

Shadow Council

Title of Report:	Polling District Review	
Report No:	COU/SA/19/002	
Report to and date/s:	Shadow Council - 15 January 2019	
Shadow Executive (Cabinet) Members:	<p>Councillor Ruth Bowman Cabinet Member for Future Governance – Forest Heath Tel: 01638 510896 Email: ruth.bowman@forest-heath.gov.uk</p>	<p>Councillor Carol Bull Portfolio Holder for Future Governance – St Edmundsbury Tel: 01953 681513 Email: carol.bull@stedsbc.gov.uk</p>
Lead officer:	<p>Fiona Osman Electoral Services - Manager Tel: 01284 757105 Email: fiona.osman@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p>	
Purpose of report:	To review the designation of polling districts and polling places in the district of West Suffolk and to implement any recommendations in the publication of the Electoral Register.	
Recommendation:	<p>It is recommended that:</p> <p>(1) The Schedule of Polling Districts at Appendix 4 is approved; and</p> <p>(2) The Schedule of Polling Places at Appendix 5 is approved.</p>	
Key Decision:	<p><i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i></p> <p>No, it is not a Key Decision - ☒</p>	

Consultation:		A letter outlining the review process and a background document was circulated to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Borough and District Councillors - County Councillors - Parish Councils - Party Agents - Acting Returning Officer for South Suffolk Constituency The consultation information was published on the Council's website.	
Alternative option(s):		The Electoral Registration Act 2013 requires every Council to conduct a review during the 16 months beginning 1 October 2018.	
Implications:			
Are there any financial implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any staffing implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any ICT implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any legal and/or policy implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any equality implications? <i>If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Risk/opportunity assessment:		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
Council fails to meet the reasonable requirements of electors and fails to take sufficient account of the accessibility for disabled persons of a polling station	High	Public consultation and direct consultation with statutory consultees. All polling stations assessed by the elections team and by Polling Station Inspectors at the election.	Low/Medium/ High*
Ward(s) affected:		All Wards	
Background papers: <i>(all background papers are to be published on the website and a link included)</i>		Consultation page/information on website: https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/Council/Consultations/reviewofpollingdistrictsandpollingplaces2018.cfm	

Documents attached:	<p>Appendix 1 – Information sheet for consultees</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Wards and polling districts, places and stations – no changes</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Wards and polling districts, places and stations – changes</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Schedule of Polling Districts</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Schedule of Polling Places</p>
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1. Key issues and reasons for recommendation(s)

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places requiring local authorities to complete a review between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020.
- 1.1.2 Although the relevant regulations relate to parliamentary elections, the Council will apply the outcomes of the review to local elections and referenda, in order that electors voting in person will use the same premises on each occasion.
- 1.1.3 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has reviewed the new Council's electoral arrangements and the final recommendations for the West Suffolk Council ward boundaries were published on 12 October 2018. Following a period of Parliamentary scrutiny, the revised electoral arrangements have been approved and will come into force at the elections on 2 May 2019.
- 1.1.4 The new ward boundaries and polling districts will be included in a revised Register of Electors to be published on 1 February 2019.

1.2 Introduction to the review

- 1.2.1 The Council is required to review of polling districts and places and must also approve a new schedule of polling districts to take account of the new ward boundaries, particularly in Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Newmarket where the majority of ward boundaries have changed.

- 1.2.2 As part of the review, comments were sought from members of the public, local political groups, parish councils, borough and district councillors, county councillors and the (Acting) Returning Officer for the South Suffolk constituency. Comments were invited via an online survey, or by sending an e-mail or letter to the Electoral Services team. Consultees were asked to make representations concerning the proposed arrangements and, where possible, asked to suggest alternative polling locations to consider.

- 1.2.3 An [information sheet](#) was provided to all consultees (see **Appendix 1**) together with a list of all [current and proposed polling stations](#).

A total of nine responses were received from the consultation: four from parish councils or parish meetings; three from borough or district councillors; one from the Chairman of a village hall committee; and one from the (Acting) Returning Officer for the South Suffolk constituency. Details of the responses received are listed against the relevant ward at Appendix 3.

1.2.4

2. Key objectives of the review

- 2.1 The primary purpose of the review is to determine voting arrangements that are as convenient as possible for local residents and to designate polling places that are accessible to all electors. During any review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations, the Returning Officer must provide information and comment on both the existing polling stations and the polling stations that would likely to be used, if any new proposals for polling places were to be accepted. Election rules require the Returning Officer to decide how many polling stations are required for each polling place and they must allocate electors to the polling stations in such manner as they think appropriate.

2.2 Premises

- 2.2.1 A range of premises are currently employed within the authority for use as polling places including schools, council premises, church halls, caravans and portacabins. As part of the review, the suitability of these premises was assessed, incorporating any comments received during the consultation. The review considered any potential known future problems with polling places, such as building works or closure, or future non-availability of premises.
- 2.2.2 The choice of polling place will often be a balance between the quality (access, facilities, etc.) of a building and the distances between the electors and that building, compared to other options for polling places. There is no detailed guidance on this. The legislation provides merely that all electors in a constituency should have 'such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances'.
- 2.2.3 The selection of suitable premises for use as a polling place often poses challenges. For example, schools are usually easy for local voters to find and provide good facilities for both polling staff and electors. However, this can cause disruption to the administration of the school and the Electoral Services Team work closely with the school's management team to try and minimise any disruption.
- 2.2.4 Polling stations should be easy to find on polling day. Where suitable permanent premises are not available in a polling district, temporary facilities can be provided for use as a polling station such as caravans or portacabins.
- 2.2.5 As part of this review, consideration was given to the availability of caravans for use as polling stations in the long term; a supplier in Stowmarket had already ceased trading and a supplier in Norwich was currently being used.

An alternative supplier in Haverhill was suggested by a Haverhill councillor, but this supplier only sold new and used caravans and did not hire caravans.

- 2.2.6 To reduce the risk of the unavailability of caravans for future elections, it is proposed that seven polling districts poll with their neighbouring parishes. In all cases, the new polling station is no more than 3 miles from the current polling station and is within the same district ward. In some parishes electors have to travel similar distances or even further to a polling station within the same parish.
- 2.2.7 The seven parishes affected by this have been contacted individually to allow them to consider whether a suitable alternative is available within their parish and three responses have been received.

2.3 Electors

- 2.3.1 During a review of this type, consideration must also be given to the appropriate number of electors per polling station and polling place, depending on the facilities available, the geographical location of the polling districts, as well as the increasing number of electors who now vote by post.

2.4 Communications campaign

- 2.4.1 Consideration has been given to the problem of 'elector confusion'. This can occur changing the venue of polling stations. It has been agreed that a communications campaign will be launched across West Suffolk to inform residents and electors of all of the proposed changes. This will include a letter being sent to every elector where there is a change of polling station, press releases, information on the Council's website and use of social media.

3. Requirements and process of the review

- 3.1 In conducting a review, guidance and legislation provides that the following requirements must be met:
- Publication of notice of holding of the review
 - Consultation with the (Acting) Returning Officer for every parliamentary election held in a constituency which is wholly or partly within its area
 - Every such (Acting) Returning Officer must make representations to the Council which must include information as to the location of the polling stations (existing or proposed) within polling places (existing or proposed).
 - The representations must be published as prescribed.
 - The Council must seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities
 - Any elector in a constituency situated in whole, or in part in the authority's area, may make representations.

4. Parliamentary and ward boundaries

- 4.1 There are currently three constituency areas:
- West Suffolk constituency – which is wholly within West Suffolk

- Bury St Edmunds constituency – which is partly within West Suffolk, and partly within Mid Suffolk
- South Suffolk constituency – which is partly within West Suffolk, and partly within Babergh

4.2 Ten district wards had no changes proposed to the polling districts, polling places or polling stations. In addition, no feedback was received regarding these wards during the consultation. Full details of the wards are at **Appendix 2**.

4.3 43 district wards had changes proposed to either the polling districts, polling places or polling stations and/or had feedback received during the consultation. Full details of the proposals and feedback received are at **Appendix 3**.

5. Designation of polling districts and polling places

5.1 The Council is required to designate the polling districts and polling places. There is no requirement to designate a polling place for every polling district except in instances when electors have to vote outside of their polling district. This generally occurs where there is no suitable building to use as a polling station. If no polling place is designated then by default the polling district is the polling place.

5.2 It is proposed that the Council adopts the policy of only designating a Polling Place where out-of-district polling takes place as this allows for flexibility if buildings are not available, particularly in relation to unscheduled elections where bookings have to be made at short notice.

5.3 The Schedule of Polling Districts is at **Appendix 4** and the Schedule of Polling Places is at **Appendix 5**.