

**REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RESOURCES AND EXECUTIVE**

**Date of Meeting: Scrutiny Committee Resources – 17 September 2014**

**Executive – 7 October 2014**

**Council – 15 October 2014**

**Report of: Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support**

**Title: The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places within the Exeter Parliamentary Constituency**

**Is this a Key Decision?**

No

**Is this an Executive or Council Function?**

Council

**1. What is the report about?**

1.1 This report sets out for consideration by the Scrutiny Resources Committee proposals for new polling district and polling places arrangements recommended as a result of the Council's responsibilities under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and Schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

**2. Recommendations:**

2.1 To adopt the proposals at below for implementation from a revised register of electors to be published on 1 December 2014.

2.2 For the Council to formally publish its final report on the Review of Parliamentary Polling Districts and Places within the Exeter Constituency on 16 October 2014, as required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

2.3 For the Council to complete a further review by 31 January 2020, as required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

**3. Reasons for the recommendation:**

3.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires each Council to carry out a review of polling districts and places for all of the existing Parliamentary Constituencies contained within its boundaries. The review must be carried out between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015.

3.2 Each Council is subsequently required to carry out a polling district and polling place review every fifth year. The review must be carried out during a sixteen month period that starts every fifth year after 1 October 2013. The last review was approved by the Council on 18 October 2011.

**4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.**

4.1 There would be some officer time involved in redrawing the appropriate polling district boundaries to match the proposals contained within this report. This can be contained within existing resources.

4.2 There would be no significant change in the costs of running polling stations if the proposals were adopted as the costs of an additional polling station within Exwick would be more than outweighed by reducing the existing double station at Exwick Community Centre to a single station, as well as removing the need to hire in a temporary station at Orwell Garth.

**5. Section 151 Officer Comments:**

5.1 There are no financial implications contained within this report.

**6. What are the legal aspects?**

6.1 There are no issues to raise on the content of this report.

**7. Monitoring Officer's comments:**

7.1 There are no issues to raise on the content of this report.

**8. Report details:**

8.1 A public consultation phase was carried out between 9 June and 14 July 2014. Additionally, all Exeter City and Devon County Councillors, political parties and other stakeholders such as disability charities were contacted. (See list at Appendix A). Further opportunity to comment on the proposals put forward by the Acting Returning Officers for the Exeter Parliamentary Constituency and the part of the East Devon Parliamentary Constituency which falls within Exeter City Council, was carried out until 1 August 2014.

8.2 Since the last polling district review carried out in 2011, Exeter has grown in terms of residential housing (up 3%) and registered electors (up 4.5%). There continues to be several anticipated housing developments in the pipeline.

8.3 Due to its urban nature, to afford the maximum flexibility in selecting polling stations (particularly if required at short notice), Exeter City Council has always defined its polling places as being coterminous with its polling district boundaries. The only exception to this rule being where the polling station may be located just outside of the ward boundary. It is recommended that this practice be continued.

8.4 Exwick Ward (see Map A)

The number of polling districts in the Exwick Ward was reduced from four to three following the Review carried out in 2007. The Exeter Civil Service Sports Club was subsequently used as a polling station. However, this venue has not been available for a number of years and the Thatched House Inn has been successfully used in its place.

The current number of electors registered to vote in the relevant polling district (DB) is just over 2,000. Although the venue can cope with average turnouts of 30 – 40%, there is some doubt that it will have sufficient space to deal with larger turnouts, particularly with respect to the forthcoming Parliamentary election, where turnout could be as high as 70%.

Therefore it is recommended that Exwick Ward reverts to four polling districts based around the existing three polling stations, together with an additional polling station at Exwick Parish Hall (see Map A). It is estimated that this will reduce the electorate at the Thatched House Inn to a more manageable 1500. In order to balance numbers a reduction of approximately 500 will be made from DC Exwick Community Centre, which will reduce the need to provide a double station at that venue.

#### 8.5 Topsham Ward (Map B)

The residential developments on the site of the Old Royal Navy Stores and adjacent areas continue to become inhabited, with further developments also being proposed.

Since the last Polling District Review in 2011 a Community Room has become available within the Rydon's housing development (See Map B). This would be ideally situated as a polling station and be readily accessible for the residents of the new developments. Therefore it is recommended that a new polling district be created (SD) in addition to the three existing polling districts in Topsham Ward.

It is recommended that, given the distances involved, the polling district at SC based around Topsham AFC as a polling station is retained to take account of the continuing and future residential development in that area.

Given the expected rate of growth over the next few years, the number of electors in this new polling district area will be monitored. Therefore, this may require a further specific review before the next statutory polling district review is due.

#### 8.6 Pinhoe Ward (Map C)

Polling District JA is served by a mobile polling station based at Orwell Garth. Although meeting the geographical needs of the electors in that area, the polling station accommodation itself is unsatisfactory for electors, staff and election tellers. For example, there are no toilet facilities available for staff other than by consent with a nearby resident, or by the provision of temporary facilities. Similarly, it is difficult for the secrecy of those voting to be maintained due to the type of temporary accommodation which is available, which also affects disabled access which is virtually non-existent. Additionally, the costs of providing the temporary structure are significantly higher than for any other polling station.

It is therefore recommended that the Polling Place for JA is extended to include Willowbrook School.

Whilst it is recognised that this is outside the current polling place which would necessitate the polling place area being extended, it is felt that this offers a far more sustainable proposal than that which currently exists. Facilities are available at the school which would allow the school to function as normal on election day without the need to close.

**9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?**

9.1 By making polling districts and places coterminous, allows the (Acting) Returning Officer discretion to locate a Polling Station within that area which best meets the needs of the area and the electors within in.

**10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?**

10.1 There are no risks associated with the proposals.

**11. What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity; health and wellbeing; safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, community safety and the environment?**

11.1 By ensuring that polling stations are, within the constraints of the buildings available, as accessible as possible impacts on equality issues especially for the disabled elector.

**12. Are there any other options?**

12.1 An option which has been considered is an overall reduction in the numbers of polling stations used for elections. This could, on paper, give rise to some savings for the Council in terms of lower hire fees for building hire, and staff costs. However, Members will be aware of the issues surrounding queues at polling stations at the last Parliamentary election which, it is understood, were attributable to a reduction in the number of polling stations in those areas, therefore increasing elector numbers beyond that which could be reasonably handled.

12.2 The number of polling stations in the City allows for efficient running of all types of elections, and also for ease of access to them for the City's electors. To this end, it is felt unnecessary, and potentially risky, to reduce the numbers.

**John Street**

**Corporate Manager, Democratic & Civic Support and Returning Officer**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)**

**Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

Correspondence received from consultation exercise

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