

Minutes of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee

8 November 2023

Members Present:-

Councillor Emma Whysall (Chair)
Councillor Claire Farrier (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Richard Barnes	Councillor Caroline Stock
Councillor Geof Cooke	Councillor Zakia Zubairi
Councillor Eva Greenspan	Councillor Ernest Ambe
Councillor Alex Prager	Councillor Alison Cornelius
Councillor Danny Rich	

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Andrea Bilbow OBE

1. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andrea Bilbow.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST LICENSING & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE ON 20/07/23

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS (IF ANY)

The Chair declared an interest in relation to items 8 and 9 by virtue of employment with a personal injury law firm.

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

None.

5. ELECTIONS ACT: IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Julie Carter, Electoral Services Manager, presented the report and the requirements introduced by the Elections Act 2022 to date.

It was noted that the voting systems for the GLA (first past the post), would have implications on the count. Barnet Electoral Services will need to recruit approx. 350 members of staff to work on each day of the two-day count. In addition, approximately 150 extra poll clerks will also need to be recruited to work at polling stations. The majority of the staff used on elections in Barnet come from the Council workforce.

The requirement for Voter IDs would mean longer processing times for eligible electors alongside additional training requirements for all staff working at polling stations.

More work around communications would be done in relation to Voter IDs leading up to the elections to ensure voters would not be turned away.

Officers suggested working with Members during campaigns to help promote Voter IDs and online applications in the lead up to the parliamentary elections.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has stated that the recently implemented online portal for electors to make their postal and proxy vote applications, will be fully functional by January 2024. The submission of paper forms to Barnet's Elections Team was discouraged as these would make a significant impact upon the resources and capability within the team to make sure that all Postal and Proxy applications can be dealt with by specific election deadlines.

Changes to proxy votes meant that all current Proxy Voters must reapply, otherwise their current proxy arrangements will be cancelled on 31 January 2024. All current proxy voters will be contacted about the new process before January 2024.

The 15-year ruling in relation to overseas electors has been removed which means that any British Citizen now living overseas is eligible to vote at future Parliamentary elections, no matter how long since they last resided in the UK.

The team was commended for the good promotional work around voter registration and voter ID awareness. Officers welcomed suggestions from Members to support their democratic engagement plans – especially if they have contacts for suitable groups that Barnet's Electoral Services could engage with in future.

In relation to the increase in Voter IDs and checks, the Chair queried the measures in place to ensure that everyone who turned up to the polling station on election day by 10pm, would be allowed to vote.

It was explained that the existing procedures would continue to apply; A member of the polling station staff would join the end of the voter queue at exactly 10pm to mark the last person in line. This ensures any electors who have arrived by 10pm would still be issued with a ballot paper and be allowed to vote.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1. Note the implications and new burdens, brought in by the Elections Act, upon the Returning Officer (RO), Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), the core Electoral Services team and the wider council.**
- 2. Note how the legislation impacts upon Electors, Elected Officials, Election Candidates and Election Agents at future elections.**

6. PROPOSALS FOR POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

John Bailey, Head of Electoral Services, presented the report.

Proposals were put forth on behalf of the Returning Officer (RO) in relation to 10 wards, each of which was discussed in turn:

Burnt Oak Ward

A new polling place was introduced at Burnt Oak Leisure Centre, creating the new polling district (BOD).

It was proposed that the current polling place in district BOB be moved to North Road Community Centre.

Childs Hill

It was proposed that polling district CHA be moved from the Greek Orthodox Church to the Golders Green Chabad.

East Finchley

St Marys Catholic Church could no longer be used as a polling place. Therefore, slight changes were made to the boundary of polling district EFB as a single polling station and the polling place would be moved back to Martin Primary School.

Members highlighted that schools should no longer be used as polling places. It was noted that schools were allowed to be used in line with the regulations unlike other establishments that required permission. Arrangements are able to be put in place to ensure that Martin Primary school can remain open on election day.

Edgwarebury

It was proposed that the polling place be moved from St Andrews Church to Rosh Pinah Primary School and the slight changes to polling districts EWA, EWD and EWE would help even out the number of electors.

Members suggested an alternative proposal as detailed in appendix A which would prevent school closure, be a cost benefit. as well as satisfy religious requirements raised in a number of representations received.

Officers said that in order to achieve the proposal to reduce from three polling districts to two-polling districts in the east of this ward, approximately 300 additional electors would need to be allocated to the Scout Hut Edgware Synagogue and approximately 1800 additional electors would need be allocated to Broadfields School. This would keep the number of electors allocated to the Scout Hut polling station (which needs to be a 'single' polling station) in line with guidelines of the Electoral Commission.

It was noted that St Andrews Church previously received the highest turnout in Edgwarebury Ward, hence the preferred polling place arising out of the consultation.

Officers suggested that authority be delegated to the RO (in consultation with the committee's chair) to agree the new polling district boundaries to rebalance electors as outlined above.

In response to Members, John Bailey said that an analysis would be carried out on the GIS system to map electors in relation to polling stations to ensure optimum clarity of boundaries for electors. It was noted that a balance of interest had to be taken into account between the needs of electors in relation to suitability of facilities and the potential disruption caused to residents and pupils.

Following a discussion, Councillor Rich moved a motion seconded by Councillor Farrier, to amend the Officer's recommendation by delegating authority to the RO to establish the new polling district boundaries in Edgwarebury Ward in consultation with the Chair.

The Committee then voted on the motion which was recorded as follows:

For: (approval) 7

Against: (approval) 4

The motion was carried.

Hendon

It was proposed that the polling place HED be moved to Hendon Library in line with a proposal received within the representations to the review,

Cllr Prager highlighted that some of the polling district boundaries could cause confusion amongst residents living along particular roads at the boundary of HAC and HCC.

Golders Green

It was proposed that the polling place be moved from St Edward the Confessor Church to the London Jewish Family Centre on St Georges Road to rebalance the polling district and to provide a more central location for electors in GGB.

Mill Hill

It was proposed that the polling place from Canada Villa be moved to Mill Hill Rugby Club which would benefit electors in the new polling district boundaries of MHD.

West Hendon

It was proposed that new polling places be introduced at St Matthias Church Hall and at the West Hendon Community Hub. These two new polling places will benefit many electors living close to the A5 and improve voter access to polling stations for approximately 3000 electors.

Colindale South

It was proposed that polling district CSB be moved to the Hybrid Meeting rooms without changes to the boundaries. CSE would be a new polling district, with a polling place at St Matthias Church Hall in the south of the ward to reduce pressure on the United Reform Church Hall.

In North East of the Ward, subject to acceptance of the Colindale Gardens function room, the Returning Officer proposed to introduce a new CSC polling district which would be available to the Colindale Gardens electors – the number of electors here being anticipated to rise sharply in coming years.

In the new boundaries of CSA polling district, the Beaufort Park Estate Management Office is proposed as the polling place, subject to agreement with the venues management.

Officers requested that the proposals for CSA and CSC be accepted in principle by the Committee, subject to satisfactory assessments of the proposed polling venues and suitable agreement being reached with the respective management of the two locations. Should it not be possible to use the proposed polling places for CSA and CSC, the existing CSA polling district would be retained with the polling place at the Council Offices on 2 Bristol Avenue.

High Barnet

It was proposed that polling districts HBC and HBD be changed to North/South moving the polling place from St Peter's Church Hall to Whittings Hill School, which has stated that it would be closed on polling day.

Members raised an anomaly between HBB and HBC on the north side of Barnet Road which needed to be addressed and to reduce pressure on the polling place at Chipping Barnet library.

Therefore, Members proposed an amendment as detailed in appendix K; That the boundary north of Barnet Road between HBB and HBC remain the same in line with the current map but the rest of the RO's proposal be adopted.

Following a discussion, the Chair moved a motion seconded by Councillor Ambe, to amend the Officer's recommendation to delegate authority to the RO to amend the proposed changes to the polling districts in High Barnet Ward in consultation with the Chair.

The Committee voted unanimously in favour of the motion.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1. Note the Representations received during the public consultation period of the Polling District and Polling Place review and the Returning Officer's responses, as detailed in Appendix A.**
- 2. Approve the proposed new arrangements for polling districts and polling places that are contained within Appendices B – I as Amended.**
- 3. Approve the proposed arrangements for the Colindale South polling districts and polling places, as contained within Appendix J - subject to confirmation of suitability, availability and acceptance of use by the polling venue proposed in Colindale Gardens.**
- 4. Approve the proposed arrangements as Amended for the High Barnet polling districts and polling places, as contained within Appendix K.**

7. GAMBLING POLICY: STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Jas Lally, Interim Head of Consumer and Public Protection presented the report and highlighted the revised Gambling Policy following a twelve-week consultation with several organisations including the police. Changes included the location and number of gambling places in proximity to vulnerable people. It was noted that it would take approximately 6-12 months of intelligence gathering to map out and target areas of concern. The findings and activities of the Licensing Team would then be reported back to the Committee before approval at full Council.

RESOLVED that the Licensing and General Purposes Committee

- 1. Approves the proposed revised Gambling Statement of Principles.**
- 2. Recommends that this Gambling Statement of Principles be adopted at the next full meeting of the Council.**

8. ANNUAL HEALTH, SAFETY & WELLBEING REPORT

Mike Koumi, Head of Safety, Health and Wellbeing presented the report and highlighted the Council's Health and Safety performance between 2022 and 2023.

Performance information was gathered via independent audits, the accident reporting system, training records and sickness data. This is used to identify gaps and inform areas for improvement.

The report also provided an update on progress towards the Council's priorities. It was noted that several activities had taken place to meet priorities including the introduction of a Potentially Violent Persons Database and the lone working system, enabling staff to manage risk and to take control if faced with difficulty.

Other checks in place allowed for early intervention through referrals where needed.

Focus was placed on the audit programme for schools, post Covid, to ensure that safe systems and correct practices were in place. Schools were also provided with support especially around areas for improvement in health and safety.

Members queried the high numbers of staff being referred to their GPs for further investigation. It was noted that those referred were front-line staff and work was being done with individual service leads to improve lifestyle choices.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1. Note the council's Health Safety and Wellbeing performance for the period 2022/23.**
- 2. Note the update on activities carried out in order to achieve the councils' Health, Safety and Wellbeing priorities for the period 2022/24.**

9. HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Mike Koumi presented the report. The previous council subcommittee, dealing with corporate health and safety issues, had been decommissioned a number of years ago. Since then, corporate health and safety items have been raised at various meetings including the Joint Negotiation and Consultation Group and local consultation committees. These committees are set up to discuss both industrial relations as well as health and safety, and there is currently no standalone health and safety Committee.

The Head of SHaW has revised the council's consultation arrangements for H&S and identified a need for a standalone corporate H&S committee. The Trade Unions have also been requesting this for a number of months. Therefore, the establishment of a health and safety consultative forum, made up of senior Officers and trade union representatives, to be chaired by the Chief Executive, was the proposal before the Committee. Any significant matters would be escalated and reported to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee.

The revised consultation arrangements will be reviewed after twelve months.

RESOLVED That the Committee agree the revised Health and Safety Consultation arrangements and note the establishment of a Corporate Health and Safety Consultative forum.

10. LICENSING & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE - FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Clair Green, Executive Director of Assurance, highlighted the requirement of additional elements to the work programme, following the recent change in governance arrangements.

The current forward work programme would be updated with Lead Officers on potential items for consideration, in line with the Constitution. The outcome of that review along with the updated draft, would be reported to the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the draft work programme and an updated version would be shared with the Committee on 8th February 2024.

11. ANY ITEM(S) THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

The meeting finished at 8.12pm