

COUNCIL

13TH DECEMBER 2011

REPORT OF THE ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

TAMWORTH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY - REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES

EXEMPT INFORMATION

None

PURPOSE

To inform Members of the comments received from the recent consultation in respect of the review of polling districts and polling places undertaken in accordance with the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and to make recommendations relating to polling places within the Parliamentary Constituency that fall within the Borough of Tamworth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council

1. Consider the results from the review process and endorse the officer recommendations and reasons for said actions;
2. Publish such information as prescribed in compliance with the legislation and;
3. where required make appropriate recommendations for consideration by Budget Review Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA 2006) introduced a duty upon all local authorities to review their parliamentary polling districts and polling places at least once in every four year period. The first such review was completed for the Tamworth Constituency at the end of 2007.

Local Authorities are required to divide every constituency into polling districts for the purpose of Parliamentary elections and to designate a polling place for each polling district. Polling places should be within the polling district unless special circumstances make it necessary to designate an area outside this.

The consultation period began on Monday 1st August and ran for a period of 10 weeks. Notices were placed on the council's website, council offices and library along with press releases in the Tamworth Herald and Lichfield Mercury inviting electors to submit comments. Potentially interested organisations were written to along with local political parties. **Appendix A** outlines the organisations contacted.

Appendix B details all of the polling places within the parliamentary constituency that have been consulted upon.

We received a total of 131 submissions. These are detailed in **Appendix C**. Submissions have been received regarding the polling places in the following polling districts:

- TK (Castle Ward) – 8 responses
- TL (Castle Ward) – 40 responses

- TN (Castle Ward) – 1 response
- TQ (Bolehall Ward) – 1 response
- TW (Glascote Ward) - 46 responses
- TZ & TAA (Glascote Ward) – 3 responses
- TGG (Trinity Ward) - 3 responses
- TII (Trinity Ward) – 4 responses
- TLL (Wilnecote Ward) – 6 responses
- TPP (Wilnecote Ward) – 3 responses
- TRR (Stonydelph Ward) – 13 responses
- TUU (Stonydelph Ward) – 3 responses

A review of the responses has been undertaken, these are then summarised at **Appendix D**. Key issues raised are:

- Polling Station not central in polling district.
- Polling station should be within walking distance.
- Vehicular access to polling place and parking.
- Would prefer to be in neighbouring ward - property is on the border and electors have more in common.

Of the responses identified in **Appendix D** the majority are satisfied with their polling places, particularly in TX, Glascote Ward, where no material issues were raised. A number of proforma letters were received from the following polling districts with Temporary Stations – The Green (TL) and St Martin in the Delph (TRR). These identified a request for alternative temporary stations as detailed in **Appendix D**.

Officers, where appropriate, have commented on the responses received and proposed actions - these are included in **Appendix D**.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

A number of submissions have been received requesting the use of temporary stations. The Electoral Commission (EC) recommends that these are only used as an absolute final measure. Ideally, the EC would like to see no temporary stations used. This of course is an impossible feat. In a perfect world all polling districts would have an ideally situated building. In reality this is not the case. Therefore, it is best to use the buildings that we have available. These may be slightly off the centre of the polling district but will offer better facilities for electors and staff alike. They are also more cost effective. Currently, we have three temporary polling stations (TL - Milo Ave/Sutton Ave, TJ - Buckingham Road and TGG - Dorado). The average cost for each of these stations is £1,500 each.

The potential financial impact against each polling district is identified in Appendix D. Any additional use of temporary polling stations is dependent upon such recommendations being adopted and will require a submission for Budget Review Group consultation.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

Perhaps the most fundamental point to make here is that there is no such thing within the Borough or possibly the country as a purpose built polling station. Secondly, none are owned by the Returning Officer but are instead hired for the day of poll. The premises that are used within the Borough range from church halls, schools to community centres and finally temporary stations. It is important to remember the elector when selecting suitable premises for such a use. This can at times cause a conflict between what premises are available and providing a fully accessible polling station that is convenient to use.

The Representation of the People Act 1983 places an obligation on local authorities, so far as reasonable and practicable, to designate polling places that are accessible to disabled people and keep them under review. If the authority was to move away from a perfectly accessible building in favour of a temporary station so that the location is slightly more convenient it could open the door for a claim regarding disability discrimination. Also, the

generators that the temporary stations use tend to be loud and can cause difficulties for those that are hard of hearing as well as being unpleasant for polling staff. It is important to remember that despite the growth in absent voting the majority of electors (86%) still choose to attend their local polling station.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Have been considered as part of the officer determinations. The review has also considered disability and equality legislation on arriving at our conclusion and recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS

The current scheme has been in place since the last review in 2007. The majority of electors are happy with the location and suitability of their polling place and station. It is important to remember that at the last elections held in May 2011 no complaints were received regarding the locations and accessibility to the polling places used. It is not tenable financially or from an accessibility point of view to move to temporary stations when a perfectly suitable building is currently being used within or close to the polling district. In fact, it is the EC view that the use of temporary stations should be avoided if at all possible.

Some of the issues that have been raised by the submissions can only be solved by a local boundary review. In the near future the Local Boundary Commission is looking to begin consultations in this area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In accordance with the requirements of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 a review of polling station arrangements in the Tamworth Constituency has been undertaken.

REPORT AUTHOR

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Electoral Administration Act 2006
Electoral Commission Circular - Guidance for EC19/2010
(http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/100851/EC192010-Polling-district-reviews.pdf)
Electoral Administration Act 2006 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/22/section/16>)

APPENDICES

Appendix A – List of Consultees including letter and draft scheme.

Appendix B – List of Parliamentary Polling Stations with the Borough of Tamworth.

Appendix C – Detail of Submissions received from Electors, Consultees and other Stakeholders.

Appendix D – Summary of Comments and Proposed Actions

All responses have been received from the local Tamworth Constituency; a map detailing the polling places will be available in the Members room up until 12 December 2011 for perusal.