

## **Democracy and Standards Committee**

Held at 7pm on Monday 20 November 2023 at the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby, NN17 1QG

### **Present: -**

#### Members

Councillor Andy Mercer (Chair)

Councillor Jean Addison

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury

Councillor Robin Carter

Councillor Melanie Coleman

Councillor Emily Fedorowycz

Councillor Ian Jelley

Councillor Matt Keane

Councillor Graham Lawman

Councillor Paul Marks

Councillor Dorothy Maxwell

#### Officers

Adele Wylie, Executive Director Customer & Governance

Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer, (Committees/Members)

Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Support Officer.

Also, in attendance – Councillor G Mercer.

The chair welcomed members and the viewing public to the meeting.

### **72 Apologies for absence**

**Resolved** to note that an apology was received from Councillor Tye.

### **73 Members' declarations of interest (if any)**

The chair invited those who wished to do so to make a declaration of interest.

**Resolved** that no declarations were made.

### **74 Polling District and Polling Places Review 2023 - Final Recommendations**

The report of the Executive Director of Customer & Governance, Adele Wylie, was received to update the committee on the response to the recent consultation on the polling district and polling place review and to seek approval to make a Polling Place Order setting out the allocated polling place for each polling district.

Appended to the report were the following:

- Appendix A - Acting Returning Officer recommendations
- Appendix B - New polling districts and future parliamentary constituencies relating to each polling district.

The executive director presented her report to committee informing them that this review related to current ward boundaries and that a future review would be required on new boundaries. She summarised the outcome of the consultation which had

taken place between 2 October 2023 and 30 October 2023, full details of which were published on the council's website.

The information from the consultation had resulted in the statutory review being completed in accordance with legislation and would enable the Register of Electors to be updated to consider the future Parliamentary constituency boundaries and other changes to electoral arrangements.

Councillor Gill Mercer had sought permission from the chair to address the committee.

In summary she raised her concerns over various polling districts in Rushden, which covered a large area, resulting in residents having to travel a long way to vote. She referred to polling district RSI, where previous feedback had been given that the John White Golf Club was not a suitable venue, as it was too far from town. *In the consultation this had been changed to the Rugby Club. Reference was also made to polling district RSH where voters had to drive past the Full Gospel Church, which was being used as a polling station to get to the Rugby Club. This was suggested in the consultation, as being preferable to the Golf Club which had previously been used. Despite removing the Golf Club in the Consultation, voters in polling district RSG were now listed in Appendix A to vote at the Golf Club rather than the football club. This was deemed to be too far for residents to travel and was different from the suggestion in the consultation documentation. She noted that these polling stations were to be reviewed and asked that ward members be consulted during this process as they had the knowledge of the area."*

The chair thanked Cllr G Mercer for her comments.

The chair invited members to discuss the report.

Some of the issues raised are summarised below:

- Accessibility - concerns over access for wheelchair users, the availability of dropped kerbs and suitable parking for the disabled to park near enough to the relevant station to enable a voter to physically have the opportunity and freedom of choice to cast their vote. Issues around restrictions relating to electric vehicle charging points and the ability to park in these locations on election day were also raised.

The executive director responded to confirm that the location of stations was considered carefully, with accessibility being of high importance, however, some buildings were old and had limited access. Regarding parking provision, where possible there was adequate parking, but it was noted that some stations were on busy roads and as such parking was not available directly outside the station. Parking restrictions in relation to Electric vehicle charging point, would be lifted on election day. Polling station staff were also trained to be as obliging as possible and assist a voter where they could. Ultimately electors had the opportunity to request a postal or proxy vote.

- Consultation process - it was commented that the consultation exercise had received a very low response rate and that this could have been due to the difficulty in accessing the consultation and responding to questions. A

suggestion was made over how the consultation process could be improved to gather more information and capture the thoughts and suggestions of the community.

- General points - Concern was expressed that there was a reduction in available stations, particularly in rural areas where it was essential that voters had the opportunity to vote locally. There was also concern that voters did not know where to go to vote, this had particularly been highlighted with recent by-elections where town councils had chosen not to issue poll cards, resulting in a low turnout and confusion. Several comments were also made on individual stations with concern expressed over the continuing use of schools, resulting in children missing education, and parents having to arrange additional childcare. A request was made that the use of schools be avoided, as generally there were many alternative venues very nearby that could be used instead. Regarding 'Tellers' at stations a request for the provision of chairs was made. This would need to be discussed directly with the election's office as there were strict guidelines that had to be followed.

The executive director responded so some of the points raised confirming that there was a polling station checker available on the website, where electors could put in their postcode and it would direct them to the correct station to enable them to cast their vote. Regarding schools these were only used if there was no alternative suitable place nearby. She stressed that the main aim was to ensure that no elector was disenfranchised and that there were choices to enable them to cast their vote. She also asked that members raise all their individual issues directly with the election's office, who would be able to look at their concerns or suggestions.

The chair thanked members for their comments, observations and suggestions, and the executive director for her response, and reiterated that the election's office be provided with as much information as possible so that appropriate and informed decisions could be made.

He proposed the recommendation contained within the report, with the addition that members comments and concerns be taken into consideration, and this was seconded by Councillor Marks. On being put to the vote the recommendation was declared carried.

**Resolved** that:

- (i) The content of the consultation responses be noted;
- (ii) The report of the Acting Returning Officer be noted;
- (iii) The recommendations as detailed at Appendix A to the report be noted, and approval be given to the new polling districts and the future parliamentary constituencies as they relate to each polling district as detailed at Appendix B, and that ongoing monitoring of polling districts and polling places continue, taking into account concerns and comments of ward members, with any updates to arrangements being made as necessary to reflect community identity, accessibility, appropriateness and convenience for voters;

- (iv) The Executive Director of Customer and Governance be authorised to make changes to the Polling Places Order should a change be needed at short notice to a polling district or place, when there was insufficient time for the committee to consider such change;
- (v) To note the publication of the Register of Electors on 1 December 2023 incorporating the details of new polling districts where necessary and the future parliamentary constituencies as they relate to each polling district as detailed at Appendix B.

## **75 Close of meeting**

**Resolved** that there being no further business, the chair closed the meeting at 8.35pm.