

## **Polling Station Review**

### **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 The Council is required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to undertake a polling station review every four years from 2007. It is a matter reserved to full Council, and Councillors are advised the review will be started shortly.

### **2. Background**

2.1 The 2006 Act introduced a number of new electoral measures, including a substantial review of postal voting. This meant that some of the other provisions of the Act, including the requirement to undertake a review of polling stations, tended to take a lesser priority, and many councils, including the former Wiltshire District Councils adopted a “measured” approach to initiating their polling station reviews in 2007.

2.2 It is for the Council to designate polling areas, and for the Returning Officer to determine polling stations within those polling areas, and the two roles are clearly interlinked. The review of polling areas and polling stations should look not only at the physical premises e.g. for accessibility reasons, but also at their location and general suitability.

2.3 A typical example would be at Erlestoke (and there are others), where electors traditionally voted in the village, but due to a change in circumstances a few years ago, now vote at nearby Great Cheverell. Erlestoke has recently provided a new hall which is designed for community use, and the council would need to weigh up the pros and cons of encouraging community identity and the use of more local premises, against the cost of setting up a new station for just under 200 electors. In that example, the Council would need to approve either Erlestoke or Great Cheverell as the polling area for the electors of Erlestoke, and then the Returning Officer would have to identify suitable premises within that area. Another typical example would be at Corsham, where new development and the shape of the wards mean that many electors have to pass a polling station in another ward to get to their own polling station.

### **3. Main Considerations for the Council**

3.1 We are using the 2011 Referendum as an opportunity to collect a lot of information about the existing stations, and it is likely that in many cases there are very few realistic alternatives available.

3.2 The review should start with a set of parameters against which stations should be measured, e.g. minimum electorate (which is not recommended), access issues etc, and it is likely the review could take some time to complete. The involvement of a small group of councillors would be a useful sounding board, prior to submission of a final scheme for full Council at a later date.

#### **4. Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

4.1 One of the main purposes of undertaking a review is to arrive at a fair and equitable system of polling stations, taking into account a whole range of factors such as access issues and elector location. The polling station review must have regard to disabled voters, and also take into account the views of people with particular expertise in relation to different forms of disability

#### **5. Risk Assessment**

5.1 Individual stations are always assessed for risks at every election, but this is the first real opportunity to examine the robustness of the overall polling station stock of the new Council.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

6.1 There are unlikely to be any significant financial consequences arising from this review, although there may be a possibility of reducing the number of stations in 2013, due to the rationalisation of town wards with unitary divisions.

#### **7. Legal Implications**

7.1 The review is required under the Electoral Administration Act 2006

#### **8 Proposal**

8.1 To establish a small working party to work with officers as a sounding board, prior to submission of a Polling Station Review scheme for consideration by Council at a later date. Membership of the working party to be agreed with Group Leaders.

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**Background Papers - None**

**Appendices - None**