

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council: 31 October 2007

Subject: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To advise on representations received in relation to the Council's proposed scheme of Polling Districts and Polling Places for parliamentary elections and to recommend adoption of a final scheme.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Electoral Administration Act 2006 imposed a duty on Councils to review polling districts and polling places within their boundaries by the end of 2007. Under this new legislation, Councils must seek to ensure that all electors in parliamentary constituencies within their areas have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place within the area is accessible to electors who are disabled.
- 2.2** In accordance with this new legislation, the Council, at its last meeting, adopted recommendations by the Returning Officer as its preferred scheme of parliamentary polling districts and polling places and remitted the scheme for public consultation. Details were widely circulated to local community groups and organisations, to the Access Panel and to agents of political parties and were also publicised through the Council's website.
- 2.3** The deadline for representations was 5 October 2007, but in view of the problems caused by the postal strike, representations were accepted until 19th October. Representations were also accepted by telephone from elected members.
- 2.4** In order for the electoral register to be prepared in terms of the statutory timetable, final decisions must be taken at this meeting so that details can be passed to the Electoral Registration Officer by the beginning of November.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** A limited response was received to the consultation. Most of the premises contained within the scheme passed without comment. Details of respondents and their representations on particular polling places are contained within the Appendices 1 and 2 to this report, together with comments thereon.

- 3.2 One of the main problems is the geographical distribution of premises which are suitable for polling. As a result, some voters have to travel a distance to their nearest polling place.
- 3.3 The West Dunbartonshire Access Panel has submitted representations on access issues for a number of the halls, ranging from the desirability of dropped kerbs and suitable parking to the steepness of a number of permanent access ramps.
- 3.4 Some of the premises used for polling are church halls or halls in private or community ownership. Many of these premises are ideally suited to the purpose, being in the heart of their local communities. All now have permanent ramps for disabled access. Unfortunately, some ramps are thought by the Access Panel to be too steep. This is an issue which it is impossible for the Council to address for ownership and structural reasons. The issue of dropped kerbs has been referred to the Roads and Transportation Section for investigation, although this is also problematic as the costs of such work would normally have to be met by the owners of the buildings concerned.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1 There are no personnel issues arising from this report.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There would be financial implications for the Council of addressing any access issues as the costs of permanent adaptations cannot be reclaimed from the Scotland Office and the cost of temporary solutions for polling day can only be reclaimed at 50%.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1 Each polling place is inspected with a view to identifying and eliminating avoidable hazards. No other risk analysis is required.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The representations made on the scheme are detailed and examined in Appendix 2 to this report, together with a complete list of polling places for the West Dunbartonshire County Constituency at Appendix 3. It is accepted that every scheme of polling districts and places will have certain limitations, given the range of premises available for the purpose. It is inevitable that some of the premises selected will be more suitable geographically for some voters than for others. However, it is considered that the preferred list of polling districts and places adopted by the Council for consultation still represents the best fit for the local area.

7.2 There is still flexibility remaining within the legislation for further adaptations to the scheme if circumstances change – if, for example, a preferred location cannot be used for any reason or if a new, more suitable, location becomes available.

8. Recommendations

8.1 It is recommended that the Council considers the representations on particular proposed polling places and now formally adopts the preferred scheme of polling districts and places as the Council's approved scheme.

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Chief Executive
Date: 23 October 2007

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Appendix 1: List of respondents
Appendix 2: Individual polling places on which representations were made
Appendix 3: Complete list of polling places

Background Papers: Electoral Administration Act 2006, Section 16
Statutory Instrument No. 2965 “ The Review of Polling Districts
and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations
2006”
Report to Council Meeting of 26 September 2007 and minute
thereof

Wards Affected: All wards