

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

Report of the Returning Officer

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

Summary:

- 1.1 To seek the Scrutiny Committee's views on proposed polling arrangements for Stockport in order to inform the Council meeting's determination of polling districts, polling places and polling stations for forthcoming elections.

Information:

- 2.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires the Council to undertake regular reviews of all polling districts and polling places in its area. The Act provides that the next review must be held between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020. Subsequent reviews must be every five years within a sixteen month period beginning with 1 October 2023.
- 2.2 Given the timetable of electoral registration and election activity during 2018 and 2019 the review is being undertaken at the earliest opportunity. This will allow any changes to be included within the electoral register to be published on 1 February 2019 and brought into effect for the local elections in May 2019.
- 2.3 The responsibility for designating polling districts is for the council to determine. In drawing up polling district boundaries the Council must ensure that all electors in the area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 2.4 The Council must also designate a polling place for every polling district. This is usually within the boundary of the polling district unless there are special circumstances eg lack of suitable buildings.
- 2.5 In designating polling places, the Council must:
 - 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. There should be no barriers to voting for people with a disability. Access issues identified by SCOPE and Disability Stockport will be considered as part of the review. The review will include recommendations where applicable as requested in the motion passed at the Council meeting on 18th January 2018 and will be referred to in the findings.

- 2.6 The polling station is the actual area where the voting takes place ie the room or area where electors cast their vote. The Returning Officer is responsible for designating the polling station which must be within the polling place agreed by the Council.
- 2.7 Public notice of the review was given on 1 October and information about the review was published on the Council's website on 1 October 2018. All members, MPs and MEPs were also informed of the review and invited to submit comments and representations. The Acting Returning Officer for the Denton & Reddish parliamentary constituency was invited to submit comments in respect of polling stations within the Stockport wards within that constituency. The views of Area Committee on the current polling arrangements were sought at their meetings in November. Comments were requested by 9 November 2018.
- 2.8 Having received comments and representations on the current polling arrangements, the Returning Officer has published proposals for polling districts and polling places for future elections. The proposed arrangements will be considered by Area Committees at their meetings in December and at the Cabinet on 18 December which will make recommendations to the Council Meeting on 17 January 2019.
- 2.9 A number of principles have been followed in determining the identification of suitable buildings for use as polling places. These include:
- Location and accessibility to electors within the polling district
 - Size – can it accommodate more than one polling station if required
 - Accessibility – is the building accessible to all those entitled to vote at the polling station
 - Availability – is the building readily available in the event of an unscheduled election.
 - Facilities available in the venue including parking, heating, lighting, toilet facilities and security
 - Public buildings -the election rules allow the Returning Officer the free use of buildings maintained by the council including schools maintained by the authority and free schools. These will be identified in the first instance.
 - Private buildings – in the absence of suitable public owned buildings, churches, clubs and other private sector buildings conveniently located and accessible to electors are considered for designation as the polling place
 - Mobiles – in the absence of any suitable public or private building in or adjacent to the polling district a mobile will be considered for designation as a polling place. Given the difficulties of heating, lighting, security, comfort of staff and electors, the negative reaction from residents living close to the site of a mobile and the significantly higher cost of locating a mobile polling station, these are considered only as a last resort.
 - The potential impact on election turnout of moving the polling station to a different location.
- 2.10 The attached schedule sets out details of the proposed polling districts and polling places including the total electorate at November 2018 and the number of electors that are eligible to vote in person at each polling station ie excluding postal voters.

Recommendation:

- 3.1 The views of the Scrutiny Committee are sought on the proposed polling arrangements. Any comments or suggestions will then be reported to the Cabinet on 18 December 2018 and taken into consideration in making recommendations to the Council meeting on 17 January 2019.

Background papers:

There are none.

Anyone wishing to discuss the report or examine the background papers should contact Caroline Cooke or Gulderen Harwood on 0161 474 3268 or email caroline.e.cooke@stockport.gov.uk