



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: Governance and Resources

Date of Meeting: 13 December 2010

Public

Key Decision: No

Recorded in Forward Plan:

No

Inside Policy Framework

Title: REVIEW OF POLLING ARRANGEMENTS

Report of: Assistant Director (Governance)

Report reference: GD.65/10

Summary:

This Report presents the results of the annual review of polling arrangements and makes recommendations as appropriate. Responsibility for designating polling places lies with the full Council. This Report is presented to the Executive for information before submission to the Council meeting on 11 January 2011.

Recommendations:

(See over)

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Recommendations:-

It is recommended to Council that:

- (1) that Officers continue to monitor the use of portable cabins as polling stations and continue to investigate potential alternatives. It be further recommended that Officers discuss with the supplier the use of self contained units and improved units with a wider door as detailed in paragraph 17 at a number of polling station locations where portable cabins are used it being noted that the costs of using these improved models as a means of accommodating disabled access would require additional funding to be voted to the Election Management Budget. (paragraph 19);
- (2) the polling arrangements in all other wards remain unchanged (paragraph 23);
- (3) the Portable Cabin on the east side of Kingstown Road located in the car park of the Gosling Bridge continue to be the polling place for districts AE, BF and PBK (paragraph 24);
- (4) the St Michael's Parish Centre continue to be the polling place for districts BB, BC and BE but officers monitor the possible future use of the Stanwix Community Building (paragraph 25);
- (5) the West End Temperance Hall in Caldewgate continue to be designated as the polling place for district JB and officers discuss with the leaseholders the possibility of siting a polling station notice outside the premises prior to polling day (paragraph 28);
- (6) that the portable cabin at Borrowdale Road continue to be used as the polling station for district KD. (paragraph 29);
- (7) the Returning Officer be given authority, after consultation with relevant Ward Councillors and the Portfolio Holder, to change polling place locations at the elections in 2011 if the usual premises prove to be unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances (paragraph 30).

Reasons for Recommendations

To carry out a review of the Councils polling arrangements

Implications

- Staffing / Resources - None
- Financial - None
- Legal - None
- Corporate - None
- Risk Management - None
- Environmental - None
- Crime and Disorder - None
- Impact on Customers - Review of polling facilities
- Equality and Diversity - See below

Impact assessments

Does the change have an impact on the following?

Equality Impact Screening	Impact Yes/No?	Is the impact positive or negative?
Does the policy/service impact on the following?		
Age	No	
Disability	Yes	Positive
Race	No	
Gender/ Transgender	No	
Sexual Orientation	No	
Religion or belief	No	
Human Rights	No	
Health inequalities	No	
Rurality	No	

If you consider there is either no impact or no negative impact, please give reasons:

The Council is reviewing findings from Election 2010, to improve polling arrangements. This information triggers a review of EqIA 9: Governance.

If an equality Impact is necessary, please contact the P&P team.

Introduction

- 1 The Council has a statutory duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide its area into polling districts, to designate a polling place for each district and to keep both polling districts and polling places under review. The Directorate's work plan provides for an annual polling review to be carried out.
- 2 For the purposes of the current review, all City Councillors have been consulted on the polling arrangements in their particular wards. In addition to City Councillors all Agents acting for Candidates in the May elections were also consulted. The feedback from the inspections of polling stations in the Carlisle Parliamentary constituency carried out by members of the Senior Management Team has also been used to inform this review. The current polling places and the electorate for those polling places are listed in the Appendix and these have been reviewed in the light of any representations received. Any changes to polling places which are agreed by the City Council will be implemented at the City Council elections and the likely referendum on the Alternative Vote scheduled to be held on 5th May 2011.

Statutory Provisions

- 3 In exercising its duty to keep polling districts and places under review, the 1983 Act requires Councils to seek to ensure that all electors have "*such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances*". Each parish should be a separate polling district. 'Polling place' is not defined in the Act but it refers to the building or area in which the polling station is situated.
- 4 The Act also says that a Council must "*seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled*". The effect of this requirement is that a building should not be designated as a polling place if the only means of access to any polling station situated in it would be by means of steps, when another more suitable building is available in the polling district. However, a building would not be a more suitable polling place if it is so far away from most of the electors in the area as to be inconvenient for them to reach it.
- 5 With the exception of portable cabins, the majority of polling places are accessible to disabled voters and where there have been particular difficulties, temporary access ramps have been installed. Polling compartments specifically designed for voters in wheelchairs have also been provided. In addition, any disabled voter can be assisted by the Presiding Officer in the polling station or may be helped by a companion. Large versions of ballot papers are displayed in every polling station and devices are provided to assist blind or partially sighted voters cast their own vote. Voters may also elect to cast their vote by post if they feel that this would be more convenient than attending a polling station.

Free use of rooms

- 6 In addition to free use of school premises, described in paragraph 21 below, any room the expense of which is payable out of any rate may also be used free of charge. This applies to a room in a local authority building e.g. a Community Centre.

Duties of Returning Officer

- 7 It is the responsibility of the Returning Officer to provide sufficient polling stations within each polling place and to allot electors to the stations as he thinks most convenient. One or more polling stations may be provided in the same room. The Returning Officer also has a duty to appoint the polling staff and provide the necessary equipment.

Review Criteria

- 8 Apart from those outlined above, there are no specific statutory criteria for determining the suitability of premises for election purposes or even the number of polling stations to be provided for a given electorate. At previous reviews, however, the following factors have been taken into account:
 - the convenience of the location within the polling district for the majority of electors including potential barriers such as major roads, rivers and railway lines
 - internal size and layout of the premises having regard to the number of voters allotted to the polling station(s)
 - lighting and heating
 - extent of parking provision
 - proximity to public transport
 - cost (where there is a choice between similar premises)
- 9 The suitability of polling places are considered according to these criteria, taking account of the availability of alternative premises. An electorate of about 1000 - 1200 is a manageable number per polling station at a parliamentary election but the number of voters to be allocated to any particular polling place will have regard to the distribution and density of households within the Ward concerned. The continuing rise in the number of electors who vote by post (currently around 15% of the City's electorate) means that the total number of electors allocated to individual polling stations can also be increased because a decreasing proportion are voting in person.

Election 2010

- 10 Members will recall the coverage in the National Media of the elections held on 6 May 2010 relating to problems with voting at polling stations in some areas of the country. The problems related to queues forming at stations and voters being unable to vote before the close of poll at 10pm. The size of the electorate assigned to individual polling stations and the number of staff allocated to stations were cited as contributory factors to the problems which arose.
- 11 In some of the polling stations where problems occurred the electorate entitled to vote at those stations was in excess of 4000 voters. In the Carlisle area the stations at Yewdale Community Centre and at the St. Michael's Parish Centre have the most electors allocated. These stations have just over 2330 voters allocated. Both are double polling stations with 2 teams of staff on duty at the stations. In Carlisle there were no incidents of voters queuing and being unable to cast their votes at 10pm and whilst there is the possibility of changes being introduced nationally as a result of the above events the current split for the allocation of the electorate to polling stations in the Carlisle area is felt to be appropriate. Officers will also study any reports that are produced relating to the problems which arose at the last election and will take on board any recommendations or suggestions for improvement.
- 12 Prior to the above election a survey was carried out nationally by Scope which found that nationally 67% of polling stations had one or more access barriers for disabled people. Members were asked to consider the issue of disabled access to polling stations in their ward as part of this years review. The Access Group have been previously consulted on the matter and the Council's Access Officer was consulted on this years review and has made a number of comments regarding portable cabins. With regard to other buildings used as polling stations, the Access Officer has agreed to review and advise on any locations which are highlighted as having problems with access for disabled voters. Members will, however, be aware that many of the polling stations used by the Council, particularly community buildings, have benefitted from improvements in recent years and these have provided improved access arrangements for the disabled. The Electoral Services Section have not received any request from disabled people for changes to access arrangements to polling stations. There are still however access difficulties with stations where portable cabins are used. The issue of portable cabins is explored elsewhere in this report.
- 13 As mentioned previously Members of the Senior Management Team carried out inspections of all polling stations used in the Carlisle Constituency for the 2010 election against a checklist which included access issues based on the Scope survey. The inspection raised several issues around facilities provided for voters and staff some of which it was possible to resolve fairly quickly on polling day but also noted some issues relating to access for portable cabins and again this is addressed later in the report.

Mobile Polling Stations

- 14 As previously mentioned it is not possible in every polling area to locate a polling station in a permanent building. Where no suitable permanent buildings are available, mobile stations are used instead. Portable cabins, however, are much less satisfactory than permanent premises due to space limitations and lack of facilities. They are also becoming increasingly difficult to staff and equip. Units are hired from a commercial supplier and guarantee of delivery is an important consideration, particularly in the event of an election being called at short notice. General concerns regarding the use of mobile stations have been raised in the current review by two members of the Council although it was not possible to identify alternative venues to host polling stations in place of mobile stations.
- 15 The Councils Access Officer has been consulted as part of this Review and has recommended that a portable ramp should be provided with each portable cabin so that if ramped access is required it can be facilitated and that consideration should also be given to the siting of the portable cabin so that the gradient of the ramp can be managed.
- 16 Discussions have been held with the supplier of the portable cabins with regard to concerns over the accessibility of and the facilities in the cabins and location / siting with a view to providing level access portable cabins wherever this is possible.
- 17 The supplier has informed the Council that he has investigated the possibility of supplying portable offices for use as polling stations with disabled access. He is currently in a position to supply some units that would incorporate a 1000mm door, disabled access, toilet and solar powered electricity. He has further indicated that he is looking to commence a programme of fitting disabled access doors ie 1000mm wide to any office units purchased in future which could also be supplied with disabled ramps. The supplier has however added that there would be an additional cost of £300 above the cost of the existing portable units for the self contained units referred to above and an additional cost of £100 over the cost of the existing portable units for the supply of an improved unit with a wider door as also referred to above. It should also be noted that because of site conditions, gradients and space that the above units would not be suitable for all locations where portable cabins are currently used as polling stations.
- 18 Officers have as part of this review investigated possible alternatives to two of the portable cabins used as polling stations (paragraphs 24 and 29) and whilst it is not recommended that any changes are made in respect of the two sites investigated in the current review officers will continue to monitor the use of the portable cabins as polling stations and continue to investigate any potential alternatives.
- 19 Recommended that Officers continue to monitor the use of portable cabins as polling stations and continue to investigate potential alternatives. It be further

recommended that Officers discuss with the supplier the use of a number of self contained units and improved units with a wider door as detailed in paragraph 17 above at a number of polling station locations where portable cabins are currently used it being noted that the costs of using these improved models as a means of accommodating disabled access will require additional funding to be voted to the Elections Management Budget Heading.

Use of Schools

- 20 The 1983 Act also provides for the use, free of charge, for the purpose of taking the poll or the counting of the votes of "*a room in a school maintained or assisted by a local education authority or a school in respect of which grants are made out of moneys provided by Parliament*", subject to making good any damage and defraying any expenses. These provisions also apply to grant maintained schools. There is no requirement that a school must close when part of it is being used as a polling station, but nearly all do so because of practical difficulties in staying open or on security grounds.
- 21 Closure for elections, however, can be disruptive to the school timetable and inconvenient for working parents. In response to requests from school governing bodies and representations from the Local Education Authority, the number of schools used as polling places has been reduced in recent years and only ten schools in the Council's area are now used as polling venues. For the reasons given in paragraphs 14-19 above, mobile stations are not considered to be viable alternatives to school premises.

Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts

- 22 The large majority of polling places are satisfactory and have remained unchanged for many years. Choice of suitable buildings is limited and in most cases there is no alternative to the present arrangements. This year the City elections and the referendum on the Alternative Vote may be combined on 5th May and it is suggested that changes should be kept to a minimum, unless premises that were previously used as polling stations are actually no longer available, in order to avoid as far as possible the need to switch venues which could cause confusion for voters.

- 23 Suggested changes to polling venues in Belah and Stanwix Rural, Stanwix Urban, Castle, and Morton wards are discussed below, **it is recommended that the polling arrangements in the following wards remain unchanged:**

**Belle Vue
Brampton
Burgh
Botcherby
Currock
Dalston**

**Denton Holme
Great Corby & Geltsdale
Harraby
Hayton
Irthing
Longtown & Rockcliffe**

**Lyne
Upperby
St Aidans
Wetheral
Yewdale**

Belah and Stanwix Rural Wards

- 24 A portable cabin located on the east side of Kingstown Road normally in the car park at the Gosling Bridge is the polling station for 965 electors in polling district AE, 150 electors in polling district PBK and 158 electors in polling district BF. A Councillor from Belah Ward has suggested that the polling station could be relocated to the St. Peters Church on Kingstown Road. The Church building enjoys good access arrangements for the disabled, has good parking provision and has internal layout and facilities that could accommodate the number of voters. The Church is however situated on the west side of Kingstown Road whereas all the voters are located on the east side of Kingstown Road. One of the criteria to be considered in any review of polling stations is the convenience of the location to the electors and guidance from the Electoral Commission identifies the need to consider barriers such as major roads, rivers and railway lines. It is therefore recommended that the Portable Cabin on the east side of Kingstown road usually located in the car park of the Gosling Bridge remain as the polling station for electors in polling districts AE, BF and PBK.

Stanwix Urban Ward

- 25 The St. Michael's Parish Centre is the designated polling station for 2334 electors in polling districts BB, BC and PBJ. In the recent City Council By Election for the Stanwix Urban Ward the Centre was not available for use as a polling station and it was necessary to arrange an alternative location for the polling station. After investigating a number of options arrangements were made for the polling station to be located in St Michael's Church. Some concerns have been raised with local councillors over the use of the Church as a polling station. Officers have noted the comments and will approach the responsible officer regarding the availability of the soon to be constructed Stanwix Community Building as a polling station. In the meantime it is recommended that the St. Michael's Parish Centre continue to be used as the polling station for electors in polling districts BB, BC and PBJ.

Castle Ward

- 26 The City Council agreed as part of last years review of polling stations to designate the West End Temperance Hall on Hawick Street as the polling station for nearly 800 electors in polling district JB in place of the Ukrainian Club in Silloth Street which was no longer available for polling purposes due to regular bookings of the club on Thursdays. Whilst the Temperance Hall is well located and is large enough to accommodate a polling station a Ward Councillor has suggested that voters would prefer to use the Ukrainian Club but should that not be available has also highlighted the need for improved polling station signage at the West End Temperance Hall.
- 27 Officers have contacted the Ukrainian Club and have been informed that the regular booking at the Club on a Thursday is continuing which means that the club is not available for election use. Officers will therefore discuss with the leaseholder of the West End Temperance Hall the possibility of erecting a polling station sign outside the premises to give electors notice of the location of the polling station prior to polling day.
- 28 Recommended that the West End Temperance Hall in Hawick Street continue to be the polling station for polling district JB and officers discuss with the leaseholders the possibility of siting a polling station notice outside the premises prior to polling day.

Morton Ward

- 29 A portable cabin at Borrowdale Road is the designated polling station for 736 electors in polling district KD. Officers have investigated the possibility of using the Morton Park Church Hall at the junction of Windermere Road and Wigton Road as an alternative polling station. The bookings secretary for the Church Hall has informed the Council that the deeds and covenants under which the hall operates precludes the halls use for election purposes and cannot therefore be used as a polling station. It is recommended that the portable cabin at Borrowdale Road continue to be used as the polling station for electors in polling district KD

Other Polling Places

- 30 Polling stations are currently in process of being booked for the City Council elections in May and a possible referendum on the Alternative Vote on the same day but confirmation of availability has not yet been received from all premises. In order to ensure that polling stations are provided for all electors, **it is recommended that the Returning Officer be given authority, after consultation with relevant Ward Councillors and the Portfolio Holder, to change polling place locations at the elections in 2011 if the usual premises prove to be unavailable due unforeseen circumstances.**

Polling Places – Urban Wards

APPENDIX

WARD	POLLING PLACE	POLLING DISTRICT	ELECTORATE (December 2010)
Belah	Kingmoor Junior School	AA;AB	2101
	Belah Community Centre	AC	799
	Portable cabin, Etterby Road	AD	1127
	Portable cabin, east side Kingstown Rd	AE	968
Stanwix Urban	Portable cabin, Knowefield Avenue	BA;	1214
	St. Michael's Parish Centre	BB; BC; BE	2349
	St. Augustine's Parish Centre	BD	1100
	Portable cabin, east side Kingstown Rd	BF	151
St. Aidans	St. Aidan's Church Hall	CA	1736
	Greystone Community Centre	CB	806
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	CC	518
	Greystone Community Centre	CD	1671
Botcherby	Botcherby Community Centre	DA	1459
	Botcherby Family Centre	DB	789
	Portable cabin, Cumrew Close	DC	785
	Harraby Community Centre	DD; DE	1729
Harraby	The Pinegrove Hotel, London Road	EA	1153
	Inglewood Infant School	EB	1202
	Harraby Catholic Club	EC	1161
	Portable cabin, Cumwhinton Road	ED	1244
	Creighton Rugby Club	EE	274
Upperby	St. Margaret Mary's Social Club	FA	898
	CDC Building adj. Upperby School	FB	861
	St. John's Ambulance, Scalegate Rd.	FC	1044
	Petteril Bank Community Centre	FD; FE	1344
Currock	Currock Community Centre	GA	1075
	Bishop Harvey Goodwin School	GB	1490
	Currock Community Centre	GC	945
	St. Herbert's Church Hall	GD	1185
Denton	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	HA	369
Holme	Denton Holme Community Centre	HB; HC	1988
	St. James Parish Centre	HD	840
	Portable cabin, Longsowerby	HE	1275
	Portable cabin, Lorne Crescent	HF	463
Castle	Newtown School	JA	947
	West End Temp Hall Hawick Street	JB	810
	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	JC	1396
	Deaf Vision 3 Compton Street	JD	796
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	JE	556
Morton	St. Luke's Church Hall	KA; KB	2133
	St. Edmunds Chapel, Newlaithes Ave.	KC	1341
	Portable cabin, Borrowdale Road	KD	745
	Portable cabin, Scawfell Road	KE	578
Yewdale	Yewdale Community Centre	LA; LB	2312
	Portable cabin, Richmond Green	LC	1184

	Portable cabin, Nairn Way	LD	942
	Richard Rose Morton Academy	LE	434
Belle Vue	Belle Vue Primary School	MA; MB	2176
	Newtown School	MC	1301
	St. Bedes School	MD	698
	Portable cabin, Hawthorn Grove	ME	724

Polling Places – Rural Wards

Ward	Polling Place	Polling District	Electorate (December 2010)
Brampton	Moot Hall, Brampton	PK	2244
	Brampton Community Centre	PKA	1237
	Milton Village Hall	PL	119
Burgh	Beaumont Parish Hall	NA	376
	Village Hall, Burgh-by-Sands	NB	647
	Thurstonfield Methodist Chapel	NC	363
	Village Hall, Great Orton	ND	363
Dalston	Victory Hall, Dalston	OA	1788
	Primrose Hall, Gaitsgill	OB	313
	Embassy Ballroom, Cummersdale	OC	383
	Portable cabin, Carleton	OD	234
	Wreay Village Hall	OE	325
	6 Low Moor Avenue, Blackwell	OF	476
	Portable cabin, Black Lion, Durdar	OG	327
	Creighton Rugby Club	OH	996
Great	Watson Hall, Castle Carrock	PP1	282
Corby and	Helme Farm, Cumrew	PR1; PR2	110
Geltsdale	Cumwhitton Public Hall	PS	265
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB2	279
	Talkin Village Hall	PAC	127
	Great Corby Village Hall	PBB	376
	Downagate Community Centre	PBC	366
Hayton	Reading Room, Hayton	PAA	600
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB1	322
	Methodist Church Hall, Corby Hill	PAD	786
Irthing	Lees Hill School	PG1; PG2	180
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH2	37
	Cricket Pavilion, Lanercost	PO1; PO2	182
	Taylor Institute, Low Row	PW	262
	Methodist Church Hall, Gilsland	PX1; PX2; PX3	189
	Lacy Thompson Hall, Hallbankgate	PY1; PY2	558
	Walton Village Hall	PAX	237
Longtown	Longtown Community Centre	PE1- PE4	2299
and	Moat Village Centre	PF1; PF2	173
Rockcliffe	Former Conservatory Centre, Harker	PAG2	225
	Rockcliffe Community Centre	PAM	429
	Blackford School	PAY	336

Lyne	Roadhead Public Hall	PH1	330
	Hethersgill Parish Hall	PAE	328
	Fir Ends School, Smithfield	PAJ	301
	Nicholforest Hall	PAK	326
	Westfield House, Roweltown	PAS	144
Stanwix Rural	Stapleton Public Hall	PAW	216
	Village Hall, Newtown, Irthington	PAF	585
	Former Conservatory Centre, Harker	PAG1; PAG3	155
	The Four Oaks, Cargo	PAH	430
	Scaleby Village Hall	PAR	302
	Crosby Parish Hall	PAT1; PAT2	427
	Houghton Village Hall	PAU1; PAU2	1409
	Women's Institute Hall, Linstock	PAV	305
	Portable cabin, east side Kingstown Rd	PBK	147
	Cotehill Village Hall	RA	491
Wetheral	Cumwhinton Village Hall	RB	371
	Parish Centre, Scotby	RC	1119
	Memorial Hall, Warwick-on-Eden	RD	201
	Wetheral Village Hall	RE	1048
	Portable cabin, Aglionby	RF	231
	Portable cabin, Cumrew Close	RG	135
	Creighton Rugby Club	RH	209