

**POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW
(Report by the Head of Administration)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the outcome of the recent review of polling districts and polling places as required by Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, which came into force on 1st January 2007.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006 require each authority to undertake a review of all of the polling districts and polling places in its area on a regular four-yearly cycle. The first such review must be completed by 31st December 2007. However, in practice the review needs to be completed by mid-November 2007 so that any changes can be reflected in the new Register of Electors to be published on 1st December 2007.

- 2.2 In undertaking the review, the Council must —

- publish a notice indicating the holding of a review;
- consult the Returning Officer for each Parliamentary Constituency which is wholly or partly within its area;
- enable any such Returning Officer to make representations to the authority and publish them in a prescribed manner;
- seek the views of interested groups or bodies including electors, candidates and agents, political parties and members of the Council; and
- seek representations from such persons that it thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons with different disabilities.

- 2.3 On completion of the review, the Council is required to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of both polling districts and polling places and publish other such information as prescribed in the Act and Regulations.

3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, e.g. UK Parliamentary Constituency, a European Parliamentary Electoral Region, a Ward or an Electoral Division. The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts for UK Parliamentary Elections and for keeping the polling districts under review. Although there is no requirement to sub-divide local

government electoral wards into polling districts, it is recognised good practice to do so. When doing so, every effort must be made to ensure that the polling district scheme for local government elections mirrors as closely as possible that agreed for Parliamentary Elections.

- 3.2 In addition, and unless there are special circumstances that lead the Council to determine otherwise, each Parish must be in a separate polling district.
- 3.3 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 could be defined as a specific room within a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 The Council is responsible for designating polling places whereas the Returning Officer is responsible for determining where the polling stations are situated.

4. AIM OF THE REVIEW

- 4.1 In carrying out this statutory review, the Council must demonstrate that they have, as far as is practicable, met the criteria in the legislation and in doing so must —
 - (a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
 - (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.
- 4.2 A schedule of existing polling districts and polling places is set out in Appendix A, together with details of existing polling stations used at Appendix B.
- 4.3 For administrative convenience, it would seem sensible to review all polling districts and polling places on a regular four-yearly cycle, regardless of whether or not a particular polling district or place has been reviewed for some reason in the intervening period (e.g. because of an influx of electors in an area or the non-availability of a building designated as a polling place). This will help to ensure a consistent approach is taken across the District.
- 4.4 It has been the practice to respond to feedback from Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors on the adequacy and suitability of polling stations when elections are held. This is taken into account on an ongoing basis.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The formal consultation period ran from 16th August 2007 to 28th September 2007. A public notice was circulated to all Town and Parish Councils for display in their parish, displayed at the Council offices and on the Council's website. The Hunts Post also published an article on the review.
- 5.2 In addition, specific consultation was undertaken with all District Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, Returning Officers for the Constituencies of Huntingdon and Peterborough, the Returning Officer for Cambridgeshire County Council, political agents/parties and local disability groups.

6. ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 6.1 Responses received as a result of the consultation process are summarised in the schedule at Appendix C. The schedule provides details of the relevant Ward/Parish and identifies any action proposed.

7. COMPLETION AND CHALLENGE OF THE REVIEW

- 7.1 On completion of the review, the Council is required to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of both polling districts and polling places.
- 7.2 Although the Electoral Commission has no initial role in the review process itself, it has an extremely important role in respect of considering representations and observations made that a Council has not conducted a review so as to meet the reasonable requirements of the electors and to take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Arising from the responses received to the consultation process on the review of polling districts and polling places, members of the Panel are invited to —
- (a) note the outcome of the review and consultations undertaken;
 - (b) agree the changes, as proposed, to polling district boundaries and polling places as detailed in the report; and
 - (c) note that a review of all polling districts is to be undertaken at least every four years, but in the intervening period agree to delegate authority to the Returning Officer, after consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Panel, to determine any changes necessary to polling places, within a Ward, in the light of any housing development.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Section 16 – Electoral Administration Act 2006

The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006

Circular EC 28/2007: Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations – 26th June 2007: The Electoral Commission

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