

Meeting: COUNCIL
Date: 8 OCTOBER 2014

Agenda Item: 13

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To advise Council on the outcome of a review of the Polling Districts and Polling Places in the Borough of Stevenage and to make recommendations on appropriate or necessary changes or amendments to the existing Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations Order.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That a new Polling Districts and Polling Places Order be made, to come into operation on 1 December 2014.
- 2.2 That each Polling District and the Polling Districts bordering it be designated as the Polling Place for that Polling District.
- 2.3 That the new Polling Districts and Polling Places Order be based on the existing Order in so far as no changes to the Polling Districts are recommended but it be noted that the Returning Officer has agreed the following changes to Polling Stations –
- Polling District CBB (Old Town Ward) be changed from the Bunyan Baptist Church to the Cromwell Hotel.
 - Polling District CBD (Old Town Ward) be changed from the Scout Association Building, rear of Barclay School to The Royal Oak Public House.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2013 required that a review of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places must be undertaken and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015. It was considered appropriate that the Stevenage Borough Council review be undertaken and completed in time for the publication of the Register of Electors on 1 December 2014.

3.2 Polling Districts

A Polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a European Parliamentary electoral region, a ward or an electoral division.

3.3 Polling Places

A Polling Place is a geographical area in which a Polling station is located. However, as there is no legal definition of what a Polling Place is, the geographical area can be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire Polling District.

3.4 Polling Stations

A Polling Station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the Polling place designated for the particular Polling district. The Returning Officer for the particular election must provide a sufficient number of Polling Stations, and allot the electors to those Polling Stations in such manner as he or she thinks the most convenient.

3.5 Notice of the 2014 Review was published on 28 July 2014. Any elector within the authority or within a parliamentary constituency which has any part in the authority may make a representation. The consultation period ended on 4 September 2014.

3.6 The proposals were available on the Council's website or could be inspected at the Council offices. The consultation document was also sent to:-

All SBC Councillors
Member Parliament for the Stevenage Constituency
Members of the European Parliament Eastern Region
Local Political Parties
REACT - The Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Organisation of Disabled People
The Hertfordshire Hearing Advisory Service (HHAS)
Hertfordshire Society for the Blind.

3.7 In accordance with the procedures, the Council's Returning Officer has been invited to comment only on the proposals relating to Polling Stations changes or amendments.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Responses were received concerning Chells, Longmeadow, Manor, Pin Green and Woodfield Wards.

- 4.1.1 Chells Ward - Polling Districts CHA / CHB / CHC. Councillor Robin Parker responded that he was content with the no-change proposals for CHA and CHB but did not consider the Polling station for CHC (Fairlands Valley Sailing Centre) was value for money given the number of voters attending that station for the Elections on 22 May 2014*.

*Unlike Polling District and Polling Places which are fixed by the local authority, Polling Stations are a matter for decision by Returning Officer.

- 4.1.2 Longmeadow Ward – Polling Districts CAN / CNB. Councillor Monika Cherney-Craw responded that she had no comments.
- 4.1.3 Manor Ward – Polling Districts CFA and CFB. Councillor Robin Parker responded that he was content with the no-change proposals.
- 4.1.4 Pin Green Ward – Polling Districts CGA / CGB / CGC. Councillor Jeannette Thomas responded that she was content with the Polling Districts and Polling Places.
- 4.1.5 Woodfield Ward – Polling Districts CCA / CCB. Councillor Phil Bibby stated that he agreed with the recommendations.
- 4.2 In the light of these comments there are no recommendations to changes the current Polling Districts or Polling Places.
- 4.3 Concerning Polling Stations the Returning Officer has agreed with the proposals that the Polling stations for the Old Town Ward Polling Districts CBB and CBD trialled in 2014 become the Polling Stations for those Polling Districts in the new Order.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 Additional cost will be incurred in the administration of elections if the council decides to designate additional Polling Districts and associated Polling Places and /or temporary buildings. Conversely, cost savings will be accrued if Polling Districts are merged and/or fewer Polling Stations utilised

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 The Council is required by the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide its area into Polling Districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections, to keep those Polling Districts under review and to undertake a full statutory review as a minimum every four years. The Act also states that authorities must:-

(a) Seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

(b) Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the Polling

places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a Polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons’.

- 5.2.2 Subsequently the Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2013 required that a review of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places to be undertaken and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015.

5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.3.1 The proposals do not have the potential to discriminate against people on grounds of age; disability; gender; ethnicity; sexual orientation; religion/belief; or by way of financial exclusion.

5.4 Risk Implications

- 5.4.1 Poor designation of Polling Districts and Polling Places could have an adverse effect on the administration of future elections, directly impacting on the electorate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- BD1 – Published Notice of the Review
- BD2 – Timetable for the Review
- BD3 – Information Sheet provided with the documentation
- BD4 – Letters sent to Councillors/Outside Bodies
- BD5 - Inspection document containing totals of electorate numbers as at June 2014; totals of Postal Voters at the Polling stations as at June 2014; expected influx of electors within the Ward; details of proposed changes to the District; details of proposed changes to the Polling Place/Station; and comments of the Returning Officer
- BD6 – Comments received from Councillors Bibby, Cherney-Craw, Parker and Thomas

APPENDICES

None