

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:-</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Management Board</b>
2.	<b>Date:-</b>	<b>9 September 2011</b>
3.	<b>Title:-</b>	<b>Review of Polling Places 2011 – all wards affected</b>
4.	<b>Directorate:-</b>	<b>Chief Executive's</b>

### 5. Summary

To report the findings of the review of parliamentary polling districts and polling places as required under The Electoral Administration Act 2006 before presentation to Cabinet on 5 October 2011.

### 6. Recommendations

- **That the Board approves the Returning Officer's proposals for future polling arrangements so that a report can be provided to Cabinet on 5 October 2011**

## **7. Proposals and Details**

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires that a full review of polling arrangements be completed every four years. The last was completed in December 2007 and the current review commenced on 22 June 2011 and must conclude by 1 December 2011.

The review has been conducted under the Terms of Reference at appendix 1 which were published along with the statutory Notice of Review on 22 June 2011.

Stakeholders, including elected members, MPs, political parties, parish councils, community groups and electors were offered an opportunity to make representations. Details are at appendix 2.

The Electoral Services team has considered polling arrangements throughout the borough and has taken account of the representations received during the review which are at appendix 3. The Facilities Management team has been involved in the review and Building Managers have provided expertise on accessibility issues and specific knowledge of many of the current and potential polling venues.

Every venue has been evaluated against issues of accessibility, voter convenience, fairness and availability for polling (including at short notice). It should be noted that the outcome of the RMBC Property Rationalisation Savings and Localities Review may affect the future availability of some venues.

The Returning Officer's proposals for future polling arrangements are at appendix 4

## **8. Finance**

Additional costs are not significant and will be met from the existing election budget.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

Inadequate provision of polling places and polling stations could have a detrimental affect on voter turnout and could be the source of an election challenge.

There must be a sufficient number of suitable polling stations to allow the Returning Officer to allocate a reasonable number of voters to each. The Electoral Commission's report on queues in some areas at the 2010 elections concluded that in part the problems were as a result of a reduction in polling stations so that too many voters were allocated to each. There will be more combination of polls at future elections which increases the risk of queues where provision is inadequate.

The polling place review has highlighted an emerging risk to the adequate provision of polling venues. The current financial climate is forcing the council to continually review its property assets and council premises currently used or potentially suitable for polling may become unavailable. There are few suitable privately owned buildings and private premises always carry the risk that use for polling is not guaranteed and may be refused,

sometimes at short notice. There may be a change of ownership or policy or an alternative booking may be preferred.

It is likely that more schools will be required as polling places in the future if sufficient provision is to be assured.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

Provision of reasonably convenient polling arrangements is a statutory requirement and contributes to delivery of the council's objectives of fairness, equality and community cohesion. Such provision is an essential element of the free and fair elections required under Protocol 1, Article 3 of the Human Rights Act.

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

Electoral Administration Act 2006

The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections)

Regulations 2006

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