

St Edmundsbury Borough Council – Polling District Review Background information for consultees

Polling district – the geographic areas into which a council divide its area for the purposes of conducting elections. In making the designations Councils are required to seek to provide all electors with as reasonable facilities for voting as are practical, and to have regard to accessibility when making any designations for polling places. Where areas are parished each parish should normally be a polling district in its own right unless there is a compelling reason otherwise. In reality this means that many of the polling districts in St Edmundsbury are pre-defined as a result of parish arrangements and the only question to consider is whether it would make for more effective arrangements if the parish were divided into parish wards. Currently in the rural areas of St Edmundsbury there are only two instances where parishes have been warded, and in each case the warding has been necessitated by the parish straddling two wards and separate polling districts being required to facilitate the two different sets of parishioners to vote in different Borough wards. In urban areas there is potentially more scope to alter the boundaries of polling districts. Here the prime consideration is to achieve reasonable facilities for voting for all the electors, so far as practicable.

Polling place – this can either be as broad as a geographic area, or as tightly defined as a specific building. Councils are not generally obliged to designate polling places. The only circumstance in which they must make a designation is if polling cannot take place within the polling district. This usually only arises when there are no suitable premises or locations for a temporary building within the polling district. In these instances the Council must designate a polling place. If no polling place is designated then the whole polling district is treated as the polling place. St Edmundsbury has previously followed the practice of only designating polling places where out of district polling is necessary as to designate polling places as a matter of routine can cause administrative difficulties if buildings are not available for use at a particular election.

Polling stations – the polling station is the actual room used for polling. The choice of polling station rests with the Returning Officer, not with the Council, so this review is not about the buildings used, but about the administrative areas into which the Register of Electors is divided. Having said that as indicated in the covering letter if any individual or organisation responding to this review has suggestions about alternative venues then the Returning Officer would be pleased to consider them, but they will not form part of the formal review report to the Council.

What is included in the review – The Council is only obliged to conduct a review of any area which it has not reviewed within the last 4 years. In that period St Edmundsbury has consulted on arrangements across a range of areas in the Borough as the need as arisen. However, for the sack of clarity and completeness, the whole of the Borough will be included in the review.

What is not included in the review – as already indicated the location of polling stations does not form part of the formal review. Also excluded from the review are proposals for the alteration of the boundaries of the wards or

parishes, or the number of councillors on a council. All these are issues which have their own separate review processes.

How the review is being conducted - The final decision on designations of polling districts and polling places will be made by the full Council of St Edmundsbury. As the terms of reference for the Council's Democratic Renewal Working Party include advising the Council on electoral matters, the outcomes of this consultation process will, in the first instance, be considered by the Working Party at its meeting on 18 November 2014. The Working Party will then forward recommendations to the full Council meeting on 16 December 2014. Although the full Council will be free to debate the recommendations it is anticipated that the detailed work of the review and discussion of any proposals for change will take place at the meeting of the Working Party. Although there is no automatic right of access to the meeting for members of the public the Chairman of the Working Party is happy for any individual or organisation to attend the meeting to hear the debate on this item.

Suggesting a change to an existing polling district or polling place designation - When considering any proposals for change the Council will be aiming, so far as practicable, to make equitable arrangements for polling right across the Borough. Proposals will be considered in this wider context, as well as with regard to the convenience of the local arrangements.

Who has been consulted? - All Borough and County Councillors for St Edmundsbury, Parish Councils, the Returning Officer of each parliamentary constituency within the Borough, the County Returning Officer and local political parties.

If you have any queries about the polling district review process, or require further information, please contact

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