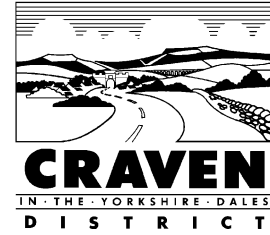


Audit and Governance Committee – 12th January 2015



REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Report of the Chief Executive (Returning Officer)

Ward(s) affected: All

1. **Purpose of Report**

To review the Polling Districts and Polling Places for the Craven District, which were approved at Council Minute CL.632. The review is required under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (as amended).

2. **Recommendations** – Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Consider the comments received, together with the recommendations relating to each (paragraph 4.4), and decide whether to make any changes to the designation of Polling Districts or Polling Places, or make any recommendations to the Returning Officer about Polling Stations.
- 2.2 Subject to the decisions at 2.1 above, to recommend the Council Meeting:
 - a) to adopt the Schedule at Appendix 2 so far as it relates to the designation of Polling Districts and Polling Places for the Craven District; and
 - b) for it to be implemented with effect from February 2015.
- 2.3 Recommend that authority is delegated to:
 - a) the Audit and Governance Committee to make any changes to Polling Places in the period to 2018, when the next review will be implemented; and
 - b) the Returning Officer to make temporary changes to Polling Places during an election period; that is the period between the publication of the Notice of Election and the completion of the Count

3. **Background**

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (as amended) the Council is required to undertake a regular review of the polling districts and polling places in the District. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 amended the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. This review must be completed by 31st January 2015 and subsequent reviews undertaken every five years.

- 3.2 The Electoral Commission defines a **polling district** as a geographical area created by the sub-division of a constituency, ward or division into a smaller part; a **polling place** as the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (acting) Returning Officer. A **polling station** is the room or building where the poll takes place.
- 3.3 Each Parish is a separate polling district but may be sub-divided further if the size of the parish and the number and location of electors requires this.
- 3.4 When designating polling districts and determining where polling places should be located, the Council must seek to ensure that the voting facilities for all electors in the District, including those who are disabled, are reasonable and practical in the circumstances.
- 3.5 It is the responsibility of the Council to designate polling districts and places. The Returning Officer is responsible for designating the polling stations within the polling places however; the Returning Officer will be pleased to receive members' views.
- 3.6 In undertaking a polling district and place review, the Council must:
- a) Publish Notice of the holding of the review;
 - b) Consult the (Acting) Returning Officer for every Parliamentary Constituency which is wholly or partly in its area;
 - c) Enable the (Acting) Returning Officer to make representations to the Council and publish them in a prescribed manner;
 - d) Seek representations from such persons that it considers has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for those who have different forms of disability;
 - e) Allow any elector in the Council's area to make representations which could include proposals for alternative Polling Places.
- 3.7 On completion of the review, the Council must give reasons for its decisions and publish this information.

4. **Consultations undertaken**

- 4.1 Notice of Review was published on the 7th July 2014. Full details of the review were published on the Council's website and also sent to all Members and Parishes within the District and preliminary comments sought.
- 4.2 The previous (Acting) Returning Officer published her comments on the proposed polling districts and places on the 8th August. Consultation was then undertaken with the stakeholders listed below:
- a) Members of the Council
 - b) Parish Councils/Parish Meetings
 - c) Disability Groups
 - d) Community Groups
 - e) Political Groups

4.3 Appendix 1 summarises the responses received during the consultation period (which ran from the 8th August until the 30th September).

4.4 In summary, the following changes to existing arrangements are recommended,

<i>Polling District</i>	<i>Proposed arrangement changes</i>
Skipton East No. 2 (SKE2)	<p>Recommend change of polling place to:</p> <p>(N.B. Alternative locations are still being inspected and evaluated and the proposal will be reported to Committee)</p>
Skipton West No. 2 (SKW2)	<p>Recommend change of polling place to</p> <p>(N.B. Alternative locations are still being inspected and evaluated and the proposal will be reported to Committee)</p> <p>Reasons – the current polling place is outside the polling district. The proposed location is more conveniently located for local electors and so should encourage participation.</p>

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Craven is an extensive, mainly rural area and consequently there are many electors who have to travel some miles to vote at their allocated polling station. However, postal voting is available to all electors and is a more convenient method of voting for many electors. Currently, 6,730 electors have chosen to vote by post on a permanent basis. The Returning Officer will be running a publicity campaign in the run up to the Parliamentary and local government elections in 2015 to raise awareness on the automatic right to apply for a postal vote and also the location of post boxes and also the box at Belle Vue Square.
- 5.2 Throughout the review process every effort has been made to ensure that electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances and that, as far as is reasonable and practical, polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.
- 5.3 Occasionally, designated polling places become unavailable for use during elections because the building has to be closed or is being used for other events. As Council must approve changes to polling places, it is recommended that delegated authority be given to the Returning Officer, to make temporary changes to Polling Places during an election period between the publication of the Notice of Election and the completion of the Count.
- 5.4 The author of this report and the Returning Officer would like to express their thanks to all those who responded to this review.

6. Implications

Financial – there are none arising from the recommendations in this report. If these were to be changes in the number of polling stations, this would have the effect of increasing or reducing the cost of elections. Each polling station costs approximately £600-£700.

Legal – the key legal requirements and considerations are set out in the body of this report. There is a legal requirement for the Council to undertake a review of its Polling Districts and Places by 31st January 2015.

Communication to corporate priorities – none, statutory requirement.

Risk Management – Election planning includes consideration of contingency arrangements in the event of a polling station becoming unavailable.

7. Author of the Report – Annette Moppett, Solicitor to the Council

Note : Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix A – Responses received within the consultation period.

Appendix B – Schedule of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Craven District at August 2011