

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE: 4 JULY 2007

REPORT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER **(Author: I. Vargeson)**

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Summary: To consider arrangements to meet the new requirement to undertake an initial review of polling districts and polling places by 31st December 2007.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a requirement for local authorities to undertake a complete review of all polling districts and polling places within their areas by 31st December. Authorities must then complete further reviews every four years.
- 1.2 A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a Parliamentary Constituency, a European Parliamentary Region, a Ward or an Electoral Division.
- 1.3 A polling place is a geographical area where a polling station is located. The term "polling place" has no legal definition and could be defined as tightly as a particular building, or widely as the entire polling district.
- 1.4 At present there are 100 polling districts in Breckland. When all polling stations are in use, 144 buildings are presently required.
- 1.5 Because of the detailed nature of the review, the Committee may wish to consider appointing a working group to carry out the task and report back. Although the first review must take place by 31st December, it is being recommended that any changes should be introduced in line with the annual publication of the Register of Electors on 1st December.

2. KEY DECISION

- 2.1 This is not a key decision.

3. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The matters raised in this report fall within the following Council priorities:-
 - A safe and healthy environment
 - A well planned place to live which encourages vibrant communities

The review will, where possible, improve opportunities and facilities for voting.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In carrying out the review, the Council must seek to ensure that:
 - All electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as practicable in the circumstances.
 - So far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled and when considering the designation of a polling place regard must be had to accessibility.

- 4.2 The polling place must be within the area of the polling district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate somewhere else. It must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the polling district how they will be able to reach their designated station.
- 4.3 A good deal of background information will be necessary, such as:
- Figures
 - Details of existing polling places and suitability
 - Details of potential alternative locations
 - Maps
 - A projection of the likely influx of electors in areas where significant development is proposed.
- 4.4 Before holding a review, the authority must publish a notice of its intention to do so. Any elector may be given the opportunity to make representations on the designation of polling place and the authority may identify persons who it feels has particular expertise in accessibility issues. The authority must consult the Returning Officers for Parliamentary Constituencies and publish their representations.

5. ADMINISTRATION OF THE REVIEW

- 5.1 A decision needs to be taken on how the authority wishes to consider representations made and ultimately designate the polling districts and polling places within its area. Guidance from the Association of Election Administrators suggests that the detailed work is delegated to a cross-party sub-committee or similar body which can then report formally prior to designation coming into effect. On completion of the review, the authority must give reasons for its decisions and must also publish:
- All correspondence sent to a Returning Officer in connection with the review, or to persons considered to have particular expertise in relation to access
 - All representations made by any person
 - The minutes of any meetings when details of the review have been considered
 - Details of the designations agreed
 - Details of where the results of the review have been published.
- 5.2 Should the Committee decide to proceed in this way, details of existing arrangements and criteria to be adopted in considering any changes will be provided to that body. Although guidance on access criteria is quite detailed, in practice the authority may find (as it does at present) that in some areas choices are restricted.

6. OPTIONS AVAILABLE

- 6.1 The authority is obliged to carry out the review and the options available to the Committee are:
1. To carry out the review itself
 2. To appoint a working group to carry out the review and report back.

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 6.1 Because the review will involve going into some detail and of necessity involve meeting at shorter frequencies than normal, over a period of a few months, in practice the task is best undertaken by a small group. The principles agreed would feed back through the Committee and, ultimately to full Council. Working papers would be available to all Members.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To appoint a working group to carry out the review of polling places, polling districts and access arrangements in accordance with Section 18 C(i) of the Representation of the People Act 1983.
- 7.2 To appoint Members to the working group.