

Allerdale Borough Council

Council – 30 January 2019

Polling Districts and Polling Places Review

The Reason for the Decision:	It is a statutory requirement that authorities conduct a review of polling districts every five years; the review is also necessary because of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's changes to the Allerdale wards, effective from May 2019
Summary of options considered:	To approve amendments to a number of polling districts and to approve a polling scheme for the authority
Recommendations:	That Council approves: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The amendments to the polling districts as set out in Appendix A to the report2. The polling scheme as set out in Appendix B to the report
Financial / Resource Implications	A reduction in the number of polling stations may present some cost savings in terms of venue hire and staff payments. These savings will be offset if additional staff have to be employed at neighbouring polling stations in line with Electoral Commission guidance on elector ratios, and if electors choose to set up a postal vote rather than travel to a different polling station.
Legal / Governance Implications	Implications for electoral administration of the borough and the effective running of elections
Community Safety Implications	None
Health and Safety and Risk Management Implications	None
Equality Duty considered / Impact Assessment completed	Yes – Copeland Disability Forum has inspected proposed new polling stations

Wards Affected:	All Allerdale Borough Council wards
Is this a Key Decision:	Yes
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Joan Ellis
Lead Officer	Andrew Seekings Electoral Registration Officer andrew.seekings@allerdale.gov.uk

Report Implications

Community Safety	N	Financial	Y
Legal	Y	Partnership	N
Social Inclusion	Y	Asset Management	N
Equality Duty	Y	Health and Safety	N
Employment (internal)	N	Employment (external to the Council)	N

Background Papers

- The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013
- Electoral Commission: Guidance on reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, compulsory polling district and polling place reviews must be carried out every five years.
- 1.2 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England conducted a review of Allerdale in 2016/17 and their recommendations will be implemented at the 2 May 2019 Allerdale elections. The amendments to some of the Allerdale ward boundaries require changes to polling districts because currently some of the new wards are split by a polling district, which is not acceptable.
- 1.3 An agreed polling scheme will need to be in place for the Allerdale elections on 2 May 2019.

2.0 Statutory Consultation Process

- 2.1 All Allerdale councillors were consulted in September 2018 on their views on the current polling arrangements in their ward. Their comments were taken into consideration before the proposed scheme was published for consultation.

- 2.2 As part of the statutory process, the Acting Returning Officers (AROs) for all of the parliamentary constituencies within the Allerdale area were consulted in December 2018 on the proposed polling scheme. The AROs for Copeland and Penrith and the Border have responded to state that they are happy with the proposals. The proposals of the ARO for the Workington constituency are set out in section 5.5 of this report.
- 2.3 The Members of Parliament for the Workington, Penrith and the Border and Copeland constituencies were consulted and all have responded to say they have no comment to make.
- 2.4 The local disability forums for Allerdale, Copeland and Eden were consulted and asked for their views on the proposed new polling stations. The Copeland Disability Forum (CDF) carries out accessibility inspections on behalf of the Allerdale Forum, and the proposed new stations in the Copeland and Workington constituencies were inspected on 15 January 2019. There are no proposed new stations within the Penrith and the Border constituency.
- 2.5 Once the review has been agreed by council a statutory notice must be published at least fourteen calendar days before the new version of the electoral register is published. The new register will be published on 1 March 2019 and it is this register that will be in use for the election.
- 2.6 Certain persons have a right of representation through the Electoral Commission. The Commission may, if it agrees with the representation, direct the authority to make any alterations to the polling places that they think necessary. Any such representation and direction would be reported to council.

3.0 Polling Districts

- 3.1 Polling districts are geographical areas created by subdividing a Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election. In England, each parish must be a separate polling district unless there are special circumstances. This means that a parish must not be in a polling district which has a part of a different parish within it, or any un-parished part of the local authority area within it, unless any of the special circumstances apply (for example if the number of electors in the parish is so small as to make it unfeasible to have a separate polling district).
- 3.2 The re-drawing of the Allerdale ward boundaries has meant that some of the current polling districts will be split across two different wards. A boundary review of the county council divisions which took effect in 2013 also had the effect of splitting some polling districts and these have been captured with this review.
- 3.3 As well as amending any obvious anomalies such as splitting of wards or divisions, the review has also sought to simplify some of the more quirky polling district boundaries.

- 3.4 Whilst the majority of the polling district amendments are fairly minor and affect small numbers of electors, some are more significant and these are set out in more detail below.
- 3.5 The Local Government Boundary Commissioners, in redrawing the Allerdale ward boundaries, drew the Flimby ward boundary so as to include the whole of Whitecroft and Whitecroft Court, to the south of Maryport. This means that the residents in those streets will now need to vote in the Flimby ward rather than in the neighbouring Maryport South ward. An additional complication is that those properties still fall within the original Maryport parish ward therefore a separate polling district will be drawn for that area, and if the parish ward election is contested a ballot box will be allocated to the Flimby polling stations to enable those electors to vote in the correct parish election.
- 3.6 The redrawing of the Allerdale ward boundaries in Workington has resulted in a number of electors in Chaucer Road, currently in the Moorclose ward, being moved into the neighbouring St John's ward.
- 3.7 An historic anomaly in the drawing of polling districts in the Moss Bay ward puts 26 electors in polling district CU7. With the redrawing of the ward boundaries it is more sensible to move those properties into polling district CU4, which will be part of the new Moss Bay and Moorclose ward. A similar anomaly puts 11 properties in Holyoake Terrace, Workington in the CV6 polling district that should rightly sit in the CV9 polling district.
- 3.5 The proposals for a reduction in polling stations will, if approved, require a splitting of polling districts in some cases so that electors in the affected area can be allocated to different new polling stations depending on distance. This will ensure that everyone from a polling district votes at the same polling station.
- 3.6 Maps are attached to Appendix A that show the amendments (hand drawn as unable to set on GIS) and large scale maps of the proposed amendments will be available at the council meeting.

4.0 Polling Scheme

- 4.1 There are currently 113 polling stations in use across Allerdale, however some of these are double stations, i.e. electors from two different polling districts vote in the station, and each has a separate Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk(s).
- 4.2 Each polling district must be allocated to a polling station which should, where possible, be situated within the polling district. If there are no suitable premises within the polling district then the polling station can be situated in a neighbouring polling district but all attempts should be made to ensure it is within a reasonable distance.
- 4.3 Since 2006, electors have been able to access postal voting on demand and as a result the number of postal voters has increased over the years.

Currently there are 14,432 permanent postal votes in place within Allerdale. A number of temporary postal vote applications are always expected in the lead up to an election.

- 4.4 The comments received from elected members when consulted on polling arrangements within their ward have resulted in a number of proposed new stations for 2019. These are highlighted in the attached Appendix B. All proposed new stations have been inspected by the Copeland Disability Forum (CDF).
- 4.5 The CDF has raised a concern about access for wheelchair users to the proposed polling station at Kirkbride as the car park surface is gravelled. Officers will work with the Bowling Club to ensure all possible measures will be put in place to enable wheelchair users to access the building (see further in section 4.12). There were no concerns raised about any of the other proposed polling stations, although the lack of a dedicated car park for Broughton Moor Community Centre was flagged as a concern.
- 4.6 Victoria Junior School has asked not to be used as a polling station for May 2019 only, as the school was forced to close for a number of days in 2018 because of a gas leak. The Head Teacher is therefore reluctant to close the school for an additional day during the same school year. As a temporary measure electors will be allocated to the neighbouring polling station within the ward, Queen Street Hall.
- 4.7 The Acting Returning Officer for the Workington constituency has proposed that a small number of polling stations no longer be used. These are included in the schedule at Appendix B along with the rationale behind the proposals.
- 4.8 It is always a challenge to recruit sufficient presiding officers to run the polling stations. The role is demanding and carries a great deal of responsibility so staff must have appropriate experience and skills. Reducing the number of presiding officers required will help to ensure that the remaining stations have high calibre staff running them, whilst maintaining a small reserve list of Presiding Officers to cover for unexpected absences or illness on the day itself. Poll clerk ratios may need to be increased at the stations that will receive a high number of electors, however it is not difficult to recruit additional poll clerks.
- 4.9 Castles and Coasts Housing Association advised in 2017 that Laybourn House would no longer be available as a polling station because of safeguarding issues for the residents. There are no suitable alternatives in the polling district so it is proposed to allocate electors to St Gregory's RC Primary School. However, the school is currently undergoing building works that affect the room used as a polling station. The access issues this causes will mean school having to close down for the day if it is used as a polling place for the May 2019 elections. All options will be investigated prior to making a decision on appropriate polling arrangements for those polling districts for May 2019. The usual room in St Gregory's School will be available for use from the autumn term of 2019.

- 4.10 There are currently three polling stations in Aspatria. The stations for polling districts AF and AH are both very close to the boundary to polling district AG, meaning that many electors will be closer to one of the neighbouring polling stations than the one they are currently allocated to. It is proposed to discontinue using Aspatria Community Centre as a polling station for polling district AG, and to instead split the polling district as set out on the attached map at Appendix A, and send electors to the nearest neighbouring station.
- 4.11 Maryport is well served by polling stations and it is proposed that Ellenborough Social Welfare Club is no longer used. The polling districts using that station will be reallocated between the nearest neighbouring stations.
- 4.12 Where possible, suitable alternatives have been identified that can be used in place of local schools that need to close during polling, including Broughton Moor and Seaton. The Kirkbride Learning Centre has now closed and the school could not remain open during polling if a room in the main building was used instead. Kirkbride Bowling Club has been identified, although the Disability Forum have raised some concerns about accessibility for wheelchair users because of a gravelled car park. As mentioned above, work is ongoing to work with Kirkbride Bowling Club to ensure wheelchair access is available on the day, including options around using an adjoining car park, and if extra resource is required it will be provided.
- 4.13 St Mary's RC Primary School in Workington had asked not to be used again as a polling station because of disruption and parental complaints. It is proposed that electors instead vote at The Oval Centre, Salterbeck.
- 4.14 Electors who would normally vote in person at stations that are proposed to close will be allocated to the next nearest polling station and will be given information about the postal vote application process. Polling districts will be split where necessary to ensure that all electors in a polling district vote at the same polling station.

5.0 Finance/Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are hire costs and staffing costs associated with polling stations. Typically the average polling station hire cost is around £150 - £200. Staff costs are around £400 for a smaller station up to £700 for the largest stations, plus mileage and training expenses. The Electoral Commission provides guidance on elector ratios at polling stations, so increasing the size of electorate voting at a station may mean that one or two additional poll clerks are required.
- 5.2 Electors may choose to apply for a postal vote rather than use a different polling station and there will be costs associated with this.

6.0 Legal Implications and Risks

6.1 The procedure for conducting a Polling District Review is set out in legislation and all statutory requirements have been complied with.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 That Council approves:

1. The amendments to the Allerdale polling districts as set out in Appendix A to the report
2. The Allerdale Polling Scheme as set out in Appendix B to the report

Appendices:

- Appendix A Proposed polling district amendments
- Appendix B Proposed polling scheme

Lindsay Tomlinson
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