

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Electoral Registration Officer
to

General Purposes Committee

on

11th February 2008

Report prepared by:
Andrew Wallace, Head of Democratic Services

Agenda
Item No.

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2007

A Part 1

1. Purpose of Report

To seek approval to proposed amendments to polling districts and polling places in the Parliamentary Constituencies of Southend West and so much of Rochford and Southend East as falls within the Borough.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That polling places be defined as the polling district except for those as detailed in **Appendix 2** to this report where the polling place be extended to include the existing polling station as it is outside the relevant polling district.
- 2.2 Polling district **EA** be split to create a new polling district incorporating Shoebury Garrison Site with effect from the audit of the Register to be carried out in the autumn of 2008.

That delegated authority be given to the Electoral Registration Officer, in consultation with the chairman, to make any necessary changes to polling places that may arise other than as part of a review.

3. Background

3.1 Introduction

- (a) Under the representation of the People Act 1983, the Council has a duty to divide the Borough into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district. It also has to keep these arrangements under review.
- (b) Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a number of changes to the 1983 Act in respect of the way reviews must be undertaken.

- (c) In compliance with the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, every Council in England and Wales must have undertaken a review of all the polling districts and polling places in its area. Following this initial review the Council is required to complete a further review every four years.
- (d) The Council may undertake reviews of all or some of the polling districts or polling places at any time but must still undertake a full review of each within four years of the previous review.
- (e) For administrative convenience it would seem sensible to review all polling districts and polling places on a regular four yearly cycle, regardless of whether or not a particular polling district or place has been reviewed for some reason (e.g. because of an influx of electors in an area or non availability of a building designated as a polling place) in the intervening period. This will help in ensuring that a consistent approach is taken across the Borough.
- (f) The arrangements made for parliamentary elections are also used at all other elections.
- (g) The Council has powers to change polling places and polling district boundaries, but not Ward or Parish boundaries. These are defined as follows:

- **A Polling District** is the geographical sub division of an electoral ward. The Council is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts for UK Parliamentary elections and for keeping polling districts under review.

When designating polling districts, the Council must seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

- **A Polling Place** is the area in which a polling station is located.
- **A Polling station** is the actual building where the process of voting takes place. It must be located in the polling place designated for the particular polling district. However the decision on the location of a Polling Station is a matter for the Returning Officer.

- (h) The Council must:
 - (i) Seek to ensure that all the electors in the Constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;

- (ii) 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 that are disabled, and when considering designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons (whilst the Act refers to polling places this is a drafting error and the act should refer to polling stations).

3.2 Proposal Details

- (a) Attached at **Appendix 1** are details of the existing polling districts:
 - Each polling district is designated as a polling place.
 - The number of electors as at 1st July 2007.
- (b) Attached at Appendix 2 are details of proposed amendments to Polling Districts / Places.
- (c) An audit checklist for each of the existing polling stations was completed by the Presiding Officer on duty at the elections held in May 2007 and also by the booking contact for each of the premises. It should be noted that in some cases access at a polling station is not as would be desired in an ideal world. Where there are steps or other access issues, Electoral and Polling station staff will always do whatever is reasonable to ensure voters, including those with disabilities are able to access the polling station and cast their vote.
- (d) Since the last review undertaken there has been a substantial increase in the number of electors choosing to vote by post. There are currently 13,600 postal voters, approximately 11% of the electorate, and this reduces the number of electors that opt to vote in person at polling stations.
- (e) The allocation of Polling Stations is a matter for the Returning Officer but for the Committee's information the following criteria are applied.
- (f) Recently there have been concerns about the use of mobile units as polling stations and portable buildings are only used as a last resort.
- (g) In considering their continuing suitability officers have considered public safety, the availability of buildings, accessibility, location in relation to the centres of population in the polling district, transport links and overall suitability.

There is statutory power to use public buildings free of charge but wherever possible the use of schools particularly junior or primary is avoided.

4. Corporate Implications

4.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Critical Priorities

Excellent Council

4.2 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

4.3 Legal Implications

The Council is required to review Polling Districts or Polling Places every four years (Electoral Administration Act 2006).

4.4 People Implications

The Council must ensure that sufficient Polling Districts / Polling Places are designed to afford the maximum opportunity for electors to vote.

4.5 Property Implications

None

4.6 Consultation

Statutory consultation via press advertisement, responses will be reported at the meeting.

4.7 Equalities Impact Assessment

See paragraph 3.1 (h) (ii).

4.8 Risk Assessment

Risk assessment carried out on Polling Stations which do not form part of this report. Polling Districts and Places are geographical areas of the Borough.

4.9 Value for Money

N/A

4.10 Community Safety Implications

N/A

4.11 Environmental Impact

N/A

5. Background Papers

None

6. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Current Polling Stations / Places

Appendix 2 – 2007 / 08 Polling Station Assessment