The designated polling place will normally be a specific building located in a central or convenient location for the electors registered within the polling district concerned. Although convenient location is a relevant factor in designating each polling district, the building selected must be suitable in terms of accessibility and availability.
18. **Polling stations** are selected by the Returning Officer but must be located within the designated polling place.

Process and timetable

19. Please refer to Appendix B, proposed timetable for the review of polling districts and places. The Working Group is invited to endorse the approach set out in this document.
20. There has been insufficient time to prepare draft recommendations for this review so the initial consultation must be conducted on the basis of the existing scheme, supplemented by a draft scheme of revised polling districts (see appendix C).
21. Consultation letters will be sent to all identified interested parties and full details included on the website. Notice of the review will be published inviting representations to be submitted by 22 August (see appendix D). It is suggested that further meetings of the working group should take place on 4 September to agree final proposals for consultation, and on either 6, 7 or 8 October to agree the final revised scheme to be recommended to Council on 21 October.
22. As already explained, it has not been possible to prepare a draft revised scheme. Members are invited to suggest suitable buildings to be inspected as potential polling places.

23. Further information about how the scheme might operate in practice, highlighting potential problem areas, will be brought to the meeting.
24. Officers will evaluate all representations received during the initial consultation period, inspect potential polling places where appropriate, and bring a draft scheme to the next meeting of the working group for approval. Once agreed, the draft scheme will be published with a view to inviting further representations.

Risk Analysis

25.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
3 – the purpose of the review is to identify suitable arrangements for polling in every polling district	2 – action may be needed to change polling places in some areas and to identify new places where ward boundaries have changed	3 – the impact of continuing to operate an unsuitable polling scheme would be significant	Full consultation and proper examination of all potential polling premises as part of the statutory review

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.