

THE CABINET

18 OCTOBER 2011

Title: Polling Districts and Polling Places Review	
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE	
Open report	For Decision
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: Yes
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Accountable Divisional Director: Tasnim Shawkat, Divisional Director of Legal and Democratic Services	
Accountable Director: Stella Manzie, Chief Executive	
Summary: <p>The Council has a duty under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to conduct a review of Borough polling districts (areas within ward boundaries) and associated polling places (stations) every four years. The review process, undertaken by the Chief Executive as the Proper Officer for Electoral Registration, requires public consultation with relevant interested persons / organisations following which the final proposals, as agreed by the Authority, are published and become subject to challenge through the Electoral Commission for a further six week period. The proposals come into effect upon the publication of the Register of Electors on 1 December 2011.</p> <p>The review, which is the second since the implementation of the legislation, was announced by way of a public notice in "The News". Details of the review together with proposals for change were circulated to all Councillors, both local Members of Parliament and local political parties, together with identified relevant organisations such as those that may have an expertise in access to premises or facilities for people with disabilities. The consultation period closed on 1 August 2011.</p> <p>Details of the proposals for polling districts and polling stations, together with a summary of representations made on a ward by ward basis, are set out in Appendix A. In summary there are no proposed changes to 13 of the 17 wards. In the light of the representations made a number of alternative sites for polling stations have been identified and recommended.</p> <p>The wards affected are:</p> <p>Chadwell Heath where it has been recognised that the cricket pavilion in St Chads Park (QD) falls below the normal public accessibility and safety standards, and as such the Baptist Church in Havering Gardens has been identified as a more suitable venue.</p> <p>River where because some electors at the last election were required to travel further to cast their vote, the former River Community Centre in Oval Road South should again be used as a polling place,, subject to the successful outcome of discussions with the</p>	

Council's Asset Management division to improve the internal facilities and with the Dagenham Boxing Club

Thames where following an assessment of the Scout and Community Hall in Blessing Way, it is recommended that the building be designated as the polling station for the JD polling district with a consequential reconfiguration of both the JA and JD polling districts in order to reduce potential voter confusion arising from the current arrangements, create a better balance of electors to locations and address the emerging new developments at Barking Riverside, and

Whalebone where following an assessment of the Christian Fellowship Hall in Green Lanes, it is recommended that the building be designated for the LC polling district which will result in that section of the electorate voting within its own polling district.

Maps showing the locations of polling places within the polling districts as a result of the review are set out in **Appendix B**.

Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) Approve for publication the final proposals arising from the review of polling districts and associated polling places as detailed in Appendix A to the report; and
- (ii) Authorise the Chief Executive to agree any permanent or temporary arrangements within the next four year period that are deemed appropriate in respect of alternative polling stations and/or reconfiguration of polling districts, subject to consultations with relevant ward councillors.

Reason(s)

In order for the Council to meet its statutory responsibility to review polling districts and polling stations every four years.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Every local authority area is divided into wards and those wards are divided into polling districts for voting purposes. A polling place (station) is designated for each polling district. Electors on the register for a particular polling district can vote in person only at their allocated polling place. The review dealt with identifying polling places within defined polling districts. Actual ward, constituency and borough boundaries are unaffected by the review.
- 1.2 In line with the guidance which accompanied the legislation, any representations made within the review period which do not support the original proposals are required, where possible, to provide alternatives. The Chief Executive must take account of the comments received and make necessary changes where appropriate, and to report on the outcome of the review to the Cabinet for determination.
- 1.3 Once the final arrangements are adopted all relevant correspondence, representations, minutes and details will be published on the Council's website.

- 1.4 Following the publication of the final arrangements the following are, by law, entitled to appeal direct to the Electoral Commission within a period of six weeks:
- Groups of no less than 30 electors in a constituency who have not previously made representations.
 - An elector who has previously made representations during the Review.
 - A person who is not an elector in the area but who the Commission decides has expertise in access to premises or facilities for disabled people.
- 1.5 All representations to the Electoral Commission must be in writing. They must be based on the grounds that the Council has not properly conducted the review because it has either failed to meet the reasonable requirements of electors, and/or taken insufficient account of accessibility for disabled people to the polling places within a polling district.

2. Proposal and Issues

- 2.1 The following statutory guidelines must be taken into account as part of the review:
- The Council must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
 - The Council must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.
- 2.2 Other guidelines are recognised good practice, but may not always be possible:
- The polling place should be in its own polling district;
 - All polling places should relate to a single ward;
 - Natural, well-defined boundaries are preferred;
 - All properties in a minor road or estate should be in the same polling district (unless the ward or constituency boundary makes this impossible);
 - There should be an even spread of polling places;
 - The polling district should be the 'catchment area' for the polling place and no elector should have to pass another polling place to get to their own;
 - The polling places that voters are familiar with are not changed unless there is a strong need to do so.
- 2.3 The initial review in 2007 took into account all of the above factors to ensure, as far as practicable, all sites were compliant and Electoral Services staff have continued to monitor the suitability of polling places through visits and reports of presiding officers and polling station inspectors at elections.
- 2.4 As both Council and non-Council premises are used as polling places it is not always possible to ensure full accessibility, such as disabled car parking, but where permanent access ramps are not in place temporary ramps are provided by Electoral Services for the day of the election. Access issues are also mitigated by the option that exists for all registered voters to apply for a postal vote, negating the need to vote in person.
- 2.5 With regard to the types of buildings used as polling places, every effort is made to find alternatives to schools, as this can require the school to be closed for the day and causes disruption to pupils, teachers and parents. However this is not possible

in all cases due to the lack of suitable and available alternatives within each polling district.

2.6 Set out at Appendix A is a schedule showing each ward, its polling districts, the number of electors allocated to each polling district as at 1 August 2011 and details of the existing polling place. General observations are set out under each ward where relevant, together with a summary of any representations made and the final recommendation in each case.

2.7 It should also be noted that the review represents the circumstances that exist at this point in time and it is possible that alternative arrangements may need to be made by the Chief Executive come the time of an election / referendum. This could be due, for example, to the unavailability of a particular polling place owing to refurbishment works or a significant change in the size of the electorate. Any such changes would not require a formal review. Recommendation (ii) above seeks to address these eventualities.

3. Options Appraisal

3.1 A number of alternative sites for polling places were considered as part of the review but were rejected, principally for reasons of accessibility to voters and with disability issues in mind.

4. Consultation

4.1 The Act places a duty on local authorities to ensure that all relevant groups and individuals are given the opportunity to comment on the proposals being put forward for polling places, particularly in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons with disabilities. Attached at **Appendix C** is a list of all those consulted as part of this review.

4.2 The representations received were principally from Members and officers of the Council and are referred to in Appendix A.

5. Financial Implications

Implications confirmed by: David Abbott, Principal Accountant

5.1 There are no specific financial implications associated with this proposal. The cost of this review (including employee costs, general office expenses, and the cost of consultation) will be met from within the existing Democratic Services revenue budget.

6. Legal Implications

Implications confirmed by: Doreen Reeves, Group Manager, Legal Services

6.1 Each constituency is divided into polling districts for the purposes of Parliamentary elections. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 provides that the Council must divide its areas into districts and keep the polling districts under review.

6.2 A polling district must have a designated polling place. Section 18C of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 places a duty on the Council to conduct four yearly reviews

of polling districts and polling places. This report provides details of the compliance for the review under Schedule A1 of the Act.

7. Other Implications

7.1 **Risk Management** - It is important to conclude and publish the Council's final arrangements for polling districts and places so as to properly plan for the scheduled GLA and Mayoral Elections in May 2012. The booking of venues will take place early in the New Year to ensure that buildings will be available and any issues will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

7.2 **Customer Impact** - Electoral Services has previously been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) including the provision of elections, which included analysis of polling station locations taking into account the needs of particular communities as regards race, faith, disability, age and gender.

As part of the requirements of the review relevant organisations with a focus on disability were consulted on the proposals. A short refresh EIA has been undertaken as part of the current review.

In addition to the issues referred to in the report regarding disability access, alternative arrangements, most typically postal voting, can be made for those voters not wishing for reasons of religious belief to vote in person in those religious buildings used as polling places..

7.3 **Crime and Disorder Issues**- The review has sought to ensure that polling places are in open and accessible areas for a range of reasons including matters of crime and disorder as well as public safety. The particular proposal to relocate QD polling district (Chadwell Heath ward) from St Chad's Park cricket pavilion to the Baptist Church in Havering Gardens is in response to concerns regarding the lack of lighting in the immediate area and the safety of voters and staff.

7.4 **Property / Asset Issues** - There are no direct property and/or assets issues, although by the very nature of the proposals any future change of use or availability of current polling places may require alternative arrangements to be made.

Background Papers Used in the preparation of the Report:

- Electoral Administration Act 2006 and associated Guidance
- Public Notice advertising the review

List of appendices:

Appendix A - List of proposals with comments and recommendations
Appendix B - Maps showing the locations of the polling places within districts
Appendix C - List of consultees