

## REPORT TO ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL – 24 SEPTEMBER, 2015

### REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT 1983 – DESIGNATION OF NEW POLLING PLACE IN ALFORD

#### 1 Recommendation

**Members are requested to approve the Community Area at the new Alford Community Campus as the designated polling places in Polling District WW1414 (Alford).**

#### 2 Background/Discussion

2.1 The Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994) requires that each Scottish local authority divides its area into polling districts for the purpose of parliamentary elections and designates the polling places for each of those polling districts. The suitability of currently – designated polling places is kept under review, on an ongoing basis, by Council officers and, where suggestions are made for the use of an alternative facility which might prove more convenient and beneficial to the local community, these are investigated and adjustments made, where appropriate. The intention is to ensure that reasonable facilities are provided for voting and that polling places are accessible to all electors, so far as is practicable.

#### 2.2 Proposal

- 2.2.1 In Alford (Polling District WW1414), notification has recently been received that the current Alford Community Education Centre will shortly no longer be operational and will therefore be unavailable for polling purposes. As members will know, the new Alford Community Campus is scheduled to be opening imminently and before polling takes place in the Huntly, Strathbogie and Howe of Alford By-Election on November 5<sup>th</sup>. The consensus of opinion amongst officers is that, as a significant event affecting the local community, polling at the By-Election should, if at all possible, take place in the new Campus premises.
- 2.2.2 Election staff have visited the venue and are satisfied that the community area at the new premises meets the necessary requirements, in terms of space, amenities, accessibility and the ability for the polling place to be clearly identified.
- 2.2.3 Little adverse impact is anticipated on the continuity of activity elsewhere within the Campus: polling at the forthcoming By-Election will not affect the primary and secondary schools on November 5<sup>th</sup> and access to the new library can be managed, for that one day, via the separate emergency exit.
- 2.2.4 Comments have been sought from local members, the area manager and the Electoral Registration Service and no adverse response has been received to date. As a consequence, it is recommended that members designate the community area as the new polling place in that polling district, with immediate effect.

2.2.5 Members of the Council's Election Team, councillors in Ward 14, the Area Manager, the Electoral Registration Officer, the Head of Finance and the Monitoring Officer have been consulted and the views submitted considered and incorporated, as appropriate, in the preparation of this report.

### **3 Staffing, Financial and Equality Implications**

- 3.1 Other than the work undertaken in visiting and evaluating the premises in question and any input provided by Infrastructure Services, Education and Children's Services, and Electoral Registration, there are no further staffing or financial implications arising from the report. In the event that members were not to approve the arrangements recommended in this report, additional staff time would require to be allocated to progress matters.
- 3.2 An equality impact assessment has been carried out in the course of developing the proposals contained within this report. It is included at Appendix A and identifies positive impacts for persons with protected characteristics.

**Jim Savege**

**Chief Executive / Returning Officer**

Report prepared by:- Allan Bell

Date 14 September, 2015

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity (“activity” is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions). |  |
| Service   | Chief Executive  |
| Section   | Election Team  |
| Title of the activity etc.  | Review of Polling Place in Alford  |
| Aims of the activity  | To approve the recommendation to designate a new polling place in Alford. The purpose of the review is to ensure that reasonable facilities are provided for voting and that the polling place is accessible to all electors, as far as practicable. |
| Author(s) & Title(s)  | Allan Bell, Elections Coordinator  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Stage 2: List the evidence that has been used in this assessment.                             |  |
| Internal data (customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints). | N/A  |
| Internal consultation with staff and other services affected.                                 | <p>Members of the Council’s Election Team have been asked to consider polling arrangements in Alford which may no longer be suitable for elections.</p> <p>Staff within Property &amp; Facilities Management and Education &amp; Children’s Services have highlighted the availability of the new Alford Community Campus and have encouraged consideration of its use for election polling purposes with immediate effect</p> <p>The area manager is invited, as a matter of course, to comment on any proposal to alter polling arrangements, with particular reference to their knowledge of local communities and settlements.</p> |
| External consultation (partner organisations, community groups, and councils).                | Consultation outwith the Council has taken place with the local community council. Due to the short period of time since the proposal was raised, a response has not yet been received. In addition, elected members in Ward 14 of Aberdeenshire Council were invited to comment and both support the proposed change.   |
| External data (census, available statistics).   | Maps of existing polling places and polling districts are available on the Council’s website.  |

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| Other (general information as appropriate). | N/A |
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**Stage 3: Evidence Gaps.**

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|---|---|
| Are there any gaps in the information you currently hold? | No, the information held is appropriate for the review process. |
|---|---|

**Stage 4: Measures to fill the evidence gaps.**

|  |           |            |
|--|-----------|------------|
| What measures will be taken to fill the information gaps before the activity is implemented? These should be included in the action plan at the back of this form. | Measures: | Timescale: |
|  | N/A.      |            |
|  |           |            |
|  |           |            |
|  |           |            |

**Stage 5: Are there potential impacts on protected groups? Please complete for each protected group by inserting "yes" in the applicable box/boxes below.**

|                                    | Positive | Negative | Neutral | Unknown |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------|---------|---------|
| Age – Younger                      | Yes      |          |         |         |
| Age – Older                        | Yes      |          |         |         |
| Disability                         | Yes      |          |         |         |
| Race – (includes Gypsy Travellers) |          |          | Yes     |         |
| Religion or Belief                 |          |          | Yes     |         |
| Gender – male/female               |          |          | Yes     |         |
| Pregnancy and maternity            |          |          | Yes     |         |



|   |  |  |     |  |
|---|--|--|-----|--|
| Sexual orientation –<br>(includes Lesbian/<br>Gay/Bisexual) |  |  | Yes |  |
| Gender reassignment<br>– (includes<br>Transgender)          |  |  | Yes |  |
| Marriage and Civil<br>Partnership                           |  |  | Yes |  |

**Stage 6: What are the positive and negative impacts?**

| Impacts.   | Positive<br>(describe the impact for each of<br>the protected characteristics<br>affected)  | Negative<br>(describe the impact for each of<br>the protected characteristics<br>affected) |
|--|---|--|
| Please detail the potential positive and/or negative impacts on those with protected characteristics you have highlighted above. Detail the impacts and describe those affected. | Younger people will benefit from an appropriate polling venue being identified for the long-term and this will continue until they are of voting age. In the shorter term, the use of the community area will not require pupils to miss schooling on the occasion of any election. | N/A  |
|  | Older people will benefit in that the venue is readily accessible and on a ground floor level. This, therefore, will be beneficial to elderly voters who may have some mobility issues.   | N/A  |
|  | Polling premises are assessed for their suitability for wheelchair users in terms of interior space, door width, level flooring, smooth car park surfaces, toilets for voters with a disability, clear internal light and so on.  | N/A  |

**Stage 7: Have any of the affected groups been consulted?**

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| <p>If yes, please give details of how this was done and what the results were. If no, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating steps?</p> | <p>The local community council has been invited to submit its views on behalf of local residents, including elderly residents and the young.</p> |
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**Stage 8: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce negative impacts?**

|  |                         |                  |
|--|-------------------------|------------------|
| <p>These should be included in any action plan at the back of this form.</p> | <p>Mitigating Steps</p> | <p>Timescale</p> |
|  | <p>N/A</p>              | <p>N/A</p>       |
|  |                         |                  |
|  |                         |                  |
|  |                         |                  |

**Stage 9: What steps can be taken to promote good relations between various groups?**

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|---|--|
| <p>These should be included in the action plan.</p> | <p>On an ongoing basis, the principles of accessibility will remain of the highest priority in designating any new polling places and the provision of associated facilities will be assessed before any new venue is used at elections.</p> |
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**Stage 10: How does the policy/activity create opportunities for advancing equality of opportunity?**

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| <p>The review process seeks to ensure that all electors are able to cast their votes in person at elections, should they so wish, regardless of any disability or sensory impairment. Therefore, equality of opportunity is of paramount importance.</p> |
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**Stage 11: What equality monitoring arrangements will be put in place?**

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|--|---|
| <p>These should be included in any action plan (for example customer satisfaction questionnaires).</p> | <p>Any new polling place proposed is subject to a thorough review as to its accessibility before designation as a new polling venue. After major elections, a post-event evaluation process is always applied, seeking the views of candidates, agents, staff and electors. Where any of these groups highlight issues relating to polling provision, these are analysed and appropriate remedial action taken, as necessary.</p> |
|--|---|



Stage 12: What is the outcome of the Assessment?

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Please complete the appropriate box/boxes | 1   | No negative impacts have been identified –please explain.   |
|   | A key aim of the process is to ensure suitable, local polling provision for residents and to try to make certain that there are no unnecessary barriers to voting. The outcomes are therefore all positive for voters with a disability and also for elderly voters and young people in different respects. The impact on all other protected characteristic groups is neutral. |   |
|   | 2   | Negative Impacts have been identified, these can be mitigated - please explain.<br>* Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen.          |
|   | N/A   |   |
|   | 3   | The activity will have negative impacts which cannot be mitigated fully – please explain.<br>* Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen |
|   | N/A   |   |

\* Stage 13: Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.

N/A

Stage 14: Sign off and authorisation.

|                             |  |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Sign off and authorisation. | 1) Service and Team  | Chief Executive – Election Team  |  |  |
|                             | 2) Title of Policy/Activity  | Review of Polling Places and Polling Districts                                     |  |  |
|                             | 3) <b>Authors:</b> I have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/activity. | Name: Allan Bell<br>Position: Elections Coordinator<br>Date: 14/9/15<br>Signature: |  |  |
|                             | 4) Consultation with Service Manager   | Name: N/A<br>Date:   |  |  |



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|---|---|--|---------------|
|   | 5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service   | Name: Jim Savege<br>Position: Chief Executive/<br>Returning Officer<br>Date: 14/9/15 |               |
|   | 6) If the EIA relates to a matter that has to go before a Committee, Committee report author sends the Committee Report and this form, and any supporting assessment documents, to the Officers responsible for monitoring and the Committee Officer of the relevant Committee. e.g. Social Work and Housing Committee. |  | Date: 14/9/15 |
|   | 7) EIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: eia@abdnshire  |  | Date:         |
| (Equalities team to complete)<br>Has the completed form been published on the website? YES/NO |   |  | Date:         |



| Action Plan  |   |                  |              |   |  |  |
|--|---|------------------|--------------|---|--|--|
| Action   | Start   | Complete         | Lead Officer | Expected Outcome  | Resource Implications                    |  |
| Complete the preparations for the use of the venue at the forthcoming by-election. If approved, publication of the decision of the Council to designate a new polling place. | After Council meeting on 24 <sup>th</sup> September, 2015 | 31 October, 2015 | Allan Bell   | Adjustments to polling arrangements in Alford, as recommended within the report. This will improve electoral provision for voters and will be designed to improve accessibility for all electors. | Staff time in implementing the outcomes. |  |

