

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO THE FULL COUNCIL

20 November 2019

Report Title: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019

Submitted by: Chief Executive

Portfolios: Corporate & Service Improvement, People & Partnerships

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to bring to Council the outcome of the consultation following the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places which took place between 29 July and 19 September 2019.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council approves the amendments to the polling districts and polling places set out in Appendix A to this report.

Reasons

Having carried out a Review of Polling District and Polling Places, a decision by the Council on that review is now required to ensure that polling districts and polling places remain beneficial to the electorate.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 A Review of the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations has been carried out in the Parliamentary Constituencies in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006).
- 1.2 The main purpose of the review is to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting and that all polling stations are accessible to electors who are disabled. However, it should be noted that community buildings are becoming more difficult to find in some areas compared to previous years.
- 1.3 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a new timetable for the formal review of polling districts and places. This new timetable implemented the requirement to conduct a review of each polling district, polling place and polling station within each local authority area every five years.
- 1.4 Although there was a review recently due to the boundary changes that came into force for the May 2018 elections, the above changes to legislation required us to conduct another formal review between the period of 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020.
- 1.5 Existing polling arrangements were assessed and the views of interested groups and individuals were invited. These included electors, political parties, Members of the Council, those organisations who cater for the specific needs of people with different disabilities and the Acting Returning Officer for Stoke North, Stone and Staffordshire Moorlands.
- 1.6 Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission stipulates how reviews should be conducted in four stages. The first stage requires the Council to give public notice of its intention to conduct the

review. The second requires the Council to review the existing polling arrangements to determine their suitability, or otherwise. The third stage requires the Council to consult widely. This includes local electors, interested groups and bodies, including political parties, elected Members and organisations experienced in assessing the needs of people with disabilities. The final stage relates to the consideration of proposals for changes to polling district boundaries and polling places by the Council, as these can require alterations to be made to the electoral register.

1.7 Any comments, suggestions and requests received were explored and those found to be achievable and in the best interests of the electors affected are outlined in the table below and, in further detail, in Appendix A.

1.8 Three submissions were received during the consultation period. Two submissions raised issues with the use of Co-op Academy Friarswood which is required to close on polling day for safeguarding reasons when voting takes place at the school. These submissions also offered the recommendation of alternative premises to use for future elections/referendums. In addition to this, a comment was also received encouraging the use of May Bank Infants School for future elections. Details of the submissions are set out at Appendix B to the report.

2. **Issues**

2.1 The location and accessibility of polling places has a direct effect on electors' ability to exercise their democratic right to vote.

3. **Proposal**

3.1 To take all submissions, representations and alternative places suggested into consideration and to amend and update existing polling districts.

3.2 Members are recommended to make the following changes for implementation:

WARD	PROPOSED CHANGES
Madeley & Betley: SLD	Proposed amendment to update and amend the polling district from SLD to SLC to follow alphabetically. No change to polling station.
Maer & Whitmore: SMC, SMD and SME	Proposed amendments to update and amend polling districts SMC, SMD and SME to follow alphabetically as SMB, SMC and SMD. No change to polling stations.
Westbury Park: NUC	Proposed amendments to update and amend polling district NUC to NUB to follow alphabetically. No change to polling stations.
Westlands: NWC, NWD, NWE, NWF and NWH	Proposed amendments to update and amend polling districts NWC, NWD, NWE, NWF and NWH to follow alphabetically as NWB, NWC, NWD, NWF and NWG.
Westlands: NWA and NWH - Co-op Academy Friarswood	Taking into consideration the two submissions received recommending the use of The Coppice over Co-op Academy Friarswood for future elections, it is recommended that this change is not implemented immediately and the location does not change due to potential issues of accessibility for electors to this site but the matter is deferred to a future review.
Wolstanton: NXE	Proposed amendments to update and amend polling district NXE to NXD to follow alphabetically. No change to polling stations.

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

- 4.1 It is essential to designate polling places that are most beneficial to the electorate.
- 4.2 Members are also asked to note that the Council's software provider has advised officers make any necessary amendments in January 2020 so that the Register of Electors is not affected at the Polling Station on the day of the General Election.

5. **Options Considered**

- 5.1 Every local authority is required to complete a review, identifying designated polling places for each polling district. Legislation requires that the scheme is kept under review. As required by Section 27 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 this report proposes a full review of the polling scheme.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 The review complies with the Representation of the Peoples Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006)
- 6.2 The recommendation is not at variance with the Human Rights Act 1998 and is unlikely to result in any adverse Human Rights Act implications. The recommendations are in line with relevant legal procedures prescribed by the Act and with guidance issued by the Home Office.

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 The Council must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled Any amendments to the current polling districts, polling places and polling stations will take into account the provisions of the Equalities Act, Representation of People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006), and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 8.1 It should be noted that hire charges for many of the existing polling station venues may increase next year.

9. **Major Risks**

- 9.1 The Council is obliged to conduct a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations on a regular basis and to undertake such Community Governance Reviews as are required to keep the electoral arrangements within its area up to date.
- 9.2 The Council must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

10. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

There is no anticipated environmental impact associated with the recommendations in the report.

11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 N/A

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

N/A

13. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A – Schedule of Proposals following the Review of Polling Districts and Places 2019

Appendix B- Submissions received from the Polling Districts and Polling Place Review 2019

14. **Background Papers**

Sections 18C (1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983

Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006

Electoral Commission Guidance on Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations