

Delegated Decision

9 April 2021

Review of Polling Districts and Places



Report of Corporate Management Team

Helen Lynch, Head of Legal & Democratic Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Belmont

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To consider a proposed change to the County Council's polling districts and polling places prior to the next scheduled review in order to conduct the elections on 6 May 2021 which are being held during the pandemic.

Executive Summary

- 2 Each Local Authority is required to carry out a review of Polling Districts and Polling Places within its area every 5 years. The County Council completed a review in January 2020. Within that delegated authority was given to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader, and local members as appropriate, to make any changes that may be required before the next review.
- 3 On Thursday 6 May voters in Durham will go to the polls for the County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner, and Parish and Town Council elections. The team have been making preparations to conduct these at a time when Covid-19 continues to present risks to public health, and are encountering many challenges one of which is requiring changes to some of the polling stations to be used for this election.

Recommendation(s)

- 4 The Head of legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader, and local members as appropriate make a change to a polling place for the election on 6 May 2021.

Background

- 5 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the County Council is required to conduct a review of polling districts and polling places within the County Durham every five years.
- 6 The County Council completed a review in January 2020. Within that delegated authority was given to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader, and local members as appropriate, to make any changes that may be required before the next review.
- 7 On Thursday 6 May voters in Durham will go to the polls for the County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner, and Parish and Town Council elections. The team have been making preparations to conduct these at a time when Covid-19 continues to present risks to public health, and are encountering many challenges one of which is requiring changes to some of the polling stations to be used for this election.
- 8 The role of Returning Officer is to ensure that an election is administered effectively and that as a result of voters and those standing for election is a positive one.
- 9 Where a local authority makes any alterations the Electoral Registration Officer who has responsibility for compiling the register of electors, must amend the register of electors accordingly.
- 10 There are 423 polling places and 63 electoral divisions within those districts. A polling place is an area or building within a polling district in which a polling station is situated.
- 11 Further to the 38 changes to polling places made in March there is a further one. This is to Pelaw View Centre, Hilda Avenue, Durham. The building works at the centre are more extensive than initially thought and will not be completed in time for May. The polling station will move to St Joseph's RCVA Primary School, Mill Lane where there will be a combined station. The distance to the alternative is 0.7 miles (google maps via road).
- 12 The time frame to make changes is extremely challenging and the team have sourced as far as possible the next best alternative available.
- 13 Where changes are to be made to polling stations each elector will receive a letter advising of the changes to their polling station, and options as alternatives to voting at a polling station.

Consultation

- 14 Due to the timescales involved in making preparation for the election on 6 May, there has been limited time to undertake consultation. In accordance with the delegated authority granted by full council in January 2020 this has been undertaken with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council as well as local members (as appropriate).

Proposed Changes

- 15 The polling station will move from Pelaw View Centre, Hilda Avenue, Durham to St Joseph's RCVA Primary School, Mill Lane for the election on 6 May 2021.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The legislative requirements for a Polling District and Places review are set out in the report.

Finance

The proposals do not have any impact on the existing financial arrangements.

Consultation

As set out in the report.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The council ensures it has made every attempt that each polling stations is accessible to electors who are disabled and considers these arrangements when proposing any new or alternative arrangements.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

The review helps ensure that electors within County Durham have an opportunity to contribute to the review and maximum opportunity to exercise their democratic right to vote.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

The use of schools as polling stations is avoided as far as possible. This is more challenging where public buildings are no longer available or are not accessible venues. Returning Officers may use free of charge for the purpose of taking the poll or counting the votes, a room the expense of maintaining which is payable out of any rate. Wherever possible officers work with schools to utilise community rooms which allow the school to remain open, in some cases however this is not possible.

Risk

If electors are not provided with suitable convenient places to vote it could possibly give rise to corporate criticism and adverse publicity

Procurement

None.