Title of Report: Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

Report to be considered by: Council

Date of Meeting: 6 December 2011

Forward Plan Ref: C2314


Recommended Action:

(1) That an additional polling district be created in Greenham Parish to cover the area of the new development at Newbury Racecourse.

(2) That all polling districts in the District be designated as polling places.

(3) That the Returning Officer be requested to explore the use of alternative locations for the following properties currently used as polling stations St Mary's School, Burghfield, St Joseph's RC School, Newport Road, John Rankin Junior School, Thatcham Park School, Parsons Down Infant School and The Scout Hut Almond Avenue.

Reason for decision to be taken: The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA 2006) introduced a duty for all polling districts and places to be reviewed by the end of 2007 and every four years thereafter.

Other options considered: Statutory Requirement under EAA 2006.

Key background documentation:

- Electoral Administration Act 2006
- Guidance from Electoral Commission

The proposals will help achieve the following Council Plan Themes:

☑ CPT12 - Including Everyone
☑ CPT15 - Putting Customers First

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Themes by:

Ensuring that the polling stations meet the relevant requirements
Implications

Policy: N/A

Financial: The only financial implications relate to the hire of polling stations, budgetary provision for scheduled elections is made by the Council. In addition at Parliamentary and European Parliament elections costs are reimbursed by HM Government.

Personnel: N/A

Legal/Procurement: The review is carried out in accordance with the EAA 2006 and supporting Regulations.

Property: N/A

Risk Management: Risk Management Reviews are undertaken at all Polling Stations

Equalities Impact Assessment: EIA Stage 1 attached as Appendix A.

Is this item subject to call-in? | Yes: | No:

If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position

Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision
Executive Summary

1. Introduction

1.1 Section 16 of the EAA 2006 introduced a requirement for all relevant authorities, to review polling districts and polling places by 31 December 2007, with further reviews required every four years thereafter, a review is therefore required to be completed by 31st December 2011.

1.2 The differences between polling districts, polling places and polling stations are as follows;

(1) A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a District ward or a Parish Council;

(2) A polling place is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. There is however no legal definition of what a polling place is, the geographical area could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.

(3) A polling station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district, unless there are no suitable facilities within the polling district

1.3 Notice of the review was given on Friday 1st July 2011 and interested parties were invited to submit comments by no later than Friday 30th September 2011.

1.4 Comments and observations have been received from the following individuals/organisations;

Greenham Parish Council
Councillor Tony Vickers
Chaddleworth Parish Council
Bucklebury Parish Council
Speen Parish Council
Thatcham Town Council
Winterbourne Parish Meeting
Burghfield Parish Council
Councillor Jackson-Doerge
Wokefield Parish Council
Christopher Brooks, Acting Returning Officer, Reading West Constituency
Susanne Nelson-Wehrmeyer, Acting Returning Officer, Wokingham Constituency

2. Proposals

(1) That an additional polling district be created in Greenham Parish to cover the area of the new development at Newbury Racecourse.

(2) That all polling districts in the District be designated as polling places.
(3) That the Returning Officer be requested to explore the use of alternative locations for the following properties currently used as polling stations St Mary's School, Burghfield, St Joseph's RC School, Newport Road, John Rankin Junior School, Thatcham Park School, Parsons Down Infant School and The Scout Hut Almond Avenue.
Executive Report

1. Introduction

1.1 Section 16 of the EAA 2006 introduced a requirement for all relevant authorities, to review polling districts and polling places by 31 December 2007, with further reviews required every four years thereafter, a review is therefore required to be completed by 31st December 2011.

1.2 The Government has however now published draft legislation for pre-legislative scrutiny making changes to the timing of reviews to bring them in to line with the decision to set Parliamentary terms at five years. Under the draft legislation, a local authority must carry out and complete a review of all the polling places and districts for UK Parliamentary elections in its area within the period of 16 months beginning from 1st October 2013, and the period of 16 months beginning with 1st October of every fifth year after that. A further review will therefore be required to be completed in the next two years.

1.3 The next scheduled elections in West Berkshire will be the elections for Police and Crime Commissioners on 15th November 2012, followed by European Parliamentary Elections in June 2014.

1.4 The differences between polling districts, polling places and polling stations are as follows;

(1) A polling district is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a District ward or a Parish Council;

(2) A polling place is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. There is however no legal definition of what a polling place is, the geographical area could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.

(3) A polling station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district, unless there are no suitable facilities within the polling district.

1.5 The review is not a review of electoral areas only the polling districts that are used as the building blocks for the electoral area(s). An electoral area is the smallest area for which an election is held i.e. a Parish or a Parish Ward.

Polling Districts

1.6 When designating polling districts relevant authorities must seek to ensure that all the electors in the area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances. In addition each parish in England must be in a separate polling district.
1.7 Where a relevant authority makes any alterations to the polling districts within its area the Electoral Registration Officer must amend the register of electors accordingly.

Polling Places

1.8 Each relevant authority must designate a polling place for every polling district. In undertaking this authorities must:

(1) Seek to ensure that all the electors in the area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;

(2) Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

1.9 In addition, the polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the district unless there are special circumstances.

1.10 In West Berkshire polling places are designated as the whole of the polling district and it is recommended that this continues to be the case.

Polling Stations

1.11 The Returning Officer is responsible for the designation of polling stations. A sufficient number of polling stations must be provided and electors allocated to the polling stations in such a manner as the Returning Officer considers most convenient.

1.12 The Returning Officer attempts wherever possible to avoid using schools as polling stations as this often leads to disruption; this is not however possible in some areas due to the lack of suitable available alternatives.

1.13 A number of caravans are currently used as polling stations and, these are obviously not suitable for use by people with certain disabilities. However as in the case of schools there are not always suitable available alternatives.

1.14 The locations of polling stations are discussed with local political agents prior to all major elections.

2. Conduct of the review

2.1 Notice of the review was given on Friday 1st July 2011 and interested parties were invited to submit comments by no later than Friday 30th September 2011.

2.2 At the last elections the Councils Access Officer visited a number of Polling Stations on behalf of the Returning Officer and made a number of recommendations.

2.3 Comments and observations have been received from the following individuals/organisations;
Greenham Parish Council
Councillor Tony Vickers
Chaddleworth Parish Council
Bucklebury Parish Council
Speen Parish Council
Thatcham Town Council
Winterbourne Parish Meeting
Burghfield Parish Council
Councillor Jackson-Doerge
Wokefield Parish Council
Christopher Brooks, Acting Returning Officer, Reading West Constituency
Susanne Nelson-Wehrmeyer, Acting Returning Officer, Wokingham Constituency

2.4 In addition it has been requested by Education Services that alternative locations if possible be identified for the following polling stations;

- St Mary’s School, Burghfield
- St Joseph’s RC School, Newport Road, Newbury
- John Rankin Junior School, Newbury
- Thatcham Park School, Thatcham
- Parsons Down Infant School, Thatcham

Burghfield Parish Council and Councillor Jackson-Doerge have however requested that St Marys School be retained as a polling station.

2.5 Speen Parish Council, Chaddleworth Parish Council, Winterbourne Parish Council, Christopher Brooks and Susanne Nelson-Wehrmeyer have all stated that they are happy with the existing arrangements.

2.6 Bucklebury Parish Council have raised an issue in regard to Chapel Row where electors currently have to travel to The Victory Room in Bucklebury Village to vote, they have suggest the provision of a caravan, this is not however considered appropriate due to the reasons set out in paragraph 1.13.

2.7 Thatcham Town Council raised comments in relation to the use of both the Burdwood Centre and Thatcham Baptist Church as polling stations due to their close proximity. It is not possible to use only one location due to the large number of electors, the only alternative is to use Spurcroft School, which is not considered appropriate and it is therefore proposed that the existing arrangements be retained.

2.8 Councillor Tony Vickers has made comments in regard to the use of the Waterside Centre and Scout Hut in Almond Avenue as polling stations. The Waterside Centre was only used at the elections on 5th May 2011 due to the unavailability of St Nicholas Church Hall and will not be used at future elections unless the Church Hall is not available. In regard to the Scout Hut in Almond Avenue Councillor Vickers has suggested the use of the British Legion Hall in Pelican Lane as an alternative. It is recommended that the Returning Officer be requested to explore this proposal further.

2.9 Under the provisions of The Representation of the People Act 1983, Returning Officers have the right to select schools as venues for polling stations; the decision to close the school or remain open is the Headteacher’s having regard to access...
health and safety etc. The legislation renders all mainstream schools liable for use by the Returning Officer including Academies, Community Schools, Foundation Schools, LA Nursery Schools, Voluntary Aided Schools, and Voluntary Controlled Schools.

2.10 Caravans are currently used at Wokefield and Farnborough. Wokefield Parish Council have requested that the existing arrangements continue. No comments have been received in regard to Farnborough.

2.11 Comments made by the Access Officer and officers employed by the Returning Officer to visit polling stations on Election Day in regard to access, signage, layout etc have been incorporated into the instructions given to staff employed at polling stations.

2.12 In regard to polling districts it is considered that due to the new development at Newbury Racecourse a second polling district should be created for Greenham Parish to cover this development. A new polling station be identified in or around the Racecourse, for use. When the level of occupation of the new properties becomes sufficient to justify it.

2.13 The second polling district would be part of the existing Parish Council. When the development is fully occupied. Consideration may need to be given to the warding of Greenham Parish but this would need to be the subject of a Community Governance Review.

2.14 Following the completion of the review the council is required to give public notice of the polling districts and polling places. Representations may then be made to the Electoral Commission on either of the following grounds;

(1) The local authority has failed to meet the reasonable requirements of electors

(2) The local authority has failed to take sufficient account of accessibility to disabled persons of the polling stations within a polling place.

Representations based on any other premise will not be considered.

3. Recommendations

(1) That an additional polling district be created in Greenham Parish to cover the area of the new development at Newbury Racecourse.

(2) That all polling districts in the District be designated as polling places.

(3) That the Returning Officer be requested to explore the use of alternative locations for the following properties currently used as polling stations St Mary’s School, Burghfield, St Joseph’s RC School, Newport Road, John Rankin Junior School, Thatcham Park School, Parsons Down Infant School and The Scout Hut Almond Avenue.

Appendices

Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment – Stage 1
### Consultees

**Local Stakeholders:** District Councillors, Parish Councillors, Acting Returning Officers  
**Officers Consulted:** Access Officer, Corporate Board  
**Trade Union:** N/a
APPENDIX A

Equality Impact Assessment – Stage One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of item being assessed:</th>
<th>Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Version and release date of item (if applicable):</td>
<td>Version 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner of item being assessed:</td>
<td>Head of Legal &amp; Electoral Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of assessor:</td>
<td>Phil Runacres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of assessment:</td>
<td>05.10.2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What are the main aims of the item?
To review Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations in the Council’s administrative area.

2. Note which groups may be affected by the item, consider how they may be affected and what sources of information have been used to determine this. (Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Affected</th>
<th>What might be the effect?</th>
<th>Information to support this.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability Groups</td>
<td>Any new polling stations will need to be assessed for accessibility arrangements.</td>
<td>Risk Assessments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further comments relating to the item:

3. Result (please tick by double-clicking on relevant box and click on ‘checked’)

- [ ] High Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
- [ ] Medium Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
- [✓] Low Relevance - This needs to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
- [ ] No Relevance - This does not need to undergo a Stage 2 Equality Impact Assessment
For items requiring a **Stage 2** equality impact assessment, begin the planning of this now, referring to the equality impact assessment guidance and Stage 2 template.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Identify next steps as appropriate:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner of Stage Two assessment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timescale for Stage Two assessment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Two not required:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Name:** Phil Runacres  
**Date:** 05.10.2011