

# REPORT TO COUNCIL

REPORT OF: RETURNING OFFICER

REPORT NO. DEM10

DATE: 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2008

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Electoral Administration Act 2006: Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places, and Polling Stations</b>
<b>FORWARD PLAN ITEM:</b>	Yes
<b>DATE WHEN FIRST APPEARED IN FORWARD PLAN:</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> November 2007 to 29 <sup>th</sup> February 2008
<b>KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:</b>	N/A – Legislative requirement for Council decision

<b>COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:</b>	Access & Engagement Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ray Auger	
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY:</b>	Category M: Statutory requirement	
<b>CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:</b>	Minor	
<b>FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:</b>	Unless exempt, this report is a public document and available from the Council's website: <a href="http://www.southkesteven.gov.uk">www.southkesteven.gov.uk</a>	
<b>INITIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>Carried out and appended to the report: Yes</b>	<b>Full impact assessment required: Yes</b>
<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS:</b>	Electoral Commission circular on guidance for conducting the review	

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

As part of new legislative requirements under the Electoral Administration Act 2006, each local authority must undertake a complete review of all polling districts, polling places and polling stations within their area. Polling districts and polling places are the responsibility of the local authority; the Returning Officer is responsible for the polling stations.

This review is a comprehensive one, with a detailed report prepared for each polling district, place and station, supplemented with plans, and covers such issues as access for the electorate, audit of the station for disabled voters, and location in relation to population figures. The review must then be subject to advertisement and consultation on the polling districts and places, involving stakeholders such as parish councils, elected members, community centres, social groups, political parties, voluntary organisations etc. In addition to this work, the Returning Officer must prepare a report for all the public buildings in the district – not just those owned by the authority, or those currently used as a polling station – and assess their potential use as polling places.

Appended to this report are the final proposals for the new polling districts and polling places for approval by the Council.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Council is recommended to**

- (1) approve the proposals for the new polling districts and polling places as appended to this report, taking into account all representations made;**
- (2) authorise the publication of the final proposals as required by the legislation prior to re-publication of the current electoral register on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008.**

## **3. DETAILS OF REPORT**

3.1 The aim of the review is that local authorities demonstrate, as far as practicable, they have met the criteria set out in legislation (Representation of the People Act 1983 section 18C). Authorities must:

- Seek to ensure that all electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
- 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.

3.2 When conducting the review, all decisions must be consulted upon, measured and practical. The whole process should be as transparent and open as possible to avoid possible conflict.

3.3 The prescribed stages of the review have now been completed (e.g. preparation of reference documents such as maps, current elector numbers, records on conditions and accessibility of current polling places), publication of the notice of review, the consultation process and the collation of the feedback and comments received. The Returning Officer is also required to comment on all existing polling stations and any new polling places that are proposed.

3.4 There were no objections raised following consultation from:

1. the district council's residents' survey
2. the council's website
3. disability groups
4. parish councils (with the exception of Colsterworth and Morton who have requested a change to the current polling place)

Comments have been received from several Councillors which have been taken into account in the outline proposals.

3.5 Appended to this report are the proposed new polling districts and polling places identified for the urban wards of Grantham, Stamford, Bourne and The Deepings. For the rural areas, new polling places have been identified for Colsterworth and Morton but these are subject to site visits and an oral update can be given at the meeting.

#### **4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

If the Council approves these proposals, approximately £2,500 savings will accrue in terms of hire of rooms and staffing.

#### **5. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND ASSESSED**

During the process of the review, other public buildings were considered and assessed for access, location in relation to the majority of electors, and health and safety issues. Balance had to be given between access and facilities and the distance to a station applying reasonable methodology.

#### **6. COMMENTS OF CORPORATE HEAD OF FINANCE AND RESOURCES (SECTION 151 OFFICER)**

The Service Manager has confirmed that the proposals can be contained within existing budget provision and are likely to result in £2,000 savings compared to previous arrangements.

## **7. COMMENTS OF THE SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL (MONITORING OFFICER)**

This review was essential to rationalise the allocation of polling places throughout the district and the polling districts in urban areas. The legislation does not allow for review of polling districts for rural areas. These districts must remain the same as the parish boundaries.

The last review was carried out in 1997. Since that time polling places have been added without consideration of existing places and polling districts in urban areas have increased substantially in size.

This work has been undertaken as a statutory requirement. It has involved considerable staff time to complete to this stage and the use of temporary staff has been necessary to enable the operation of the normal statutory service to continue.

Further work will be necessary after the recommendations have been agreed to allow the integration of these proposals within the software system ready for re-publication of the electoral register.

## **8. CONTACT OFFICER**

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