

BOROUGH OF KETTERING

Committee	EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE	Item 12	Page 1 of 5
Report Originator	Ian White	<i>Fwd Plan Ref No:</i> A19/006	
Wards Affected	ALL	18 th September 2019	
Title	POLLING PLACE AND POLLING DISTRICT REVIEW		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To receive details of the responses to the above review, and the comments of the Research and Development Committee in relation to the review and comment on them prior to the submission to Council.

2. INFORMATION

- 2.1 Although elections are the personal responsibility of the Returning Officer, the Council needs to formally approve the polling places to be used.
- 2.2 The Polling Place and Polling District Review of the Kettering Borough area commenced in April 2019 and is due to be finalised at the meeting of the Borough Council to be held on 25th September 2019.
- 2.3 As part of the consultation process for the review, members were asked for their comments on the existing situation in relation to polling districts, polling places and polling stations. Reports were submitted to the following meetings of Committees and Forums to facilitate that as follows:

<u>Committee</u>	<u>Date</u>
Research & Development Committee	16 th April 2019
Kettering Town Forum	8 th July 2019
A6 Towns Forum	10 th July 2019
Rural Forum	18 th July 2019

- 2.4 Public notice of the review has been given and a copy of the notice relating to the review and the accompanying documentation was displayed on the Council's website. Letters asking for comments and representations were also sent to:-
- Parish and Town Councils in the Borough
 - Registered Political Parties active in the Borough
 - Local Groups representing people with disabilities
 - Any individual elector who expresses an interest
- 2.5 A further reminder of the review was forwarded to local groups representing people with disabilities as well as local political parties active in the Borough

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The consultation period closed on 31st July and a copy of all responses and feedback received is attached at **Appendix A**.

- 2.6 As part of the review each polling station booking agent was asked to complete a questionnaire concerning the access arrangements into the polling station. There were no significant concerns raised during this process although a visit was made to Pytchley Village Hall to check the ramped access. Inspections were also carried out at Barton Seagrave Village Hall prior to the elections held on 23rd May 2019 and the venue was successfully used as a polling station at that election. Polling station inspectors also visited each polling station during the elections on 23rd May and completed an electronic accessibility questionnaire as part of their visit.

3. FUTURE PROVISION

- 3.1 Kettering Borough continues to grow in terms of the numbers of residential houses and electors. Over the next five year period, it is estimated that there could be up to an additional 4,200 houses built within the Borough. The estimated total for Kettering is 1,675 properties. Although there are many external factors that can affect these figures, it is necessary to plan for the provision of facilities for voters and structures for polling on the basis of these levels of development. This will necessitate reviews of the structure of the Register of Electors in areas of high development, along with a review of the available facilities to ensure they are capable of dealing with increased numbers of voters, and the identification of new facilities where necessary. We must ensure that what is in place for the 2019 elections is also suitable for polls up to 2024 as far as we can control the future location, availability and use of premises for polling purposes. The structure of the Register of Electors will also need to reflect both existing levels of electors and accommodate the increases that will inevitably follow the development and occupation of new housing.
- 3.2 The recommendations to be submitted to Council will seek to ensure that there is a mechanism and strategy in place to enable the Council to plan effectively for the provision of polling places and the structure to support them throughout this period.
- 3.3 Members of the Committee will be requested to consider the content of the responses at **Appendix A** and the draft recommendations at **Appendix B** with a view to their inclusion in the final report to be submitted to Council at the meeting to be held on 25th September 2019. A copy of the current list of polling districts and polling places is also attached at **Appendix C**.

3.4 COMMENTS ON EXISTING PROVISION

Further to Appendix A referred to above, members are requested to note the following:

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- Changes to polling districts can be effected by transferring streets within their Wards, and this will be carried out where necessary and appropriate.
- In relation to Amanda Wilson's comments, the options for polling in Brambleside Ward have previously been explored, however, there is currently no viable alternative building in the area that could be used as a polling station. Public houses are not considered suitable venues for use as polling stations and a mobile unit has previously been used in this ward, however, this type of building does not lend itself particularly well to use as a polling station and the accessibility of these buildings is very limited. In terms of enabling schools to plan their training day to coincide with polling day, letters were posted to polling stations in July of this year confirming the date of the elections in May 2020 and booking the venue.
- With regard to the request from Desborough Town Council to consider the Town Council Offices at the Library Building an inspection of the premises was made on 13th August 2019. Whilst the building met most of the required criteria the space inside the building was a little limited, being only suitable to accommodate one small polling station. The main areas of concern were the accessibility arrangements in terms of managing the flow of electors as they arrive and leave the building. In the event of a high turnout it was felt there was insufficient access space to accommodate a high volume of people. In addition, the close proximity of the building to the existing polling station at St. Giles Church Community Centre may lead to some voter confusion. On balance it was felt the existing arrangements were working well but that the provision of polling facilities in Desborough should be monitored and the building reconsidered if necessary at a future date.
- With regard to the provision of signage at Counties Community Centre and Highfield Barnes Community Centre, there is some doubt as to the feasibility of providing additional signage on the highway, however, arrangements will be made to review the provision of signage at these premises.
- In relation to the provision of voting facilities at Burton Latimer, the increased number of electors arising from the largescale housing development in the area has placed some additional pressure on the existing polling stations. Whilst the polling stations located in the Town, and in particular the Civic Centre, are generally quite busy there have been no reports to suggest that the current arrangements are no longer fit for purpose. Other venues in the Town have previously been considered, however, the only suitable buildings would be the local schools and current policy is to avoid the use of schools where possible.
- In relation to the suggestion that the Mikado Pheasant be considered as a possible venue for polling, it is not current policy to use public houses as

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polling stations as they are generally not suitable for this purpose. The only other alternative venues to the Highfield Barnes Community Centre are Greenfields Primary School and the Highfield Road Children's Centre. Both are located on the same site, however, access is limited due to a barrier at the entrance to the car park. For this reason the Children's Centre ceased being used as a polling station in 2017 when Highfield Barnes Community Centre became available.

- In relation to the possible use of Maplefield Community Centre, a polling station was previously located on this site prior to the school closing in 2012. At the time of writing it is not certain whether polling could take place at the new centre as the weekday opening hours of 9am to 9pm (as stipulated in condition 7 of the recent planning permission) would not meet the legal requirement for a polling station to be open from 7am until 10pm. Further investigation around the suitability of the venue and its availability would need to be undertaken once the building became operational.
- With regards to the use of school buildings as polling stations, the current policy is to avoid the use of these buildings wherever possible. Since the last review, polling stations have been relocated away from Grange Primary Academy, Barton Seagrave Primary School, Rothwell Victoria Infants School and Highfield Road Children's Centre on the Greenfields Primary School site. Should there be no viable alternative building in the polling district, the Returning Officer has actively worked with school staff to enable the school building to remain open where the layout and circumstances permit the safe access of students on polling day.

4. CONSULTATION AND CUSTOMER IMPACT

4.1 The following people were able to make representations or comment in respect of this or any other matter relating to the review:

- Any elector in the Kettering Constituency or within Kettering Borough
- Any person or body with expertise in access for persons with any type of disability

4.2 Persons or bodies making representations were requested, if possible, to identify alternative places that could be used for polling. Comments and representations were received up until the end of July 2019.

5. POLICY AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amends the Representation of the People Act 1983 to make it a legal requirement that

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Returning Officers review the polling districts and polling places within their Council area every five years.

- 5.2 The cost of this review can be met from the allocated electoral services budget for 2019-20.

6. LEGAL AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no identified legal or equality implications

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no identified climate change implications

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 Members of the Executive are requested to consider the content of the responses attached at Appendix A and draft recommendations at Appendix B and comment on them accordingly prior to them being referred to the meeting of the full Council to be held on 25th September 2019.
- 8.2 The (Interim) Head of Democratic and Legal Services be authorised to make a Polling Places Order that incorporates all of the above recommendations by 30th November 2019 at the latest, subject to Council approving them.
- 8.3 Any other unexpected changes in circumstances to polling places and polling districts that occur between 2019 and 2024 shall be dealt with by way of interim reviews as appropriate.

Background Papers :Electoral Commission
Guidance
Title
Date: February 2013
Contact Officer: Ian White (01536) 534200

Previous Minutes/Reports: Various (see table at 2.3 above)
Ref:
Date: