

Report To: Council

Date of Meeting: 9 December 2014

Lead Member / Officer: Mohammed Mehmet, Electoral Registration Officer

Report Author: Steve Price, Democratic Services Manager & Gareth Evans, Electoral Services Officer

Title: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

1. What is the report about?

The Council has a statutory duty to divide its area into polling districts and designate a polling place for each district. It also has a statutory duty to keep these arrangements under review.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

This report considers the outcome of a public consultation process and makes recommendations to Council in order to complete the statutory review process.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the County Council agrees the existing arrangement for polling districts and polling places as detailed in Appendix 1.

4. Report details.

4.1 A public consultation was held which opened on the 3 October 2014 inviting comments from electors and interested parties on the current arrangements. The consultation closed on the 3 November and the responses received are shown in Appendix 2.

4.2 The County of Denbighshire has 30 Electoral Divisions divided up into 68 polling districts and serviced by 65 polling places. The location and facilities provided by the existing arrangements appear to be well-received by the electorate year on year with very few complaints being received regarding their accessibility or location.

4.3 As a result, the principles underlying the Council's approach to polling districts and polling places outlined in the public consultation were:

(a) To retain the current network of polling districts, places and stations to ensure that as far as possible that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

(b) To ensure, as far as practicable, that polling places are accessible to people with disabilities.

(c) Any proposed changes to the current structure should be able to demonstrate wide support within the polling district. For example, the support of at least 30 registered local government electors, a criterion chosen as it accords with the minimum level of representations to the Electoral Commission required to call for a review of polling districts and places.

4.4 The consultation responses are covered below.

Denbigh Town Council's Concerns

4.5 Denbigh Town Council has expressed concerns that there is no polling station in the Central ward for the electors living in the lower half of Vale Street / Townsend, and of the distance involved from that area of Denbigh to the Eirianfa polling station in Factory ward.

Response to the Denbigh Town Council's Concerns

4.6 To address the Town Council's concerns would require the splitting of polling district BC which currently covers the entire electoral division of Denbigh Central into two separate polling districts, one for the upper part of the division and another new district for the lower part in the Townsend / Vale Street area. The equidistant point to split the division into two separate polling districts would be to use Post Office Lane and Peakes Lane with all of the residential properties in the streets shown in Appendix 3 being placed in the new polling district with a view to locating a polling station within that area.

4.7 This would create a small urban register with 241 residential properties with a current electorate of 414 including 52 postal voters and therefore a polling station voting electorate of 362. This would compare with 983 electors on the remaining register still voting at Eirianfa. Such a small polling district does not appear to be viable and is significantly smaller than all other polling districts in the town. There would also be the issue of finding suitable available public / community premises within the new polling district to locate the polling station.

4.8 Historically the polling station for this district has always been located in the upper area of the electoral division. Before Eirianfa was used as a polling station all electors previously voted at County Hall (now Denbigh Library), Hall Square. There is a strong case to be made that Eirianfa is the natural community facility for the electoral division and supports the concept of the electorate coming into the town centre on polling day.

4.9 Appendix 3 also lists the electorate for all of the current polling districts and polling stations within the town of Denbigh. The turnout at elections since 2007 indicates that Eirianfa's location does not affect turnout figures, which are comparable to the other stations within the town. It should also be noted that the percentage of postal voters in Denbigh Central is lower than all other

polling districts in Denbigh also indicating that the location of Eirianfa is not a detrimental factor.

- 4.10 Maintaining an additional polling station would bring increased costs of approximately £650 for each election held at the new station. The County Council would need to pay these costs for elections to the county council; Denbigh Town Council would have to cover the costs for elections to the town council.
- 4.11 It should be noted that although some properties within the Denbigh Central division are geographically closer to polling stations at Ysgol Frongoch and Denbigh High School / Denbigh Leisure Centre, these two locations are the allocated polling stations for the Denbigh Lower Electoral Division.

Conclusion

- 4.12 No comments were received on the structure of the current parliamentary polling districts and, with the exception of the comments on the Denbigh Central Ward, the responses on the polling places revealed that the respondents were satisfied with the current polling places. The implications of making changes to Denbigh's Central Ward are addressed above and accordingly, no changes are being recommended.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The provision of adequate polling districts and polling places is important for the electors of Denbighshire to engage in the democratic process, and therefore assisting the authority in retaining its connections with the Community.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

There are no costs arising from the review and recommendations other than staff time.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

This report and its recommendations do not introduce changes or a new policy in respect of the provision of polling districts and places. No EqIA has been completed.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The consultation process involved giving public notice of the review on the Council's website and to potentially interested parties including county councillors, city, town and community Councils, local members of Parliament,

constituency Assembly members and the Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

Cost implications arising from the review are minimal and will be contained within existing resources.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

The Council is required to confirm its arrangements to comply with legislative duties.

11. Power to make the Decision

Section 18C(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as inserted by the Electoral Administration Act 2006.