

# North Tyneside Council

## Report to Council

### Date: 27 September 2012

#### ITEM 6

Title: Changes to Polling Places

Portfolio(s): Elected Mayor

Cabinet Member(s): Mrs Linda Arkley

Report from Directorate: Chief Executive's Office

Report Author: Vivienne Geary – Head of Legal, Governance and Commercial Services and Returning Officer (Tel: 643 5339)

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Wards affected: Valley and Cullercoats

#### PART 1

##### 1.1 Purpose:

The Council is requested to consider and agree:

- (i) the proposals attached in Appendix A to change the location of two polling places;
- (ii) to grant delegated authority to the Returning Officer to agree future changes to polling places, and report such changes to full Council.

##### 1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Council consider and agree:

1. The alternative locations for the polling places in Valley and Cullercoats wards as set out in Appendix A.
2. That, other than in relation to any formal review of polling places, delegated authority be granted to the Returning Officer, to identify and agree future changes to polling places, in consultation with Ward Members in whose wards the polling places are located, and to report any such changes to the next ordinary meeting of Council.

##### 1.3 Forward plan:

This report appears on the Forward Plan for period 1 September to 31 December 2012.

## 1.4 Council plan and policy framework:

This report does not specifically relate to any of the priorities contained in the 2012-15 Council Strategic Plan.

## 1.5 Information:

### 1.5.1 Background Information

Under the current elections legislation, the Council is required to designate a polling place for each polling district within its area and also to keep such polling places under review.

To encourage and facilitate voter participation, all electors should have reasonable facilities in which to vote. The Electoral Commission recommends that the following factors are taken into consideration when reviewing existing polling places or when assessing new polling places:

- The location: is it reasonably accessible within the polling district? Does it avoid barriers for the voter such as steep hills and major roads? Are there any convenient transport links?
- Size: Can it accommodate more than one polling station if required? If multiple polling stations are required, is the polling place ample enough to accommodate all voters going into and out of the polling stations, even where there is a high turnout?
- Suitability: is the building readily available in the event of any unscheduled elections? Is there any possibility that the building may be demolished as part of a new development? Is the building accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place?

Accessibility of some existing polling places, particularly temporary units (currently 12 such units are used) continue to present a challenge. It is necessary where possible to improve accessibility by the use of appropriate alternative facilities, and reducing the number of temporary units that are used. The Returning Officer therefore continues to keep the use of temporary units under review, and as opportunities arise to use alternative, more appropriate facilities these will be pursued.

### 1.5.2 Current Issues

Representations have been received from two schools which are currently used as polling places (Shiremoor Primary School and Monkhouse Primary School), requesting the use of alternative locations. Both of these schools close on polling day, using a training day to cover the closure. However, they would prefer to be able to set a training day when it is more convenient for both the pupils and school.

As a result of these requests, alternative facilities have been considered and potential alternative places identified. The proposals for the alternative polling places are as follows:

Valley Ward - to transfer the polling place in polling district KE, from Shiremoor Primary School to Shiremoor Community Centre. The proposed polling place is directly opposite the current one, therefore there will be minimal disruption for voters.

Cullercoats Ward - to transfer the polling place in polling district PA, from Monkhouse Primary School to the premises of Marden Residents Association. The proposed polling

place is in close proximity to the current one, and the Residents Association has indicated that it would welcome the opportunity to raise its profile in the community.

Maps of each polling district and further information relating to the current and proposed polling places are set out in Appendix A.

Any changes to polling stations will be highlighted on the poll cards sent out in October for the Police and Crime Commissioner's election to be held on 15 November 2012.

### **1.5.3 Delegation**

This report also recommends that a delegation be granted to the Returning Officer to identify and agree alternative polling places, other than in relation to full reviews of polling places, which are considered by full Council.

Local Authorities are responsible for designating polling places and polling districts. If possible a new polling station should be designated within the same polling place. The location of a polling station within a polling place is the Returning Officer's responsibility, and there is no need to seek Council approval for such a change. If however there is a need to change a polling place, Council's agreement is currently required.

The last review of polling places was considered and agreed by Council in November 2011. However, since that time requests for change have been received as identified in this report, and on occasion there can be circumstances (e.g. flooding, fire, vandalism) when a change of polling station is required at short notice. As part of the planning process therefore the Returning Officer keeps all polling places and stations under review and identifies possible alternatives should they be required.

If a delegation is granted to the Returning Officer as proposed in this report, this would allow the Returning Officer to make urgent decisions, in consultation with Ward Members, to change polling places (on a temporary or if appropriate, a permanent basis) therefore ensuring sufficient and suitable polling stations are available on polling day. Such changes should they occur would be reported to full Council at the next opportunity.

### **1.6 Decision options:**

The following decision options are available for consideration by Council:

Options in relation to recommendation 1

1. To agree to the recommendations, as set out In Appendix A.
2. To make no changes to the existing scheme.

Options in relation to recommendation 2

1. To grant delegated authority to the Returning Officer, to agree changes to polling places, in consultation with Ward Members of the ward(s) affected.
2. To make no changes to the current process.

## **1.7 Reasons for recommended option:**

In relation to recommendation 1, Option 1 is recommended for the following reason:

Monkhouse and Shiremoor Primary Schools have requested the use of alternative locations, as this will cause less disruption to the pupils and the schools.

In relation to recommendation 2, option 1 is recommended for the following reason:

There may be circumstances (e.g. flooding, fire, vandalism) when a change of polling station is required at short notice. If another room can be found within the existing polling place, the Returning Officer can make this decision, as the location of a polling station within a polling place is the Returning Officer's responsibility. If, however, there is a need to change a polling place, the agreement of Council is required. If a delegation is in place, as proposed in this report, this would ensure sufficient and suitable polling stations are available on polling day.

## **1.8 Appendices:**

Appendix A: Proposals for alternative locations for polling places and maps.

## **1.9 Contact officers:**

Viv Geary, Head of Legal, Governance and Commercial Services and Returning Officer (643 5339)

Joanne Macgregor, Manager Statutory Services and Business Support (643 5350)

Alison Campbell, Finance Business Manager (643 7038)

## **1.10 Background information:**

- a. Police and Crime Commissioners elections: Guidance for Local Returning Officers, published by the Electoral Commission.
- b. Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.
- c. Representations from Shiremoor Primary School and Monkhouse Primary School.
- d. Responses from polling station staff.

## **PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING**

### **2.1 Finance and other resources**

If the proposals are accepted by Council, there would be a saving in total of approximately £400 from reduced building hire costs.

### **2.2 Legal**

Under Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006, an authority is required to designate a polling place for each polling district.

### **2.3 Consultation/community engagement**

Representations have been received from two schools as described in the report. Ward Members in the affected wards have been consulted on the Returning Officer's proposals on alternative polling places. Views of Polling Station Inspectors and Officers for the wards were also obtained.

### **2.4 Human rights**

This report supports Protocol 1 Article 3 of the Human Rights Act, which provides a right to free elections.

### **2.5 Equalities and diversity**

The proposals support the Council's equality and diversity policies by seeking to provide all electors with reasonable and practicable facilities to vote. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in relation to the proposed changes to the polling places in Valley and Cullercoats Wards. Any further changes to the current polling place and district proposals will be subject to further equality impact assessments as they arise.

### **2.6 Risk management**

The relevant risks have been assessed with the Senior Risk Advisor and will be added to the risk register as appropriate.

### **2.7 Crime and disorder**

There are no implications arising from this report.

### **2.8 Environment and sustainability**

There are no implications arising from this report.

## **PART 3 - SIGN OFF**

- Chief Executive  X
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)  X (Deputy Mayor)
- Chief Finance Officer  X
- Monitoring Officer  X
- Strategic Manager Policy and Partnerships  X