

THE CABINET

18 November 2014

Title: Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2014/15	
Report of the Chief Executive	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: Yes
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Accountable Divisional Director: Fiona Taylor, Head of Legal and Democratic Services	
Accountable Director: Graham Farrant, 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). The Electoral Registration and Administrative Act 2013 introduced a requirement that a review must be undertaken every five years, the first of which must be undertaken between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015.</p> <p>The review process, undertaken by the Chief Executive in his capacities as the Acting Returning Officer and the Proper Officer for Electoral Registration, requires public consultation with relevant interested persons / organisations.</p> <p>Following a review and consultation over the summer, changes are proposed to 8 of the 17 wards in the Borough. Those wards are Abbey, Alibon, Becontree, Eastbrook, Eastbury, Longbridge, Thames and Whalebone. The remaining nine wards are unaffected. Details of the proposals for each ward and its polling districts and polling places, together with a summary of representations made on a ward-by-ward basis, are set out in detail in Appendix A.</p> <p>Maps showing the locations of polling places within the polling districts where changes are proposed as a result of the review are set out in Appendix B.</p>	
Recommendation(s) <p>The Cabinet is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(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 until the commencement of the next review 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 five 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.
- 1.2 The Council has a duty under the Electoral Administration Act 2006 to conduct a review of Borough polling districts and associated polling places. The Electoral Registration and Administrative Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews to the extent that the next review must be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015. Subsequent reviews must then be started and completed within a period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.
- 1.3 The review process, undertaken by the Chief Executive in his capacities as the Acting Returning Officer and the Proper Officer for Electoral Registration, requires public consultation with relevant interested persons / organisations. The review must deal with identifying polling places within defined polling districts. Actual ward, constituency and borough boundaries are unaffected by the review.
- 1.4 In line with the guidance issued by the Electoral Commission (EC), any representations made on the ARO submission within the review period which do not support the original proposals are required, where possible, to provide alternatives. The ARO must take account of the comments received and make necessary changes where appropriate, and is required to report on the outcome of the review to the Cabinet for determination.
- 1.5 Following approval by the Cabinet, the final proposals will be published on the Council's website including the reasons for choosing each particular polling district and polling place. All relevant correspondence, representations made, minutes and details will also be published.
- 1.6 Following the publication of the final arrangements the following are, by law, entitled to appeal direct to the EC 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 EC decides has expertise in access to premises or facilities for disabled people.
- 1.7 All representations to the EC 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.

- 1.8 The decision of the EC on any representations will be published on their website and local authorities are encouraged to do likewise for transparency and completeness. Where appropriate the EC will direct local authorities to consider alterations to polling places that they deem necessary under the review.
- 1.9 The proposals, including changes to polling districts, will be contained in the Register of Electors next published in full on 1 December 2014 on the basis that any changes brought about by any successful challenges to the EC will be published in the next monthly update in January 2015 ahead of the Parliamentary Election in May 2015.

2. Proposal and Issues

- 2.1 The following statutory guidelines have been 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 and that where they are not to make reasonable adjustments.
- 2.2 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 an 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.
- 2.3 Other guidelines are recognised as 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.
- 2.4 Previous reviews have taken 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 previous elections including the last local elections held in May 2014.

- 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 always possible due to the lack of suitable and available alternatives within each polling district.
- 2.6 The schedule in **Appendix A** sets out each ward, its polling districts, the number of electors allocated to each polling district as at September 2014 and details of the existing polling places. The ARO's general observations are set out under each ward where relevant, together with a summary of any representations made and the final recommended proposals for each ward.
- 2.7 A summary of the proposed changes are as follows:
- **Abbey Ward** – Polling district AB to be relocated from Barking and Dagenham Foyer, 50 Wakering Road to St Mary's and St Ethelburga's Catholic Church, Linton Road.
 - **Alibon Ward** – Polling district KD to be relocated from Platform 51, Adjacent to 321 Heathway to Parsloes Primary School, Spurling Road.
 - **Becontree Ward** – Establishment of new polling district VE to be located at St Thomas More Church, Longbridge Road to accommodate increased electorate arising from the former University of East London development.
 - **Eastbrook Ward** - Polling district MA to be relocated from Rush Green Infant School, Dagenham Road to Barking and Dagenham College, Dagenham Road.
 - **Eastbury ward** - Polling districts CA and CD to be relocated from Eastbury Manor House, Eastbury Square and the portacabin site opposite John Smith House, Bevan Avenue respectively to Eastbury Primary School, Dawson Avenue.
 - **Longbridge Ward** - Polling district FA to be relocated from Faircross Community Association Hall, Hulse Avenue to Chestnut Nursery, Longbridge Road and polling district FD to be relocated from Faircross Community Association Hall, Hulse Avenue to a building or portacabin in or around the area of the Barking Hospital site.
 - **Thames Ward** - Establishment of new polling district JE (at a location to be determined) to serve residents of the eastern end of Thames View.
 - **Whalebone Ward** - Polling district LD to be relocated from Forsters Close Community Room, Forsters Close to Chadwell Heath Community Centre, High Road.
- 2.8 Maps showing the locations of polling places within the polling districts where changes have been made as a result of the review are set out in **Appendix B**.
- 2.9 It should 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 come the time of an election. 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) of this report 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 and responses to the consultation but were rejected, for the reasons set out in **Appendix A**.

4. Consultations

- 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.
- 4.2 The review was announced on 19 August 2014 by way of a notice on the Council's web site. Details of the review together with the Acting Returning Officer's submission commenting on the existing polling stations and any proposals for change were circulated for comment to all Councillors, the Borough's MPs, the relevant MEP and GLA members, local political parties, Council officers with an interest and identified relevant organisations such as those that may have an expertise in access to premises or facilities for people with disabilities. The consultation, which was also open to all local electors, closed on Friday 19 September 2014.
- 4.3 The representations received were principally from Councillors.

5. Financial Implications

Implications confirmed by: Carl Tomlinson, Group Manager Finance

- 5.1 The cost of this review (including employee costs, general office expenses, and the cost of consultation) has been met from within the existing Electoral Services budgets, with no additional funding required.
- 5.2 Any additional costs in relation to the hire of temporary or permanent buildings to utilise as polling stations, as a result of this review, will be met from the Elections budget. As the next election is a General Election any costs will be met by central Government, hence preserving the Council's Election budget.

6. Legal Implications

Implications confirmed by: Chris Pickering, Principal solicitor

- 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 regular reviews of polling districts and polling places. The Electoral Registration and Administrative Act 2013 sets the timing of the compulsory reviews.

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 Parliamentary Election on 7 May 2015. Provisional bookings of venues aim to ensure that buildings will be available for the Parliamentary election and any issues that may arise will be dealt with on a case by case basis.
- 7.2 **Corporate Policy and 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.
- 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 and staff safety.
- 7.4 **Property / Asset Issues** - There are no direct property and/or assets issues for the Council, 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: None

List of appendices:

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