

North Tyneside Council

Report to Council

Date: 19 November 2015

ITEM 7

Title: Change to Polling Places

Portfolio(s): Elected Mayor

Cabinet Member(s): Mrs Norma Redfearn

Report from Service

Area: Law and Governance

Responsible Officer: Vivienne M. Geary – Head of Law and Governance and Returning Officer (Tel: (0191) 643 5339)

Wards affected: Battle Hill, Howdon and Valley

PART 1

1.1 Executive Summary:

Following on from the May 2015 election a number of issues (detailed in the body of the report) have been identified with the polling places listed below:

- Broadway Court, Battle Hill (Battle Hill Ward)
- St Peter's Road Changing Rooms, Wallsend (Howdon Ward)
- Cheviot View, West Allotment (Valley Ward)

The following alternative polling places are proposed:

- Temporary cabin for 2016 only located in the grounds of Broadway Court, Battle Hill (Battle Hill Ward)
- Temporary cabin located in the car park of St Peter's Road Changing Rooms, Wallsend (Howdon Ward)
- West Allotment Community Centre, Benton Road, West Allotment (Valley Ward)

Ward Members in the affected ward and the Elected Mayor have been consulted on the Returning Officer's proposal on the alternative polling places and no objections have been raised.

These proposals will be in place for the elections to be held in May 2016.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that Council consider and agree the alternative locations for polling places as set out in the Appendix.

1.3 Forward Plan:

Notice of this report has been given and it first appeared on the Forward Plan that was published on 14 September 2015.

1.4 Council Plan and Policy Framework

This report does not specifically relate to any of the priorities contained in the 2014 -18 Our North Tyneside Plan.

1.5 Information:

1.5.1 Background

Under the current elections legislation, the Authority 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?
- **Accessibility:** Is the building accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place?

1.5.2 Current Issues

Broadway Court, Bellshill Close, Wallsend (Polling District HE – Battle Hill Ward)

Broadway Court sheltered accommodation is currently undergoing extensive renovation under the PFI Quality Homes Programme, and is therefore not available to be used as a polling station in 2016. This work is planned to be completed by 2017 and the building should then be available to be used as a polling station for future elections. The surrounding area has limited facilities for use as a polling station and therefore it is proposed to site a temporary station for elections taking place throughout 2016. The location of the temporary cabin will be in close proximity to Broadway Court for the convenience of electors.

St. Peter's Road Changing Rooms, St. Peter's Road, Howdon (Polling District JD – Howdon Ward)

The changing facilities at the north end of St. Peter's Road have been used as a polling station for the last 2 years. Access issues have been identified during this period of time, therefore it has been necessary to look for an alternative facility. The polling district does not offer any other suitable buildings that can be utilised as a polling station, and

therefore it is proposed to position a temporary cabin in the car park of the changing rooms. Although a temporary cabin is not the preferred choice, in the absence of a suitable alternative it is the only facility available, and it is envisaged that this will be a permanent arrangement.

Cheviot View Sheltered Accommodation, West Street, West Allotment (Polling District KA – Valley Ward)

Cheviot View is no longer available to use as a polling station, and therefore it has been necessary to look for an alternative facility it is proposed to relocate the polling station to the West Allotment Community Centre, located on Benton Road, West Allotment. This will be a permanent move.

A map of the polling districts affected and further information relating to the current and proposed polling places are set out in the Appendix.

Letters informing affected electors of the changes will be sent out, and it will also be highlighted on the poll cards, sent out in April for the combined Police and Crime Commissioners/Local Election to be held on 5 May 2016.

1.6 Decision options:

The following decision options are available for consideration by Council.

Option 1

To agree to the recommendations, as set out in the Appendix.

Option 2

To request that officers undertake further work to identify alternative proposals to the ones submitted to Council and report back to the next Council meeting.

Option 1 is the recommended option.

1.7 Reasons for recommended option:

Option 1 is recommended for the following reasons:

Broadway Court is not available to use as a polling place in 2016, the use of a temporary cabin will ensure that voters have a polling station which is located in a familiar and convenient place.

St. Peter's Road Changing Room does not provide a suitable level of access for a polling station. The temporary cabin will be positioned in the sports ground's car park, providing ample parking that will not encroach on residents' access to their properties. The temporary cabin will provide improved access to voters.

Cheviot View is no longer available to use as a polling place. West Allotment Community Centre is accessible to all voters, and is located in a central position within the KA polling district. The centre also has off road parking.

1.8 Appendices:

Appendix: Proposed change to polling places.

1.9 Contact officers:

Viv Geary, Head of Law and Governance and Returning Officer (643 5339)

Joanne Macgregor, Manager Statutory Services (643 5350)

Alison Campbell, Finance Business Manager (643 7038)

1.10 Background information:

The following information/background papers have been used in the compilation of this report and are available at the office of the author:

- (1) Electoral Commission's Guidance for (Acting) Returning Officers for the UK Parliamentary general election and local government elections in England on 7 May 2015.
- (2) Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act 1983 as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

PART 2 – COMPLIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF DECISION MAKING

2.1 Finance and other resources

If the proposals are accepted by Council, there would be an increased cost of approximately £1,900 for elections in 2016, reducing to £1,100 in 2017 once the station in Broadway Court is restored. The additional cost can be contained by the current Elections budget.

2.2 Legal

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

2.3 Consultation/community engagement

Ward Members in the affected wards and the Elected Mayor have been consulted on the Returning Officer's proposal on the alternative polling places and no objections have been raised.

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 Authority'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 change to the polling place

in Valley, Battle Hill and Howdon 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 changes have been assessed for any relevant risks with the Senior Risk Advisor and if appropriate, will be added to the risk register.

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

- Deputy Chief Executive
- Head(s) of Service
- Mayor/Cabinet Member(s)
- Chief Finance Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of Corporate Strategy