



## **Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2011 16 November 2011**

### **Report of the Chief Executive**

#### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To enable Council to consider the outcome of the review of polling districts and polling places in the Parliamentary Constituencies of Morecambe and Lunesdale and Lancaster and Fleetwood and to consider whether it wishes to make any changes in the light of the review.

**This report is public.**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

- (1) Council is asked to consider whether it wishes to make any changes to polling districts or polling places in the light of the responses received during the review, and to give reasons for its decision.
- (2) Council is asked to authorise the publication of the prescribed statutory information about the outcome of the review.
- (3) That delegated authority be given to the Returning Officer in consultation with the relevant ward Councillors, to make any necessary changes to polling places that may arise other than as part of a review.

#### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide the District into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. It has to keep these arrangements under review.
- 1.2 Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a number of changes to the 1983 Act in respect of the way reviews must be undertaken.
- 1.3 In compliance with the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, every Council in England and Wales must have undertaken and completed a review of all the polling districts and polling places in its area by 31st December 2011, completing a further review every four years.
- 1.4 The Council may undertake reviews of all or some of the polling districts or polling places at any time but must still undertake a full review of each within four years of the previous review.

- 1.5 For administrative convenience it is sensible to review all polling districts and polling places on a regular four yearly cycle, regardless of whether or not a particular polling district or place has been reviewed for some reason (eg because of an influx of electors in an area or non availability of a building designated as a polling place) in the intervening period. This will help to ensure a consistent approach is taken across the district.
- 1.6 The arrangements made for parliamentary elections are also used at other elections.
- 1.7 The Council has powers to change polling places and polling district boundaries, but not Ward or Parish boundaries. These are defined as follows:
- ◆ **A Polling District** is the geographical sub division of an electoral ward. The Council is responsible for dividing its areas into polling districts for UK Parliamentary elections and for keeping districts under review.  
When designating polling districts, the Council must seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances.
  - ◆ **A Polling Place** is the building in which a polling station is located.
  - ◆ **A Polling Station** is the actual area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located in the polling place designated for the particular voting district.
- 1.8 The Council must
- a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances;
  - b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practical the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those that are disabled and when considering designation of a polling place must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

## **2.0 Proposal Details**

- 2.1 A check of each of the existing polling stations was completed by the Presiding Officer on duty at the elections held in May 2011 and also by the booking contact for each of the premises. It should be noted that in some cases access at a polling station is not as would be desired in an ideal world. Where there are steps or other access issues, electoral and polling station staff would always do whatever is reasonable to ensure voters, including those with disabilities, are able to access the polling station and cast their vote.
- 2.2 Since the last review undertaken in the Lancaster City Council area in 2007 there has been a substantial increase in the number of electors choosing to vote by post. There are currently just under 15000 postal voters, approximately 13% of the electorate and this reduces the number of electors that opt to vote in person at polling stations.
- 2.3 The 2007 review also saw the removal of all mobile units, but in some cases this saw the location of a polling place outside the polling district to

which it applied.

- 2.4 During the course of the review existing polling places have been examined, consideration being given to public safety, the availability of buildings, accessibility, location in relation to the centres of population in the polling district, transport links and overall suitability for both staff and electors. Consideration has also been given to the consultation responses set out below. Officers are not recommending any changes as a result of the review, as the boundaries of polling districts are deemed to be satisfactory, and the existing polling places are considered the best available..

### **3.0 Details of Consultation**

- 3.1 The Council was required to publish notice of the holding of the review. This has been done by way of press release which was published in the Morecambe Visitor and the Lancaster Guardian. Notices were also posted at Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls and on the Council's Website with full details of the proposals.
- 3.2 Comments were invited via email and in writing from the public, Ward Councillors, County Councillors, MP's and Parish Councils. The Council also consulted a number of disability groups. A summary of the comments received is detailed below, full comments if required can be provided by the Elections Manager.

### **4.0 Results of Consultation**

Ward	Comment	Response
University	Boundary issue relating to the inclusion of part of the University Campus into Ellel Ward.	Can only be resolved by a Ward boundary review and has already been flagged up to be dealt with at such time as the review is undertaken.
Heysham South Ward	Two polling stations are located within the Ward. Both stations are located south of the ward and relatively close together. The suggestion has been made to move one of the Stations to Heysham Library and retain one in the south of the ward, or find one to the east of Middleton/Heysham Road and one to the west to save electors having to navigate busy roads. However, there are no reported difficulties so not concerned if the current arrangements were to continue.	The polling district is divided from west to east, rather than following a north south divide. The suggestion of relocating one of the stations to the north of the polling district at the library could be further considered if Council wished it to be looked at further.

<p>Skerton East</p>	<p>Would like attempts to be made to increase the postal vote take up – particularly in Skerton East. Would like to split the electorate of SKEC along a natural boundary on Mount Avenue allowing the electors to follow the natural hill line to vote at the polling stations at Skerton Community Centre and Halton Road Scout Hut. The current arrangement was put in place as part of the 2007 review and this request would revert to the arrangements in place prior to that time.</p>	<p>Every elector has the opportunity to apply for a postal vote so there are no plans to specifically target any area to increase postal vote applications.</p>
<p>Ellel</p>	<p>No difficulties at present but wanted to inform the Council that a new Village Hall is currently under construction which would make an ideal polling station for the future.</p>	<p>The Village Hall will be inspected when complete and a decision taken at that time as to its suitability for use as a polling station.</p>
<p>John O'Gaunt</p>	<p>A change was made in 2011 for the residents of Standen Park with the creation of a new Polling Station at Christ Church Hall. Suggested the use of a bus, van, caravan or tent to allow voters from Standen Park to vote closer to their homes.</p>	<p>There are no suitable buildings in the immediate area of Standen Park and the use of Christ Church Hall received no complaints from voters using that station. None of the suggestions made would provide adequate facilities for polling station staff or electors, and would not allow electors the privacy to which they are entitled to cast their vote. It is therefore proposed to continue to use Christ Church Hall until suitable premises can be found in the Standen Park area.</p>

Castle	Electors from Castle Park cast their vote at Lancaster Boys and Girls Club. In doing this, they pass a polling station at the Friends Meeting House and want to be included to vote at that station.	The electors of CASA report to the Lancaster Boys and Girls Club to cast their vote and the premises are located within the polling district boundaries of CASA. The Friends Meeting House, which is also located within CASA, actually serves the electorate of CASB. Until 2007, the polling station for CASB was a mobile station located at Westbourne Place but the review at that time agreed to remove all mobile polling station units from the Lancaster district and an alternative had to be found. Despite extensive searches within CASB, suitable alternative premises could not be found. The Friends Meeting House is just outside the boundary of the CASB polling district but provides an accessible polling station with adequate facilities for electors and polling station staff and is a prime example of where polling stations cannot always be located within their own polling district.
Kellet	Happy with current arrangements.	No changes are proposed.
Carnforth	The Town Council has no issue with the current arrangements but had experienced some difficulties with the layout of the polling station at Crag Bank where there was confusion about the division between Bolton-le-Sands and Carnforth Wards. The Town Council were surprised that large distinctive signs had not been provided.	There are many instances where more than one polling station is located within one polling place. Further guidance will be given to the staff to be located at this station in an attempt to make the voting process much simpler for the electors.

<p>Morecambe Town Council Wards</p>	<p>General concern that polling place provisions were not acceptable and a request has been made that the Council works to ensure that polling stations are not situated between dangerous roads and are accessible to all.</p> <p>The Ramp at Lancaster Road School polling station is not acceptable and access to the station was not as it should have been.</p> <p>The Morecambe Library polling station was moved after the library closed which was not acceptable.</p> <p>No consultation took place with regard to the removal of one of the polling stations within the Westgate Ward.</p>	<p>Without specific details of polling stations deemed to be located between dangerous roads it is difficult to consider any amendments.</p> <p>The ramp at Lancaster Road School has provided difficulties for a couple of years and despite efforts to raise the ramp for the 2011 elections there was still a step into the polling station. Tentative enquiries are being made with the Sainsbury Store located close to the School with a view to using this as a polling place. If this fails, the Council will have to investigate a solution to the issue at the school which may require a specialised ramp being made specifically for use at that location.</p> <p>The Morecambe Library Polling Station was not moved, but the entrance door to the polling station was changed once the Library closed for business. No complaints were received in 2011.</p> <p>The 2007 review saw the removal of the mobile polling station at Westgate along with all other mobile stations in the district. The same polling stations have been used in that Ward in 2009, 2010 and 2011.</p>
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## 5.0 Options

- 5.1 The options open to Council are to accept the recommendation of officers that no changes be made to polling district boundaries or the location of polling places, or to decide to make changes in the light of the consultation responses above. The Council is required by the relevant Regulations to give reasons for its decision on the review.

## 6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 On completion of the Review the Council is required to publish details of the actual designations of polling districts and polling places agreed as a result

of the review and details of where the results of the review have been published. This will be done by way of press release and details of the agreed proposals will be available at the Customer Service Centres in Lancaster and Morecambe and will also be published on the Council's website.

- 6.2 The new electoral register containing any revised polling districts will be published on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011. Any new polling districts and polling places would become effective at all elections held after this date. For the first election held after any changes are made, poll cards would include reference to the fact that some polling places have changed and that electors should check that they know where they should attend.
- 6.3 The Electoral Commission has no initial role in the review process, however under Section 18D(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 the Commission must consider representations or observation made to them that the Council has not conducted the Review correctly. The Commission may direct a local authority to make alterations it sees necessary following consideration of those representation observations and the Council must make the directed alteration within two months of receipt.

#### **CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)**

None.

#### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide the District into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. It has to keep these arrangements under review.

Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a number of changes to the 1983 Act in respect of the way reviews must be undertaken.

In compliance with the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, every Council in England and Wales must have undertaken and completed a review of all the polling districts and polling places in its area by 31st December 2011, completing a further review every four years. On completion of a review the authority must give reasons for its decisions in the review, and publish such other information as is prescribed.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Dependant on the outcome of the review there may be some costs if a specialised ramp has to be made for Lancaster Road School.

Although the exact cost cannot be determined until such time as quotes for the specific item were obtained it is expected that this would be minimal and would be met from within the Elections Budget.

**OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS****Human Resources:**

None.

**Information Services:**

None.

**Property:**

None.

**Open Spaces:**

None.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments to add.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Representations from Councillors, Parish Councils and other interested parties.

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