

Report to Council
25 November 2014

Item

Report of Democratic services manager

7

Subject Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations

Purpose

To review polling districts, polling places and polling stations as required by the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) and the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006.

Recommendations

To retain the current polling districts, polling places and polling stations subject to the following :

- 1) change the boundary between polling districts MX2 and MX3, to move voters in MX3 living adjacent/north of Drayton Road into MX2;
- 2) change the polling station in polling district CG5 to Shipfields Community Room from St Georges Church Hall ; and
- 3) identify preferred reserve polling stations and the process for finding replacement polling stations if a polling station is unavailable for a particular election/by-election, as detailed in Appendix A

Financial Consequences

There are small differences in hires charges for premises but these can be accommodated within existing budgets.

Strategic Objective/Service Priorities

The report helps to achieve the corporate objective to make Norwich safe and secure, building strong and proud local communities

Wards: All

Cabinet member:- Councillor Waters, resources.

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Contact Officers

Andy Emms, Democratic services manager.

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Background Documents

None

Report

Introduction

1. The Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) and the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, requires that Norwich City Council conduct a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations in its area.
2. Local authorities are required to divide their area into polling districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections and to designate polling places for these polling districts, and to keep these under review. By conducting this statutory review of polling places, local authorities must demonstrate that they have, as far as is practicable, met the following criteria set out in legislation.
 - 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.
3. In an ideal world Council's would have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for the electors in the area. It is accepted, however, that in practice this is not always the case and there may be little choice available. If it is necessary to use a place where for example, the access is not ideal, then every reasonable adjustment must be undertaken to provide access for all electors.
4. The key things local authorities are required to bear in mind when conducting this review is that all decisions made must be consulted upon, measured, and practical. The whole process should be as transparent and open as possible to avoid possible conflict.

Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations in Norwich.

5. The review was advertised in the press, on the Council's website and a public notice displayed in City Hall. Details of the current polling districts, polling places and polling stations are always available on the Council's website and details/plans were also made available for personal inspection at City Hall. (copies will be on display at your meeting).
6. Invitations to contribute to the review were sent to MPs, MEPs, councillors, political parties, Broadland District Council's Returning Officer and access groups.

Polling Stations / Polling Districts The current list of polling stations is included in Appendix A. All polling stations have been inspected and assessed to ensure that they are fully accessible. In some cases this is possible by providing ramps on the day of the poll.

8. In the lead up to all elections there are often local circumstances that require a mini review in itself. By way of example, in May 2014 we were able to utilise the Scout headquarters on Colman Road (polling district UN4) after a fire destroyed the St Anne's Church Hall. Also, the Silver Rooms on Silver Road (SE3) once again became available for use. In recent elections we had been using the Silver Road Baptist Church in the adjacent polling district (SE4) as a double polling station as there had been no suitable alternative in SE3. Another example was the need to use the Friend's Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane (MA5) as redevelopment works were being undertaken at Chantry Hall, Chantry Road.
9. Comparator data which shows the changes to the size of the electorate in each polling district since the last review is attached as Appendix B.
10. The Returning Officer is required to formally contribute to the review and her response is attached at Appendix C. This reflects the fact that the polling stations are reviewed prior to every election according to availability and she is fully involved in that process. She is happy that the current scheme will allow her to undertake an efficient election and accurate count.
11. The only other representations were received from Norwich Labour Party as follows:

Ward & PD	Proposal	Benefits
Catton Grove / CG5	Move CG5 polling station at St Georges Church to Shipfields Community Room (operated by Broadland Housing Association)	The polling station on Sprowston Road (St George's) is a very long way for people on Anthony Drive, Shipfields, Templemere to walk to. Establishing a new location, at the community room in Shipfields, would allow more people easier access to vote.
Nelson Ward / NE4 University Ward / UN5	Have separate polling stations for each district.	Evidence from May 2014 showed large queues developing as people waited to vote. This will be a far more significant problem in 2015.

Wensum Ward / WE3	Approach NANSA day centre / West Norwich Community Hospital to re-establish a new polling station for voters in WE3.	Difficult for residents to have to walk all the way to Wensum Junior School on Turner Road, and cross the busy Dereham Road.
Mancroft Ward. / MA5	Split MA5 into two polling districts. Establish new polling station at All Saints Church.	Easier access for residents to vote.
Thorpe Hamlet / TH2	Move polling station to Great Hospital Common Room, Bishopgate.	<p>Parking is very difficult at the Maids Head Hotel (current polling station) and will become more so once the road changes come into action.</p> <p>The Great Hospital is a central location in TH2, well known, and easier to reach.</p>

12. These suggestions were presented to a meeting of the Polling District Review Group held on 15 October, 2014.

13. The democratic services manager emphasised that if any changes were to be considered, members needed to be absolutely clear that the advantages of these should outweigh the disadvantages of asking people to change from a familiar polling station location.

14. Referring to the Labour Party responses to the consultation for Nelson Ward NE4 / University Ward UN5, the democratic services manager said that the staff working at the polling station at Jessopp Road United Reformed church said that although busy they did not believe significant queues formed. They did have practical issues/concerns relating to being a double polling station which the democratic services manager believed could be addressed through training and ensuring there are adequate staff to allow for a "floor walking" service. The only other buildings in the area are schools which we try to avoid using if at all possible.

15. Concerning Mancroft Ward – MA5, All Saints Church has been contacted but the premise is not available for use as a polling station. The Women's Institute at Evelyn Suffield House was suggested as a possible alternative to Chantry Hall or as an additional polling station in a new split polling district. The democratic services manager said he would prefer not to split the ward to create another polling district because the new polling district would be very small; extra polling staff would be required and the effect on the count.

16. For Wensum Ward – WE3, NANSA and West Norwich Community Hospital have both been contacted again but neither premise is available. The Muslim Centre on Dereham Road was suggested as a possible venue for a polling station.
17. A change was suggested to the boundary between polling districts MX2 and MX3, to move voters living adjacent/north of Drayton Road from MX3 to MX2. The Polling District Review Group members considered this was a sensible suggestion which would mean people not having to cross the busy Drayton Road to vote in person at a polling station.
18. The Polling District Review Group asked the democratic services manager to investigate the following options:

Catton Grove Ward – CG5

Visit the Community Room at Shipfields to assess the viability of the room for use as a polling station.

Mancroft Ward – MA5

Contact the Women's Institute to see whether they have a suitable room which they would be willing to allow to be hired as a polling station for future elections.

Thorpe Hamlet ward – TH2

Visit the Great Hospital at Bishopgate to assess the viability of for use as a polling station.

Wensum Ward – WE3

Contact the Muslim Centre on Dereham Road to see whether there was a suitable room could be hired as a polling station for future elections.

19. The democratic services manager reported back to the Polling District Review Group on 3 November, 2014 as follows:

Catton Grove Ward – CG5

The Community Room at Shipfields is in an excellent location in the heart of the residential area of the district and is fully accessible. The only issue to consider is availability should Broadland Housing Association choose to change the use of its premise from a community facility.

The review group agreed to recommend changing the polling station in polling district CG5 to Shipfields Community Room with St Georges Church Hall as preferred reserve.

Mancroft Ward – MA5

The Women's Institute building is available. It is slightly closer to housing on the south of the district but of course is further for those in the north. There is a small car park available at the rear but this is accessed from Surrey Street/Surrey Grove which might prove difficult for people to find. Disabled people would need to walk around via Surrey Street to the front access.

Although suitable as a polling station there does not seem to be any significant advantage over the existing Chantry Hall to warrant change.

The review group agreed Chantry Hall should be retained as the polling station in MA5 with the Womens' Institute's Evelyn Suffield House, 45 All Saints Green as the preferred alternative.

Thorpe Hamlet Ward – TH2

The refectory and the common room at the Great Hospital at Bishopgate were available for use. There is a car park but it is a long way from the available room and the nearer on-street parking was not free. The Great Hospital had some practical and logistical issues that it would need to agree to and would not want cars driving around the site as residents were its main priority – this would be difficult to sign and “police”. The cost of hire would be significantly more than any of the other polling stations used. The parking available at the rear of the Maids Head hotel was close and accessibility would be improved soon as there were plans for a lift to improve access for the disabled from the car park.

The review group agreed that the Maids Head Hotel should be retained as the polling station in TH2

Wensum Ward – WE3

The Muslim Centre on Dereham Road was not available for hire as a polling station and no alternative has been identified.

The review group agreed the Wensum Junior School, Turner Road (which is situated in polling district WE2) should be retained as the polling station for WE3 until a suitable alternative becomes available in that polling district.

20. Cabinet considered the recommendations of the cross party review group at its meeting on 12 November, 2014 and was informed that the Returning Officer considered the changes proposed are within parameters that will still allow her to undertake an efficient election and count. A copy of her response is attached as appendix D. Cabinet resolved to ask council to approve the changes to the polling scheme.
21. Members will be aware that the council does not own most of the polling stations in the polling scheme. Therefore there are occasions when they are not available for a particular election. It is then necessary to identify the next best option. Sometimes due to lack of availability, this will require the polling station to be in an adjacent polling district, and may require doubling up with another polling station. The recommendations also include arrangements that will be made if a polling station is unavailable for a particular election/by-election and these are also detailed in appendix A.

Integrated impact assessment



NORWICH
City Council

Report author to complete

Committee:	Council
Committee date:	25/11/14
Head of service:	Anton Bull
Report subject:	Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations
Date assessed:	
Description:	To review polling districts, polling places and polling stations as required by the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) and the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006.

	Impact			
Economic (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Finance (value for money)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other departments and services e.g. office facilities, customer contact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
ICT services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Economic development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Financial inclusion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Social (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Safeguarding children and adults	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<u>S17 crime and disorder act 1998</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Human Rights Act 1998	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Health and well being	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Equality and diversity (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Relations between groups (cohesion)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

	Impact			
Eliminating discrimination & harassment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Advancing equality of opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The changes will improve accessibility of two polling stations particularly for the disabled.
Environmental (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Natural and built environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Waste minimisation & resource use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pollution	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sustainable procurement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Energy and climate change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
(Please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Risk management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Recommendations from impact assessment

Positive

To make the changes identified in the report to improve accessibility of polling stations particularly for the disabled.

Negative

Neutral

Issues