Purpose of report

To consider the outcome of Northumberland County Council’s Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2019.

To designate each polling district as the polling place for Northumberland and authorise the Returning Officer to move to alternative polling stations when required.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that Council agrees the Returning Officer’s proposals in relation to each of the points raised by consultees, contained in the right hand column of the supporting documents in Appendix 1.

2. If any/all of the recommendations are agreed by Council, Council is also requested to consider how the electors affected by such changes are notified of the change of polling place. There are two options:
   a. All households affected could be sent a letter detailing the change of polling place - The cost of this would be approximately £800.00.
   b. All electors will receive a poll card during the lead up to the next election. Their poll card will detail the new polling station address. This will also include text on all poll cards, drawing their attention to the change. There is no cost associated with this option.

3. It is also recommended that:
   a. the Council designates each polling district as the polling place; and
   b. following this review and during the five year period until the 2024 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, the Returning Officer be authorised to designate alternative polling places. If any changes are made, the Returning Officer will report these changes to the Leader and the Chief Executive of Northumberland County Council.
   c. During the 2024 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, the Council will consider the results of the consultation exercise and ratify any changes that have been implemented over the preceding 5 years.
There is a further document attached in Appendix 2 which contains all the representations received as part of the review. This document is merely attached for completeness and does not require any further action.

**Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the “We want to be efficient, open and work for everyone” priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021.

**Key issues**

1. Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, which came into force on 1 January 2007, introduced a number of changes in respect of the way in which reviews of polling districts and polling places must be undertaken. These are now embodied in Sections 18A - 18D of the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006.

2. On 10 July 2019, NCC began a county-wide consultation in relation to its Polling Districts and Polling Places. Statutory Notices and a full consultation document, showing current polling stations were produced and displayed on the NCC website and notice boards throughout Northumberland. In accordance with guidance produced by the Electoral Commission, third parties were also invited to take part in the consultation including MPs, members (County and Parish) and local disability groups with a focus upon issues such as accessibility as set out in Appendix 3

3. As a result of the consultation process, the Returning Officer received seventeen responses from consultees before the deadline of 30 September 2019. Nine of these responses required further action and are the focus of the recommendations listed in Appendix 1. Where appropriate, further enquiries were made into issues raised, and in some cases site visits were carried out to inform the Returning Officer’s recommendations. This was communicated to consultees and no further representations were received. Those outstanding enquiries have now been concluded.

4. Council is, therefore, requested to accept in full the recommendations of the Returning Officer contained in Appendix 1.

5. The fact that the review has now closed does not preclude councillors or residents from raising issues with the Returning Officer as and when they arise.

6. Implementation of any changes to the polling districts and polling stations will be made on publication of the Revised Register of Electors on 01 December 2019 (If there was an election called before this date, the polling station changes would be effective immediately).
Background

1. Between November 2019 and January 2025, Northumberland County Council will take part in and deliver a series of elections:
   - May 2020 Police & Crime Commissioner Election
   - May 2021 Local Government Election
   - May 2022 Parliamentary Election
   - May 2023 Mayoral Election
   - May 2024 Police & Crime Commissioner Election

2. The consultation process has received limited response. There have been no representations from any of local disability groups and only one County Councillor has provided observations. This limited response indicates that the current arrangements are fit for purpose which is also evidenced by the positive replies from Parish Clerks requesting that the status quo be maintained in their areas of responsibility shown in Appendix 2.

3. During the recent Mayoral Election, EU Parliamentary Election, and Police & Crime Commissioner By Election, feedback on the suitability of the locations of the polling stations was obtained and the information gathered was factored into this review.

4. The recommendations of the Returning Officer have taken into account all responses received. It has also endeavoured to implement change where required, balanced against a need to ensure the electorate’s familiarity with current arrangements is maintained. There may be occasions in the future when operational need requires the use of a school as a polling station; however the Returning Officer would seek to keep the use of schools to a minimum and in most cases as a last resort.

5. Although the Electoral Commission has no initial role in the review process itself, it can consider representations and observations made that a Council has not conducted a review so as to:

   - meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or a body of them (i.e. the reasonable requirements of a particular area of the authority have not been satisfactorily met); or
   - take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place

Section 18D (1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, sets out who may make representations the Electoral Commission, namely:

   - in England, any parish council which is wholly or partly situated within the constituency (or parish meeting where there is no such council);
   - not less than thirty registered electors in the constituency (although electors registered anonymously cannot make such a representation);
   - any person (except the Returning Officer) who made representations to the authority when the review was being undertaken; and
- any person who is not an elector in a constituency in the authority’s area who the Commission feels has sufficient interest in the accessibility of disabled persons to polling places in the area or has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities of disabled persons.

The Electoral Commission is required to consider any such representations and observations, and after doing so, may direct the relevant authority to make any alterations it sees necessary to the polling places designated by the review. Should a Council fail to make the alterations within two months of the direction being given, the Commission may make the alterations itself.

**Background papers:**


**Implications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance and value for money</td>
<td>Depending on which recommendations are agreed by Council regarding the methods of notification to electors affected by the changes; the financial cost will be a maximum of £800.00. This will be funded from within the existing revenue budget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Electoral Commission guidance followed in delivering the Review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>All amendments can be conducted by both existing staff and those who take part in elections delivery on an annual basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equalities (Impact Assessment attached)</td>
<td>Consultation is distributed to local disability groups. Polling Station surveys are distributed to Presiding Officers to allow focus on access issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Assessment</td>
<td>Consultation distributed to local disability groups. Polling Station surveys distributed to Presiding Officers to allow focus on access issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime &amp; Disorder</td>
<td>The items raised pose a minimal risk to the organisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Wellbeing</td>
<td>The proposals are designed to improve the electoral experience of the local community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Consideration</td>
<td>The proposals are designed to improve the electoral experience of the local community.</td>
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Carbon reduction | N/A
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Wards | County wide.

**Report sign off.**

*Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Full name of officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Officer/Legal</td>
<td>Liam Henry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Director Finance &amp; Interim S151 Officer</td>
<td>Alison Elsdon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant Executive Director</td>
<td>Kelly Angus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Executive</td>
<td>Daljit Lally</td>
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</tbody>
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