

<b>Report of:</b>	James Bromiley, Strategic Director of Finance, Governance and Support
<b>AGENDA ITEM 7</b>	
<b>Submitted to:</b>	Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee, 6th December 2018
<b>Subject:</b>	Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

**Summary**

<b>Proposed decision(s)</b>
That the Committee approves the proposed changes arising from the review of Polling Districts, Places and Stations which took place in October 2018.

Report for:	Key decision:	Confidential:	Is the report urgent? <sup>1</sup>
Decision	Yes	No	N/A

Contribution to delivery of the 2018-22 Strategic Plan		
Business Imperatives	Physical Regeneration	Social Regeneration

<b>Ward(s) affected</b>
Polling places in all wards were reviewed. Changes are proposed in Brambles Farm and Thorntree, Central, Hemlington, Kader, Marton East, Newport, Park End and Beckfield and Trimdon wards. All councillors have been consulted on the proposed changes.

**What is the purpose of this report?**

- Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a duty on local authorities to ‘carry out and complete’ reviews of polling districts and polling places between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015, and thereafter every four years. The last review in Middlesbrough took place in October/November 2014. As there have been changes in the buildings available to us since that date and several areas of new house building across the borough, Electoral Services considered it appropriate to carry out the next review prior to the scheduled combined Local / Mayoral Elections on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019.

<sup>1</sup> Remove for non-Executive reports

2. The aim of the review is to seek that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. The Council must 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.

### **Why does this report require a Member decision?**

3. Any changes to polling districts and places require committee approval.

### **Report Background**

4. A Polling District is defined as the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors. A Polling Place is defined as the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer. A Polling Station is the room or part of the building where the poll takes place. These are chosen by the Returning Officer for the election.
5. The choice of polling place will often be a balance between the quality (access, facilities, etc.) of a building and the distances between the residents and that building compared to other options for polling places.
6. There is no fixed rule on how to decide how this should be done. Councils should be able to show that they followed a reasonable methodology in arriving at their choice.
7. The Electoral Commission, while not having direct responsibility for the review, can intervene where it considers that the reasonable requirements of electors or the needs of disabled electors have not been taken into account.
8. The Commission recommends that there be no more than 2,500 electors per polling station (excluding electors registered for a postal vote).
9. Consideration was given to the cost to the Council of further polling stations. A polling station currently costs approximately £800 to hire, equip and staff for polling day, with a mobile station costing approximately double this figure.
10. Consideration was given to any further development in the borough in terms of new build residential properties and demolitions.
11. Another key issue for the Council is that when conducting the review, all decisions made must have been consulted upon, measured and practical. The whole process should be as transparent and open as possible to avoid possible conflict.

12. Electoral Services wrote to all current councillors in March 2018 giving the background to the review and asking for initial observations to inform our proposals before these went to public consultation.
13. As required, the first stage of the review was giving notice. A public notice was published in the Evening Gazette and notices were posted in various locations in the town. A list is given in **Appendix 1**.
14. Information was provided on the council's website to inform the public about how to comment on their polling stations.
15. In line with the recommendations of the Electoral Commission, letters and questionnaires were sent to local Members of Parliament and Middlesbrough Councillors.
16. Local disability organisations and black and minority ethnic groups were also consulted. The consultee list is also contained in **Appendix 1**.
17. All comments received during the consultation period are given at **Appendix 2**.
18. The Returning Officer was also asked for his comments and these were posted on the Council website as the initial proposal.
19. Feedback from electors, Polling Station staff, Polling Station Inspectors and Polling Station Managers was also considered from recent elections.
20. Streetscene were approached and consulted in relation to access issues with mobile Polling Stations.
21. Once agreed, details of new polling arrangements will be displayed on the Council's website along with a "Find My Polling Station" postcode lookup facility. There will also be a prominent message on all poll cards prior to the forthcoming election.

### **What decision(s) are being asked for?**

22. Maps showing our proposals for all wards can be found at **Appendix 3**.
23. In Acklam, Ayresome, Berwick Hills and Pallister, Coulby Newham, Ladgate, Linthorpe, Longlands and Beechwood, Marton West, North Ormesby, Nunthorpe, Park and Stainton and Thornton wards the current arrangements have been found to be satisfactory, and no negative comments have been received during the consultation period. Ward councillors for Berwick Hills and Pallister, Ladgate, and Nunthorpe as well as Stainton and Thornton Parish Council have expressed their agreement with the current unchanged arrangements for their wards.
24. The ward councillors in Acklam ward requested an additional polling station to serve the Glendale Road area, with no additional justification. However, we believe the distance from this road to the nearest polling station at Middlesbrough District Scout

HQ is not excessive and the electorate for this station is well within the recommended maximum. Therefore we propose no change in this ward.

25. In Brambles and Thorntree Ward we have previously used a temporary station to serve approximately 270 electors who live north of Longlands Road. Mobile stations cost approximately double the cost of a station in a public building and provide poor access for disabled people and poor facilities for station staff. These 270 electors can be comfortably accommodated at the nearby station in Brambles Farm Community Centre, and this is our recommendation.
26. In Central ward there was a request from all three ward councillors to reinstate the polling place used prior to 2015 at St Aidan's Meeting Room. In addition, feedback from polling station staff and electors at recent elections indicates that the facilities available at the Europa Building, Teesside University are unsuitable. Therefore we are recommending reinstatement of the station at St Aidan's Meeting Room, and splitting the electors who would have previously voted at the Europa Building station between there and Abingdon Primary School. The total electorate at each of the stations in the ward would still be within the Electoral Commission's recommended maximum.
27. Although the International Centre in Central Ward has now closed, we have been assured that this building will still be available for use as a polling station. However, should this situation change in future an alternative would have to be found and we recommend that this decision be delegated to the Returning Officer.
28. In Hemlington, following a request from a ward councillor and the Community Council, we recommend moving electors in 6 streets on Earls Court Estate from voting at Hemlington Recreation Centre to Viewley Hill Academy as they are located closer to the academy and have an easier journey to reach it. The total electorate at this station would still be comfortably within the recommended maximum.
29. In the south of Kader ward, two temporary stations were previously provided either side of Acklam Road, serving 732 and 279 electors respectively. Unfortunately there is no suitable building in this area to locate a polling station and so use of a mobile is unavoidable. However given the increased cost of hiring and locating a mobile station we recommend combining these two mobile stations into one, and propose to locate this at the junction of Samaria Gardens and Acklam Road where there is a suitable space, and a nearby pedestrian crossing to provide access from the east side of Acklam Road.
30. In Marton East ward the 2014 review established a mobile station on Oval View to serve the housing development on the old Prissick Base site. Since that time Middlesbrough Sports Village has opened in the polling district, and this is also our dedicated count venue. The polling place was first moved here in 2016 and has been used for all elections since then. We recommend that Middlesbrough Sports Village is formally adopted as a polling place.
31. In Newport ward we were contacted by Ayresome Primary School to advise us that the building previously used as a polling station was now unavailable. An alternative was given as Redwood House, a community building on the school site with direct access from Parliament Road. Electoral Services inspected the building and have found it satisfactory for use as a future polling place.

32. Also in Newport Ward, we have previously used St. Cuthbert's Church Hall as a polling station. Facilities in this station for staff and electors have deteriorated to the point where it is no longer considered suitable for use as a polling station. We therefore propose to move the polling place to Macmillan Academy.
33. In Park End and Beckfield Ward we have previously used Southlands Business Centre as a polling place but we understand that this building is to be demolished before the next scheduled elections. We have also been made aware from a member of the congregation that Ormesby Methodist Church is to close in early 2019. Ward councillors suggested the use of the community room at Glastonbury House to replace the Southlands Centre, and Electoral Services visited the location to inspect the facilities. These were found to be highly suitable, and we recommend the adoption of Glastonbury House as a polling place.
34. Ward councillors also suggested Ormesby Club and Institute as a replacement for Ormesby Methodist Church. Again, we have inspected the facilities and agree that this location would be suitable for use. However, having considered the ward as a whole we believe it is not unreasonable to combine the two polling districts previously served by the Southlands Centre and Ormesby Methodist Church into one, with the polling place located in Glastonbury House. The combined electorate would be 1,926 which is still less than the largest existing station in this ward, and we do not consider the distance electors in any part of the combined district must travel to reach the polling station to be excessive. In the same ward, for example it is less than the journey from Althorpe Close to Priory 16 or the furthest point on Evesham Road to Park End Primary School. We therefore recommend that the two existing polling districts, OB and OC be combined into one with the polling place at Glastonbury House.
35. In Trimdon Ward a ward councillor and a resident both asked for an extra station to serve the new development at Stainsby Hall. We recognise that the journey from this development to the existing station at St. Clare's RC Primary School is not particularly easy, and also the electorate at that station is very close to the 2,500 recommended maximum and is likely to reach this number in the near future. We therefore propose to create a new polling district to cover the Stainsby Hall Development. Although it is proposed to build public buildings on this estate in future there are currently none, so a mobile station will be necessary in the short to medium term. We propose to site this at the junction of Jack Simon Way and Jocelyn Way.
36. Overall, this represents a net loss of two fixed and one mobile station from the totals following the 2014 review. The new total would be 67 polling stations on 66 different sites. In Ladgate ward, the station at Easterside Community Hub currently functions as a dual station due to the parliamentary constituency boundary dividing the polling district. Should the current proposed boundary changes be approved this would no longer be necessary, resulting in the loss of a further polling station although the building would still be used as a polling place.

### **Why is this being recommended?**

37. Consultation was carried out as described above. All comments received have been published on the Council's website.

38. No objections or comments have been received with respect to the proposed changes in Brambles and Thorntree, Central, Kader, Marton East and Newport wards.
39. The proposed changes in Trimdon ward are as a direct result of the review and consultation.
40. The proposed change in Hemlington ward has received a positive comment from a ward councillor.
41. The proposed changes in Park End and Beckfield ward have attracted negative comments from all three ward councillors, two residents and the Park End and Beckfield Community Forum. Nevertheless we believe that the proposed changes will not unduly inconvenience electors in either polling district affected whilst representing a saving of approximately £800 per election. We also advise that postal or proxy voting is available to all electors on request.

### **Other decisions and why these have been recommended**

42. Two stations (Europa Building and St. Cuthbert's Church Hall) have been relocated due to feedback from station staff and electors confirming that they were unsuitable for continued use as polling stations.
43. The station at St. Aidan's Meeting Room has been reinstated after being removed at the 2014 review as access to the alternative station has proved difficult from parts of the polling district.
44. Two mobile stations in Brambles and Thorntree and Kader have been removed due to low electorate figures, and ease of access to alternative stations. This is a particular benefit as mobile stations are expensive and a poor working environment for station staff.
45. A new station has been provided to serve a large housing development in Trimdon ward, where access to the existing station would be inconvenient. It is regrettable that this needs to be a mobile station in the short to medium term.
46. Two polling districts in Park End and Beckfield are being combined due to the loss of the buildings housing the existing stations. The replacement polling place is more conveniently located to serve both previous polling districts.

### **Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)**

#### ***Legal***

47. Carrying out and completing this review ensures that the Council meets its obligations under Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

#### ***Financial***

48. In the period until the next review in October 2022 there are three scheduled elections which will affect the whole borough – combined Mayoral / Local / Parish in 2019, combined Tees Valley Mayor and Police and Crime Commissioner in 2020

and Parliamentary in 2022. This does not include any by elections or unscheduled referendums or Parliamentary elections.

49. The cost of providing a station in a public building is approximately £800 per election, and for a mobile station approximately £1600. Therefore the proposed removal of two fixed and one mobile station would save approximately £12,800 over the four year life of this review.

### ***Equality and Diversity***

50. Disability and BAME groups were sent a letter advising of the review and requested to comment. No negative comments were received.

### **Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)**

51. Polling stations for the combined election on 2 May 2019 will be booked during December 2018. Electoral Services will deliver an awareness programme to ensure all electors are familiar with their new polling station. This would include a “find my polling station” postcode lookup on the Council’s website, an article in the Love Middlesbrough magazine and prominent information on the next poll card delivered.

### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – notice published in the Evening Gazette, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018 and list of individuals and groups invited to comment

Appendix 2 – Comments received during consultation

Appendix 3 – Maps showing proposed changes following consultation

Appendix 4 – List of proposed polling places

### **Background papers**

Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

The Electoral Commission Circular EC19/2010

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