



## Council – 10 October 2011

### Review of Polling Districts and Places

#### Purpose of report

This report follows the decisions taken by the council on 18 July in respect of a review of polling districts and places and asks members to delegate final decisions on the review to the Policy and Resources Committee on 7 November.

#### Attachment(s)

None

#### 1. Action taken since 18 July

- 1.1 The council meeting on 18 July approved the programme for the review of polling districts, places and stations (minute 107 refers). Notice of the review was published on 21 July and a consultation document with preliminary proposals followed, with approaches made to a wide range of consultees, including special interest groups.
- 1.2 The 14 consultation responses received by the closing date (15 September) have been published on a webpage on the council's website ([www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/pollingdistrictreview](http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/pollingdistrictreview))
- 1.3 Most of the current polling stations have been inspected by Building Control Surveyors to ensure that their continued use complies with DDA provisions. Where alternative venues have been suggested, these buildings have also been inspected, or will be inspected shortly.
- 1.4 The consultation document suggested that most of the current polling stations should continue to be used, but drew attention to the following stations which are either not fully DDA compliant or where an earlier request had been made to change:-
  - Barnwell Ward – Caravan at 5 Lilford
  - Kings Forest Ward – Bulwick Village Centre
  - Kings Forest Ward – Cessation of Deene Village Hall and transfer polling to station at Deenethorpe
  - Lyveden Ward – Bakehouse Cottage, Slipton
  - Oundle Ward – Caravan at The Grange, Pilton
  - Rushden Pemberton and Spencer Wards – Cessation of Tennyson Road Infants School and use of Pemberton Centre
  - Rushden Spencer Ward – Cessation of Hayway Infants School (which will close) and invitation to suggest alternatives
  - Woodford Ward – Chancel Cottage, High Street, Little Addington.
- 1.5 As a result of comments made during the consultation, other venues have been suggested for:-
  - Oundle Ward (Queen Victoria Hall)
  - Raunds Windmill Ward (two venues suggested to replace Windmill School but they are not DDA compliant)
  - Rushden Bates Ward (an alternative venue for Hope Methodist Church Hall, which will close)
  - Rushden Hayden (An alternative to replace Newton Road Primary School)
  - Rushden Pemberton Ward (an alternative venue to Whitefriars Junior School)

- but it may not be suitable)
- Rushden Sartoris Ward (Full Gospel Church to replace South End Schools)
- Stanwick Ward (new Community Hall to replace the Old School)

However, no suggestions were made during the review consultation on alternative venues for the ones which are not fully DDA compliant. The above venues have, or are being inspected by Building Control Surveyors to ensure that they are suitable and in particular, that they are DDA compliant, before recommendations are made.

1.6 In order to comply fully with equalities legislation, Equalities Impact Assessments (EIAs) have been prepared for alternative venues, especially where it is likely that changes in venues will be pursued. Where appropriate, they are being shared with consultees. Members can view these EIAs on the review webpage.

## **2.0 Further action required and timing**

2.1 There is now a need for –

- Officers to consider alternative polling stations where no suggestions have been made during the consultation and the current stations are not completely DDA compliant. This will involve visits to appropriate villages.
- Any outstanding inspections of alternative venues to be completed by Building Control Surveyors.
- Officers to discuss – with owners of properties – the use of their buildings for polling.
- Any further consultation required with special interest groups (for example the proposal to cease using the polling station at Deene is currently being consulted upon – all electors are also being consulted).

2.2 The above factors, and also the bringing forward of the council meeting to 10 October, have highlighted the need for a change in the final consideration of the review outcomes. The review must be completed in good time before publication of the next register of electors, and no later than 4 years following the last review, so it is essential that final decisions are made by early November 2011. As there is a meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 7 November, it is suggested that full council could delegate responsibility to that committee, and that all members receive a copy of the report and attachments and be invited to feed in any further observations to the meeting.

## **3.0 Equality and Diversity Issues**

3.1 The service is a statutory duty, which includes a requirement to take into account the ease of accessibility to the polling stations for anyone with a disability. In addition, the proposed change at Deene could affect older people and have rural isolation implications. The report to the Policy and Resources Committee on 7 November will include all relevant EIAs.)

## **4.0 Legal Implications**

4.1 The council is under a statutory duty to complete a review by the end of this year.

## **5.0 Risk Management**

5.1 There are no significant risks to the council in relation to the recommendation. However, failure to undertake the review could result in a legal challenge and therefore it is essential the work goes ahead.

## **6.0 Financial Implications**

6.1 There are no additional financial implications. The work is being accommodated

within the workload of the Democratic Services Manager and electoral services staff.

## 7.0 Corporate Outcomes

- 7.1 Good quality of life – safe: the prospect of improving access to polling stations for disabled people
- 7.2 High Quality Service Delivery (satisfied residents and enhanced customer experience): supporting the customer by ensuring that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting as *are practicable in the circumstances*

## 8.0 Recommendations

- 8.1 It is recommended that full council delegates, to the Policy and Resources Committee, on 7 November 2011, the responsibility for considering the final report of the review of polling districts, places and stations and making appropriate decisions thereon, and that all members receive the report and be invited to make any further comments to be reported to that meeting.

*(Reason – to comply with the requirements of legislation, which requires a review to be conducted every 4 years, and to allow further work to be undertaken to enable firm recommendations to be made)*

<b>Legal</b>	Power: Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006				
	Other considerations:				
<b>Background Papers:</b> Last review of polling districts and places					
<b>Person Originating Report:</b> Keith Osborne, Democratic Services Manager 01832 742113 (kwosborne@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk)					
<b>Date: 21 September 2011</b>					
<b>CFO</b>		<b>MO</b>		<b>CX</b>	

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)