

Report to Polling district review working group
Date 27 June 2019
Report of Democratic and elections manager
Subject Polling district and polling places review 2019

Item

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Purpose

To inform members of a parliamentary polling places and districts review and to note the (Acting) Returning Officer's proposals.

Recommendations

To note:

- (1) the report submitted to working party of the democratic and elections manager; and
- (2) the (Acting) Returning Officers proposals for changes to polling places, districts and stations

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority people living well

Financial implications

No additional budget impact

Ward/s: All Wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Kendrick - Resources

Contact officers

Stuart Guthrie Democratic and elections manager

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Background documents

None

Report

Background

1. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) published its final recommendations following their review of the electoral ward arrangements for the city council on 6 November 2018.
2. The statutory order to implement the changes was laid before parliament in December 2018. They were in place for the local elections on 2 May 2019.
3. An interim polling districts and polling places review was carried out to ensure the new electoral arrangements were in place for the local elections on 2 May 2019 however this was an interim review and there was still a requirement for a full parliamentary polling district and places review.
4. In accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, Norwich City Council is required to complete a full review of all polling districts and polling places every five years.
5. The review of polling districts, places and stations needs to be completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020.
6. The full parliamentary polling district and places review commenced on 14 June 2019.

Details of the review

7. The scope of the 2019 polling district and polling station review is to covers the following:
 - a) Ensure all polling stations have suitable access arrangements in place.
 - b) Ensure that all polling stations have suitable arrangements for the conduct of the poll (e.g. lighting, space, seating).
 - c) Identify polling stations which are now unavailable or were not fit for purpose during the 2019 local elections, and identify suitable alternatives where possible.
 - d) Identify all polling stations located in schools, and find suitable alternative venues where possible. We have found it increasingly difficult to use schools due to safeguarding issues.
 - e) Identify where there is a difference between wards and divisions and ensure electors are voting in the correct area at the relevant election.
 - f) Make adjustments to existing polling districts, for administrative purposes in order to improve the delivery of elections.

- g) Identify wards which are split by parliamentary constituency boundaries, and ensure that polling district boundaries align closely with the existing constituency boundaries and that suitable polling station provision is made for all electors.
 - h) Ensure there are no more than 2500 electors (excluding absent voters) allocated to a particular polling station as per the Electoral Commission's guidance.
8. A polling district and polling places working party made up of elected members will meet during the consultation period to help formulate a polling district and polling places scheme. The working group is politically balanced and consists of four Labour councillors, two Green party councillors and one Liberal Democrat councillor.
 9. A proposed polling scheme developed by the democratic and elections manager on behalf of the (Acting) Returning Officer for Norwich South will be presented to the working group and the public for comments as part of the consultation. It is expected that this will take place at the first meeting on 27 June 2019.
 10. The working group will also consider any other proposals or consultation responses. This could include responses from residents, organisations, political parties, elected representatives and other key stakeholders
 11. The (Acting) Returning Officer for Norwich North has been invited to respond to the consultation.
 12. In order to work to the consultation timetable, council approval is needed at its meeting on 24 September 2019. This will allow any polling district and places changes to be in place in time for the publication the electoral register on 1 December 2019.
 13. The review is looking at parliamentary polling places, districts and stations but it is important that these also reflect other elections and referendums. The polling scheme will need to be in place to reflect where the constituency, ward and county divisions differ. The polling scheme will need to ensure electors only vote in one polling station where more than one election is combined on a particular date.
 14. The democratic and elections manager will support the working group to develop a response to the proposed scheme and the working party will meet again later in July and September 2019.
 15. The public consultation period started on Tuesday 14 June 2019 and will end on Wednesday 29 August 2019. The consultation has been publicised on the council's website, at city hall and on social media. The council has also issued a press release.
 16. Comments received during this consultation will be considered by the working group and changes to the scheme made, if applicable.

17. Current ward boundary maps and elector statistics by current ward/polling district will follow in advance of the meeting alongside the (A)RO proposals.
18. At the final meeting in September, the working party will make a decision on the amended polling district and polling places scheme to recommend to council on 24 September 2019.
19. Should council decide to adopt the scheme, the electoral register will be published using any new polling district boundaries on 1 December 2019 and elections will take place on these boundaries after this date.

Table 1: Timetable

Activity	Owner	Date
Publish notice of review and start of the consultation on existing arrangements	Democratic and elections manager (DEM)	14 June 2019
First meeting of the Polling District Review Working Party	Working Party/DEM	27 June 2019
Publication of Acting Returning Officer's (ARO's) proposals and start of public consultation.	DEM	28 June 2019 – 24 July 2019
Site visits of current polling stations and potential new venues	DEM/ Elections Team	July 2019
Polling District Review Working Party to agree on ARO's proposals and amend where required.	Working Party/DEM/ARO	25 July 2019
Consultation on (revised) ARO's proposals as agreed by the Polling District Review Working Party.	DEM	26 July 2019 – 29 August 2019
Polling District Review Working Party to agree polling district review to recommend changes to council.	Working Party/DEM/ARO	5 September 2019
Full meeting of council to agree changes.	Council	24 September 2019
Register of Electors to be published with the new polling districts and agreed polling places and stations.	Elections Team	1 December 2019

Risks

20. The process of redrawing the new polling districts and confirming venues should commence as soon as practically possible after the 2 May 2019 local elections and the EU parliamentary election on 23 May 2019. Should there be a delay in formulating a new polling district scheme for approval by September 2019, it will not be possible to publish the electoral register in time for the deadline on 31 January 2020.
21. If a UK parliamentary election is called during the review period. Contingency plans will need to be agreed using the current arrangements as a basis. The (A)RO may still need to make changes to individual venues outside the review process.

Next steps

22. The (A)RO proposals will be available for the meeting of the working party on 27 June 2019.
23. The elections team will be visiting every existing polling station and any potential alternative venues during July. The Democratic and elections manager will report to the working party during the process.

