

Report to Council

**Agenda
Item:**

18(iii)

Meeting Date: 9 January 2018
Portfolio: Finance, Governance and Resources
Key Decision: Yes: Recorded in the Notice Ref: KD.28/17
Within Policy and Budget Framework
Public / Private Public

Title: REVIEW OF POLLING ARRANGEMENTS
Report of: Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services
Report Number: GD.75/17(a)

Purpose / Summary:

This report presents the results of the review of polling arrangements and makes recommendations in respect of existing arrangements. A copy of report GD75/17 which was considered by the Executive at the meeting on 18th December and the recommendations of the Executive arising from those considerations are attached.

Recommendations:

See Minute Extract attached.

Tracking

Executive:	18 December 2017
Overview and Scrutiny:	N/A
Council:	9 January 2018

Contact Officer: Ian Dixon

Ext: 7555

Appendices GD.75/17
attached to report:

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- **GD.75/17**

Report to Executive

Agenda
Item:

A.4

Meeting Date: 18 December 2018
Portfolio: Finance, Governance and Resources
Key Decision: Yes: Recorded in the Notice Ref: KD.28/17
Within Policy and Budget Framework
Public / Private Public

Title: REVIEW OF POLLING ARRANGEMENTS
Report of: Corporate Director of Governance & Regulatory Services
Report Number: GD 75/17

Purpose / Summary:

This Report presents the results of the annual review of polling arrangements and makes recommendations for changes to existing arrangements 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 9 January 2018.

Recommendations:

(See over)

Tracking

Executive:	18 December 2017
Overview and Scrutiny:	N/A
Council:	9 January 2018

It is recommended that:

1. The current polling district at OC (Dalston Ward, Cummersdale Parish be changed to create 3 polling districts at OC1, OC2 and OC3 to provide polling arrangements which are more commodious to electors in the polling district. (Para 31)
2. With the exception of polling arrangements in OC3 Dalston Ward, Cummersdale Parish it be recommended that there be no further change to polling arrangements at the present time. (Para 34)
- 3 Officers continue to monitor the use of portable cabins as polling stations and continue to investigate potential alternatives (Para 23)
- 4 The Returning Officer be given authority, after consultation with relevant Ward Councillors and Portfolio Holder, to change polling place locations at the City Council elections if the usual premises prove to be unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances (para 35).

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 Plan provides for an annual polling station review to be carried out and it has been the practice in previous years to review the arrangements in those wards having local elections in the following May. City Council elections are scheduled to be held in 17 Wards in May 2018.
2. The Electoral Administration Act 2006, placed a duty on the City Council to carry out a full review of all parliamentary polling districts and polling places in the Council's area during 2007 and every four years thereafter. The City Council carried out a full review in 2016/2017. Particular polling districts or places may however be reviewed at any time.
3. Members will be aware that a number of separate and unconnected reviews of electoral arrangements are currently being undertaken including the Review of the City Council, carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and the Review of Parliamentary Boundaries currently being carried out by the Boundary Commission.
4. Following the identification of an electoral imbalance in the area, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England are currently carrying out a Review of the City Council electoral arrangements with a view to revised electoral arrangements being implemented for the annual elections in May 2019.
5. All City Councillors have been consulted on the polling arrangements for their particular wards. Members will be aware that the views of the Carlisle Access Group have in previous years been sought on polling arrangements however, as there are no changes to venues proposed this year, the Access Group have not been approached. However comments which have been submitted in previous reviews are still valid and have informed the outcomes of this review (para 19-21 refers)
6. The current polling places and electorate are listed in Appendix 1 and these locations have been reviewed in the light of any representations and comments received.

STATUTORY PROVISIONS

7. 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.

ACCESS FOR DISABLED VOTERS

8. 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.
9. Under the Equality Act 2010 it is unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a disabled person. Discrimination includes refusing to provide any service to disabled people that it provides to non-disabled members of the public or providing a worse standard of service to disabled people than it provides to non-disabled people. Service providers have had to change practices, policies and procedures that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service. Since October 2004 service providers have had to make reasonable adjustments to their buildings to overcome physical barriers to access.
10. 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 is entitled to assistance from the Presiding Officer 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 to 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.
11. Members may recall that the Access Group have in past years visited polling stations which were being used for the first time to check on the suitability of the building for use by disabled voters. This arrangement will be continued and should any new locations be identified arrangements will be made for Members of the Group to assess any new buildings which are being used as polling stations for the first time.

FREE USE OF ROOMS

12. In addition to free use of school premises, described in paragraph 24 below, any room the expense of which is payable out of any rate may also be used free of charge. This would apply to a room in a local authority building e.g. a Community Centre.

DUTIES OF RETURNING OFFICER

13. It is the responsibility of the Returning Officer to provide sufficient polling stations within each polling place and to allocate 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

14. Apart from the requirements outlined above, there are no specific statutory criteria for determining the suitability of premises for election purposes although the Electoral Commission did issue directions in relation to the arrangements for the Referendum carried out in June 2016 that there should be no more than 2500 electors allocated to any polling station.
15. The following factors have also been taken into account at previous reviews:
 - ◆ 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.
 - ◆ extent of parking provision
 - ◆ internal size and layout of the premises having regard to the number of voters allotted to the polling station(s)
 - ◆ lighting and heating
 - ◆ proximity to public transport
 - ◆ cost (where there is a choice between similar premises)
16. The suitability of polling places are considered according to these criteria and taking into account the availability of alternative premises. An electorate of about 1250 - 1500 is considered to be 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. Members will be aware that there is an increasing number of electors who have chosen to vote by post and consequently the number of electors voting in person at the polling stations has decreased. The Council could therefore opt to increase the total number of electors allocated to polling stations above the figure mentioned above but given the problems which have been experienced in other parts of the country the Council might wish to adopt a cautious approach and maintain the status quo.
17. In the Carlisle area the stations at Yewdale Community Centre, the Stanwix Community Centre, Church of the Nazarene, Newtown School, St. Luke's,

Kingmoor Business Centre, Longtown Community Centre, Victory Hall Dalston and the Moot Hall Brampton have the most electors allocated. These stations have approximately 2000 - 2300 voters allocated. All the above stations are double polling stations with 2 teams of staff on duty at the stations. Whilst there have been no incidents in Carlisle of voters queuing and being unable to cast their votes at 10pm it is considered prudent to maintain the current split for the allocation of electors to polling stations in the Carlisle area. Officers will continue to study any reports that are produced relating to issues arising nationally from previous elections and will take on board any recommendations or suggestions for improvement.

PORTABLE POLLING STATIONS

18. It is not possible in every polling area to locate a polling station in a permanent building. Where no suitable permanent buildings are available, portable 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 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 portable stations have been raised in previous reviews by members of the Council, however, despite efforts of Members and officers it has not been possible to identify alternative venues to host polling stations in place of portable stations. Indeed additional portable cabins have had to be used in elections held in recent years as permanent buildings have become unavailable.
19. The Council's Access Officer has previously been consulted on the use of portable cabins and has recommended that an access ramp should be provided with each cabin so that if ramped access is required it can be facilitated and, secondly, that consideration should also be given to the siting of the portable cabin so that where possible the gradient of any ramp used can be managed.
20. 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 their location / siting, with a view to providing level access portable cabins wherever this is possible.
21. The supplier is now able to supply a number of units that incorporate a 1000mm door, disabled access, toilet and solar powered electricity with a number of such units being used in recent elections. It should however be noted that because of site conditions, gradients, the size of portable cabins required and space that the above units would not be suitable for all locations where portable cabins are currently used as polling stations.
22. Officers have as part of this review once again investigated possible alternatives to portable cabins used as polling stations and, whilst it has not been possible in this review to recommend changes in respect of sites where portable cabins are currently used, Officers will continue to investigate potential alternatives.

23. As an outcome of this review it is recommended that Officers continue to monitor the use of portable cabins as polling stations and continue to investigate possible alternatives.

USE OF SCHOOLS

24. 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 some do so because of practical difficulties in staying open or on security grounds.
25. 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 there are currently eight schools in the Council's area being used as polling venues.

REVIEW OF POLLING PLACES AND POLLING DISTRICTS

26. As the current Ward and Polling District boundaries are being reviewed by the Local Government Boundary Commission as part of the Commission's current review of the electoral arrangements of the City Council these have not been considered as part of this review with the exception of arrangements for polling District OC Dalston Ward, Cummersdale Parish
27. There are a number of residential developments being carried out in the Cummersdale Parish. Notably development at Peter Lane and on sites situated off Wigton Road. These sites, if fully developed, could see an increase in the electorate for polling district OC from the current 832 to a figure closer to 2500.
28. As indicated earlier in the report the range which is suggested as a manageable number of electors per register is 1250 – 1500 although this number is considerably less than the number indicated in the Commission Direction for the referendum.
29. The figures above indicate that if the developments set out above are fully built then some realignment of the register for OC Dalston Ward, Cummersdale District would be required.
30. However, even without those developments being completed there are currently a significant number of voters in the Brackenleigh, Glaramara Drive, Bleaberry Way developments off Wigton Road that need to travel five miles or so to vote at their polling station at the Embassy Ballroom in Cummersdale. There is currently a polling station located in the Richard Rose Morton Academy which is much closer to electors in those developments and would be a more convenient polling place for those electors.

- 31 It is recommended that the current polling district at OC (Dalston Ward, Cummersdale Parish) be changed to create 3 districts at OC1, OC2 and OC3 to provide polling arrangements which are more commodious to electors in the polling district. The views of the Dalston Ward Councillors have been sought on this proposal and the Ward members are in support of the proposed change.
- 32 No further representations have been received during this review with regard to polling district boundaries in the City Council area.
33. 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. Change is therefore only considered where the current premises are no longer available or satisfactory, or representations have been received in respect of particular buildings.
34. In the absence of representations, it is recommended that, with the exception of changes to the polling arrangements for Cummersdale Parish, as set out above, there be no further change to polling arrangements at the present time and Officers continue to respond to circumstances where existing polling station locations either become unavailable or unsuitable:

OTHER POLLING PLACES

35. The usual booking requests will be sent early in the New Year in respect of polling stations to be used at the City Council elections in May 2018, therefore confirmation of availability has not been received for the premises set out in appendix 1. 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 Portfolio Holder, to change polling place locations at the City Council elections in May 2018 if the usual premises prove to be unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances.

3. CONSULTATION

- 3.1 The details of consultation carried out to inform this report are set out in paragraph 5 of the report

4. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To provide polling stations for electors as per the statutory duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES

5.1 Properly run elections with the best possible facilities provide the democratic mandate for the Council to determine its priorities.

Contact Officer: Ian Dixon

Ext: 7555

Appendices List of Polling Places
attached to report:

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- None

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS/RISKS:

Chief Executive's – The Town Clerk & Chief Executive is the senior officer in charge of the conduct of elections and as such has been involved in the drafting of this report. The risk is that the Council does not comply with its duty to provide suitable and adequate polling stations. This report demonstrates how the Council is seeking to fulfil its obligations.

Deputy Chief Executive – None

Economic Development – None

Governance – This is a report from the Governance Directorate and relevant comments are contained within the body of the said report. The Council is obliged to review polling stations and also comply with its obligations under the equality legislation.

Local Environment – None.

Resources – None.

Polling Places – Urban Wards

APPENDIX 1

WARD	POLLING PLACE	POLLING DISTRICT	ELECTORATE (Sept 2017)
Belah	Kingmoor Business Centre	AA;AB,	1903
	Belah Community Centre	AC,AH	763
	1 Etterby Close	AD	1072
	Portable cabin, east side Kingstown Rd	AE,AF,AG	948
Stanwix Urban	Portable cabin, Knowefield Avenue	BA;	1166
	Stanwix Community Centre	BB; BC; BE	2165
	St. Augustine's Parish Centre	BD	1014
	Portable cabin, east side Kingstown Rd	BF	160
St. Aidans	St. Aidan's Church Hall	CA, CE, CF	1538
	Greystone Community Centre	CB,CG	718
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	CC, CH	364
	Greystone Community Centre	CD,	1414
Botcherby	Botcherby Community Centre	DA	1300
	Botcherby Family Centre	DB	688
	Portable cabin, Cumrew Close	DC	737
	Harraby Community Hub	DD; DE	1505
Harraby	The Pinegrove Hotel, London Road	EA	1113
	Inglewood Infant School	EB	1215
	Harraby Catholic Club	EC,EF	1053
	Portable cabin, Cumwhinton Road	ED.EG	1175
Upperby	Creighton Rugby Club	EE	259
	St. Margaret Mary's Social Club	FA	809
	CDC Building adj. Upperby School	FB	746
	St. John's Ambulance, Scalegate Rd.	FC	959
Currock	Petteril Bank Community Centre	FD; FE	1206
	Currock Community Centre	GA	835
	Bishop Harvey Goodwin School	GB,GE,GF	1285
	Currock Community Centre	GC,GG	1069
Denton Holme	St. Herbert's Church Hall	GD	1077
	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	HA	315
	Denton Holme Community Centre	HB; HC	1850
	St. James Parish Centre	HD	808
Castle	Portable cabin, Longsowerby	HE	1151
	Portable cabin, Lorne Crescent	HF	419
	Newtown School	JA	800
	West End Temp Hall Hawick Street	JB	530
Morton	Methodist Church Hall, Wigton Road	JC,JK	1255
	Christian Science Church	JD,JF	705
	St. Cuthbert's Court, Myddleton St.	JE,JG,JH	526
	St. Luke's Church Hall	KA; KB	1939
Yewdale	Portable Cabin Newlaithes Ave	KC	1315
	Portable cabin, Borrowdale Road	KD,KF	666
	Portable cabin, Scawfell Road	KE	559
	Yewdale Community Centre	LA; LB	2214

Belle Vue	Portable cabin, Richmond Green	LC	1069
	Portable cabin, Nairn Way	LD	859
	Richard Rose Morton Academy	LE	416
	Church of Nazarene	MA; MB	2183
	Newtown School	MC	1355
	St. Bedes School	MD, MF, MG	619
	Portable cabin, Hawthorn Grove	ME, MH	631

Polling Places – Rural Wards

Ward	Polling Place	Polling District	Electorate (Sept 2017)
Brampton	Moot Hall, Brampton	PK	2262
	Brampton Community Centre	PKA	1171
	Milton Village Hall	PL	98
Burgh	Beaumont Parish Hall	NA	380
	Village Hall, Burgh-by-Sands	NB	605
	Thurstonfield Methodist Chapel	NC	374
	Village Hall, Great Orton	ND	352
Dalston	Victory Hall, Dalston	OA	1884
	Primrose Hall, Gaitsgill	OB	296
	Embassy Ballroom, Cummersdale	OC1&2	832
	Richard Rose Morton Academy	OC3
	Portable cabin, Carleton	OD	260
	Wreay Village Hall	OE	308
	Portable Cabin, Blackwell Common	OF	599
	Portable cabin, Black Lion, Durdar	OG	308
	Creighton Rugby Club	OH	955
	Watson Hall, Castle Carrock	PP1	249
Great Corby and Geltsdale	St Mary's Church, Cumrew	PR1; PR2	108
	Cumwhiton Public Hall	PS	248
	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB2	259
	Talkin Village Hall	PAC	133
	Great Corby Village Hall	PBB	340
	Downagate Community Centre	PBC	356
	Reading Room, Hayton	PAA	556
Hayton	Heads Nook Village Hall	PAB1	313
	Methodist Church Hall, Corby Hill	PAD	736
Irthing	Lees Hill School	PG1; PG2	171
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH2	33
	Cricket Pavilion, Lanercost	PO1; PO2	186
	Taylor Institute, Low Row	PW	243
	Methodist Church Hall, Gilsland	PX1; PX2; PX3	164
	Lacy Thompson Hall, Hallbankgate	PY1; PY2	551
	Walton Village Hall	PAX	232
	Longtown Community Centre	PE1- PE4	2026
Longtown and Rockcliffe	Moat Village Centre	PF1; PF2	153
	Former Conservatory Centre, Harker	PAG2	200
	Rockcliffe Community Centre	PAM	387

Lyne	Blackford School	PAY	295
	Roadhead Public Hall	PH1	333
	Hethersgill Parish Hall	PAE	310
	Skitby House	PAJ	304
	Nicholforest Hall	PAK	300
	Shankhill School	PAS	122
	Stapleton Public Hall	PAW	211
Stanwix	Village Hall, Newtown, Irthington	PAF	565
Rural	Former Conservatory Centre, Harker	PAG1; PAG3	369
	Portable Office, Cargo	PAH	430
	Scaleby Village Hall	PAR	290
	Crosby Parish Hall	PAT1; PAT2	404
	Houghton Village Hall	PAU1; PAU2	1390
	Women's Institute Hall, Linstock	PAV	319
	Portable cabin, east side Kingstown Rd	PBK	139
Wetheral	Cotehill Village Hall	RA	484
	Cumwhinton Village Hall	RB	405
	Parish Centre, Scotby	RC	1202
	Memorial Hall, Warwick-on-Eden	RD	185
	Wetheral Village Hall	RE	1008
	Portable cabin, Aglionby	RF	209
	Portable cabin, Cumrew Close	RG	226
	Creighton Rugby Club	RH	205

EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 2017

EX.139/17 **REVIEW OF POLLING ARRANGEMENTS
(Key Decision – KD.28/17)

(In accordance with Paragraph 15(i) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Mayor had agreed that call-in procedures should not be applied to this item)

Portfolio Finance, Governance and Resources

Relevant Scrutiny Panel Business and Transformation

Subject Matter

The Deputy Leader, and Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder submitted report GD.75/17 presenting the results of the annual review of polling arrangements as required by the Representation of the People Act 1983.

The report referenced the statutory provisions and criteria which had been used in carrying out the review; and that a number of separate and unconnected reviews of electoral arrangements were currently being undertaken, including the Review of the City Council carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and the Review of Parliamentary Boundaries currently being carried out by the Boundary Commission.

The current polling places and electorate were listed in Appendix 1 and those locations had been reviewed in the light of any representations and comments received.

Also provided were details of the action taken to ensure that, so far as was reasonable and practicable, every polling place was accessible to electors who were disabled; and information on the use of portable polling stations and schools as polling places.

The Deputy Leader then reported in more detail on the suggested changes in voting arrangements for the Dalston Ward, Cummersdale Parish. It was further recommended that Officers continue to monitor the use of portable cabins as polling stations / investigate potential alternatives; and that the Returning Officer be given authority, after consultation with the relevant Ward Councillors and himself, to change polling place locations at the City Council Elections if the usual premises proved to be unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances.

The Deputy Leader, and Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder concluded his presentation by formally moving the recommendations contained within the report.

The Leader formally seconded the recommendations.

Summary of options rejected a number of options set out in Report GD.75/17 with regard to polling arrangements

DECISION

That Report GD.75/17 and the recommendations therein be referred to Council for consideration, the recommendations being that:

1. The current polling district at OC Dalston Ward, Cummersdale Parish be changed to create 3 polling districts at OC1, OC2 and OC3 to provide polling arrangements which are more commodious to electors in the polling district. (Paragraph 31)
2. With the exception of polling arrangements in OC3 Dalston Ward, Cummersdale Parish it be recommended that there be no further change to polling arrangements at the present time. (Paragraph 34)
3. Officers continue to monitor the use of portable cabins as polling stations and continue to investigate potential alternatives (Paragraph 23)
4. The Returning Officer be given authority, after consultation with relevant Ward Councillors and the Portfolio Holder, to change polling place locations at the City Council elections if the usual premises prove to be unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances. (Paragraph 35)

Reasons for Decision

To provide polling stations for electors as per the statutory duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983