

Subject:

Status: For Publication

Polling District Review Update

Report to:

Performance Overview and Scrutiny

Date:

4 September 2008

Report of: Returning Officer

Key Decision:

Forward Plan

General Exception

Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To present an update to the Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the May 2008 Election as requested.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities and associated corporate objectives.

- Delivering quality services to our customers

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- Strategic Risk – not completing the review would mean the Council is not complying with the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

4.1 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 the polling places and polling districts under review.

- 4.2 Section 16 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a duty on Councils to undertake a review of Polling Places, Polling Districts and Access arrangements, to be completed by 31st December 2007 and thereafter every four years. The purpose of a review is to ensure that all electors in a constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- 4.3 A polling district is a section of a Ward and a polling place must be allocated for each polling district. A polling place can be a geographical area, or it can be a specific building or premises. If no specific polling place is designated then the polling district will be the polling place by default. In addition, and unless there are special circumstances that lead the authority to determine otherwise, each parish must be in a separate polling district.
- 4.4 The report to Council in November 2007 highlighted the distinction between polling districts, places and polling stations. The designation of a polling districts and places are a matter for the Council, whereas decisions regarding polling stations are the remit of the Returning Officer. The Returning Officer is responsible for deciding the arrangement and number of polling stations within each Ward. In doing so she has to have regard for the number of electors, type of election, availability of staff and equipment, previous voter turnout and any other relevant matters. Consequently, the detailed arrangements at each Ward may vary from election to election.
- 4.5 When conducting the Review it was important to take into consideration the effect of postal voting on the turnout at polling stations. Since changes in legislation in 2000, allowing all voters the option to vote by post, the number of permanent postal voters in the borough has risen annually. In 2000 there were 1197 postal voters and the latest figure in 2008 is 6642, with many further postal voting forms being requested during the annual canvass. As the current number of people on the Register is 52940 that equates to 13% of the electorate voting by post which in turn significantly reduces the number of people attending polling stations. In May 2008 13% of residents chose to vote by post and of these 74% returned their vote. Therefore when looking at the numbers of people allocated to a polling station it is necessary to remember that at local elections approximately 20% of the number of people allocated will use the facility. That figure will increase to around 35% at Parliamentary elections.
- 4.6 As part of work to increase voter turnout, an advert was placed on one of our refuse collection vehicles. A request was made to the County Council to explore the placing of advertising banners on lamp posts but this was not able to be progressed. to be progressed. In addition, the Elections Office sends all young people a card on their 18 birthday encouraging them to vote and publications are sent to all secondary schools in autumn to raise awareness of the annual canvass.

As part of the 2008 canvass there is a prize draw which aims to encourage residents to return their form. A series of press releases will be published and

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articles placed on the web site to back up this work. Where no registration form is received from a property the Elections Office will work in partnership with Council Tax to confirm resident details. In 2007 this method of working resulted in a 99.72% return of canvass forms and it is hoped to equal this figure in 2008.

- 4.7 The election in May 2008 saw an overall increase in voter turnout from 35.29% in May 2007 to 36.68% in May 2008. No complaints from presiding officers, members of the public or councillors were received on election day. Since the election the Elections Officer has received one request for a property to be moved into the neighbouring polling district as the property's access road would make this more sensible. A request has also been received to use Bacup Leisure Hall as a polling station. This will be considered.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the report.

6. MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1 The Council has a duty to carry out a polling places/polling district and access review following consultation.

The impact of the review has been a positive one and voter turn out increased in May 2008. The Elections Team have worked hard to introduce new approaches to encourage voter turn out.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

There are no human resources implications arising from the report.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The turnout for the May 2008 Election increased from the turnout in May 2007. Work continues in terms of promoting elections and registration in line with the Council's commitment to increase

9. RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 That the report be noted.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 10.1 Consultation was carried out as part of the Polling District Review.

11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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Is an Equality Impact Assessment required Equality impact assessments were carried out as part of the Polling District Review and Review of Polling Stations.

Is an Equality Impact Assessment attached No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required No

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Background Papers:

Council Report *Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Access Arrangements* 7 November 2007.