

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

|    |                      |                                                           |
|----|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | <b>Meeting:-</b>     | <b>Cabinet</b>                                            |
| 2. | <b>Date:-</b>        | <b>19 October 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

The report describes the review of parliamentary polling districts and polling places which is required under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and final proposals for future polling arrangements.

### 6. Recommendations

- **That the proposals outlined in the report be approved**
- **That the final recommendations and statutory notice be published**
- **That voters affected by the changes are notified directly on conclusion of the review**
- **That the requirements for each venue and details of known future election dates are confirmed directly with owners/leaseholders on conclusion of the review**

## 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. The suggested timetable in the terms of reference has been amended because the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 5 October was cancelled but the statutory timeframe means that it is important that the remaining target dates are achieved.

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 were reported to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 9 September 2011. The Board resolved that the proposals be supported, and a report be submitted to Cabinet. However, there are two revisions to the proposals as originally submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

- A proposal to cease using Manor Farm Community Centre is withdrawn. Concern was expressed about this proposal by some members of the Board and the matter was referred back to RMBC's Facilities Manager. He subsequently met with the leaseholders and has agreed to work with them to ensure that they meet the necessary statutory requirements to ensure that the building operates safely.
- The proposal to revise boundaries in Maltby around the Charles Foster Community Centre is amended so that only voters from the current Maltby Wood (IE) polling district are allocated to this new venue. On detailed analysis, it seems unlikely to provide more convenient facilities for electors currently within Queens (IF) polling district.

Appendix 4 sets out the result of the review and the Returning Officer's final recommendations for polling arrangements across the borough and proposes a total of 163 polling stations across 128 venues to serve the electorate of 193,000 – an average of 1184 voters per polling station.

Appendix 5 describes the changes that are recommended: 8 additional venues, 4 changes in venue and 3 minor changes at current venues (change of room or of voter allocations).

Appendix 6 contains a map and property allocations for each proposed revision to polling district boundaries.

## **8. Finance**

There will be additional costs associated with eight additional polling places but these are not significant and should be weighed against the statutory requirement to provide adequate polling provision.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

The timescale for the review is tight; there is a statutory requirement that it be concluded by 1 December 2011. It is the Electoral Registration Officer's duty to make alterations to the registers of electors to reflect any changes in polling districts. If this is not done in time to be incorporated in the revised register published on 1 December it will have implications for the supply of registers to organisations and political parties and the planning of the elections to be held in May 2012.

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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