

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 18 July 2019

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Returning Officer – David Parr

**SUBJECT:** Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places incorporating the Ward Boundary Review

**PORTFOLIO:** Resources

**WARD(S):** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 Local Authorities have always been required to divide their area into Polling Districts for the purposes of elections, to designate Polling Places for these Polling Districts, and to keep these under review.

1.2 Under Section 18C(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) local authorities must carry out and complete a review of polling districts and polling places in the period specified by Section 18C(2)(a) of the RPA 1983. The compulsory review must be started and completed between 2 January 2019 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive).

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- (1) authority be given for the publication of the notice of the Polling Districts, Polling Places Review and incorporate the ward boundary review; and**
- (2) a Working Party of 6 Members (4 Labour, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Conservative) be appointed to undertake the review of polling districts and polling places, following consultation, as required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and make recommendations to Executive Board.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 A **Polling District** is the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts within which a Polling Place can be determined which is convenient to electors.

3.2 A **Polling Place** is the building or area in which Polling Stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.

3.3 The **Polling Station** is the room or building where the poll takes place which is chosen by the Returning Officer for the election.

### 3.4 The Review has three stages:-

#### 3.4.1 The Preliminary Stage

The first stage of the process involves giving notice of the Review. It is intended that this will be published July 2019. At the same time, all interested parties, including elected members and disability groups, will be notified of the review and invited to make representations.

#### 3.4.2 The Proposal Stage

The Authority must devise a proposal for the new Polling District and Polling Place arrangements, taking into account the new amendments from the ward boundary review. There is no requirement to change any existing arrangements, however, any change or decision to make no change must be supported by a reason. In practical terms, it is ideal to identify good quality Polling Stations first so that these can be used to build Polling Places and then Polling Districts. A review of existing Polling Stations, to assist both the Authority in drawing up its proposals and the Returning Officer in commenting on the proposals, will be published in July 2019. In making a decision on the proposals, there are two key factors which must be addressed:

- The reasonable requirements of the electors
- The accessibility for disabled persons to the probable Polling Stations within the Polling Place.

#### 3.4.3 The Consultation Stage

The consultation stage is for representations and comments on the local authority proposals for Polling Districts and Places. There are two parts to this:

- A submission from the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer is obliged under the Act to make a submission to the Authority on the proposals.
- Submissions from other persons and bodies.

3.5 Following the consultation stage, the Authority must make its final decisions on the review, taking into account all the representations received.

3.6 The last formal review of Polling Districts and Polling Places was undertaken in 2015. Since that time, Polling Stations have been reviewed at election times by the Returning Officer. If any changes have been deemed necessary, Ward Members have usually been informally consulted and any changes made.

3.7 Given the nature of the review and the imminent timescale, establishing a Working Party to undertake this Review would ensure that

the final decision could be made and published prior to publication of the Register of Electors on 1 December 2019. The final decision would be made by full Council in October 2019.

#### **4.0 POLICY, FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no specific policy implications although it is important to ensure that all electors have equal access to polling stations and places in line with the Council's priority on accessibility of services. Subject to the decisions on the location of polling stations there may or may not be financial implications.

#### **5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

- 5.1 **Children and Young People in Halton** – If polling stations are situated in the right places it could encourage voter turnout for electors in this age group.
- 5.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton** – none.
- 5.3 **A Healthy Halton** – The provision of polling stations in suitable locations could encourage engagement with the democratic process and in turn promote a healthy living environment.
- 5.4 **A Safer Halton** – The location of polling stations in a safe environment for all electors could encourage voter turnout.
- 5.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal** – none.

#### **6.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 6.1 If the Working Party is not appointed the review required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 will not be completed.

#### **7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 7.1 Historically, every effort has been made to make sure that all polling buildings are accessible for electors with disabilities. At the most recent elections problems were encountered with access for wheelchair users and action was taken on the day to enable electors to exercise their right to vote. It is important to ensure that all electors have equal access to polling stations and places in line with the Council's priority on accessibility of services.

#### **8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.