



## Constitution and General Purposes Committee

22 June 2021

<b>Title</b>	<b>Implementing the New Warding Arrangements for the London Borough of Barnet - Project update</b>
<b>Report of</b>	John Hooton - Chief Executive, Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	No
<b>Enclosures</b>	None
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### Summary

The new electoral arrangements for Barnet Council will come into effect at the Local Government elections in May 2022. Barnet will continue to have 63 councillors (the same as at present) but there will be an increase in the number of wards, from 21 to 24 wards, with 15 three-councillor wards and 9 two-councillor wards.

This report summarises progress so far on the cross-council project to implement these new warding arrangements as decided by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

### Officers Recommendation

That the Committee note and comment on the progress to date of the project to implement the new warding arrangements in Barnet, including the work of the Cross-Party Reference Group which has been engaging with elected members throughout the process.

## 1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) completed a statutory review of the London Borough of Barnet's electoral arrangements in January 2020. The LGBCE's final recommendations mean that:

- Barnet will continue to have 63 councillors
- There will be an increase in the number of wards from 21 to 24
- Councillors will represent 15 three-councillor wards and 9 two-councillor wards across the borough
- The boundaries of all wards will change, none will stay wholly the same.



Figure 1 Map of LGBCE Final Recommendations for Barnet Council size and ward boundaries

1.2 The outcome of the review takes effect at the Local Government elections scheduled on 5 May 2022 (i.e. these elections will elect councillors to the new 24 wards for the first time).

1.3 This report outlines the programme of work progressed to date to implement the new electoral arrangements in the London Borough of Barnet.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The size and scope of the statutory Electoral Review was such that it decided:
- the number of councillors elected to form the Council
  - the boundaries, names and number of all wards, and
  - the electoral representation of all electors and residents by elected members.
- 2.2 Following the implications outlined in 2.1 above and to allow for the conduct of legally compliant elections in the future, electors within the new wards will need to be assigned to new polling districts (wholly contained within the new wards). Each of the new polling districts will need to be served by polling places (and polling stations) that meet, so far as is practicable, the requirements for in-person voting, as laid out by the Electoral Commission. This is likely to require many completely new venues that can be used as polling places across the borough.
- 2.3 The Constitution and General Purposes Committee terms of reference include: ‘to have responsibility for overseeing the Council’s governance arrangements including Electoral Services, including elections and electoral registration performance; and polling places and polling district boundaries.’
- 2.4 In addition to the electoral arrangements in Barnet, the new ward boundaries will also affect the council’s governance arrangements as well as how it manages both operational service delivery and data insight.

## **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 Following adoption of the LGBCE proposals by Parliament, there is no legislative alternative to implementing the new electoral arrangements in time for the local government elections in May 2022. From this point, Barnet’s Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is obliged by law to compile and maintain the Register of Electors into new polling districts and the Council must designate new polling districts and places to facilitate in-person voting.

## **4 POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 The new electoral arrangements for Barnet Council will come into effect at the local elections on 5 May 2022.
- 4.2 Following Parliamentary approval of the LGBCE recommendations and working with officers across the council, the Head of Assurance and Business Development is leading a programme of activities to implement the new electoral arrangements in time for the local elections in May 2022.
- 4.3 The main objectives of the work are:
- To implement in full the LGBCE’s Local Boundary Review final recommendations, as legislated by Parliament, for future electoral arrangements (May 2022 onwards) in Barnet Council.
  - To implement effective processes and activities with regards to new ward boundaries and governance arrangements, in compliance with all relevant electoral and local government legislation.

- To identify and designate relevant new polling districts and polling places to effectively serve registered electors within the new wards of the borough.
- To engage with, and support council departments (including statutory partner organizations and contracted suppliers) to implement any changes in operational processes, reporting and KPIs in their service areas resulting from the Local Boundary Review, including sharing timely and relevant information and tools i.e. maps and new ward data.
- Undertake comprehensive, timely and relevant resident and stakeholder engagement for information sharing and raise awareness of the forthcoming changes to the ward boundaries which will come into effect in May 2022.

4.4 The project has been split into four workstreams:

- **Electoral Services** - focusing on updating polling districts and places, amending the Electoral Register in line with the new warding arrangements, planning and delivering the local elections 2022 and communicating the changes to electors.
- **Governance** - focusing on the implementation of the new governance arrangements (including revisions to Planning Committees and a review of Resident Forums and Area Committees) as well as leading on elected members and political party engagement.
- **Insight** - supporting on geographical Information (mapping, quality assurance etc) and service operational changes due to the new warding arrangements.
- **Stakeholder Communication and Engagement** - including resident and partner engagement and wider political party engagement.

4.5 In addition, a **Cross-Party Reference Group** has been established to pro-actively engage members from political parties on the process for the statutory review of Polling Districts and Polling Places and implementation of new ward boundaries arrangements.

### Progress to Date

4.6 **Electoral Services Workstream**

- Electoral Services completed visits to all existing, and some new, polling places as part of the May 2021 GLA Elections risk assessment to ensure polling venues could be made COVID19 secure. Visits undertaken involved review of polling place capacity, location and accessibility and identification of nearby alternative/additional polling places. This has informed the review of polling places for the implementation of new ward boundaries arrangements.
- Updated Members of the Cross-Party Reference Group on current polling places, the key characteristics that define a good polling place venue and on the Electoral Commission's guidance on reviewing Polling Places and Polling Districts.
- Shared printed maps of the borough (with new the ward boundaries) with the political groups of elected members for use as a 'working document'.
- Utilised the new ward boundaries mapping shape files, as provided by LG BCE, to start consideration of the location of new polling district boundaries as determined by polling place locations and electorate numbers.
- On-going follow up on proposed new/good polling places across the borough with visits to assess suitability and availability of suggested polling places and fit within a polling district.

#### 4.7 **Governance Workstream**

- On 20 October 2020 the council approved changes to planning committee arrangements (Chipping Barnet; Finchley & Golders Green; and Hendon Area Planning Committees). The Committees had a ward/area link (which linked to the current ward boundaries and parliamentary constituency boundaries) were deleted and replaced with Planning Committees A, B and C which have no link to wards/areas. This element of the governance workstream has therefore been delivered. New Planning Committee arrangements can be retained after May 2022 when the ward boundary changes come into effect.
- The next phase is to review Resident Forums and Area Committee arrangements which currently have a ward/area link. Work over recent months has focussed on implementing changes to Area Committees budget arrangements (via the delegation of a proportion of Committee Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to these committees). These changes were approved by the Policy and Resources Committee on 24 May 2021. Options are now being developed to present to Members at the Cross-Party Reference Group regarding possible changes to wards and areas and how they link to Area Committees and Residents Forums to come into effect in May 2022. Initial feedback from Members is that three Residents Forums and three Area Committees should be in place from May 2022 onwards and officers are proceeding on that basis.
- Officers will work on developing proposals for discussion with Members on:
  - a) new area boundaries
  - b) number of wards and councillors in each area (new wards are 3 Member and 2 Member), and
  - c) names for new areas.
- Proposals to be discussed in mid-2021 with final proposals agreed at Constitution and General Purposes Committee no later than 12 January 2022 for approval by Full Council on 25 January 2022 for implementation in May 2022.
- Options for engagement with political groups (other than those represented on the Cross-Party Reference Group) are being considered. It is likely that political party engagement will take place around the same time as the prospective candidates' briefings take place for the May 2022 local election (i.e. around February 2022).

#### 4.8 **Insight Workstream**

- The Insight Team have pro-actively engaged with cross-council services to capture ward-based data insight and comparison requirements and to identify any impacts on service operations resulting from the new ward boundaries arrangements. This included provision of project information packs to service areas to raise project profile and provide necessary tools to inform service planning early on.
- Upgrade to Geographical Information System (GIS) capability, to provide a public facing interactive tool to encourage self-service on the council's website, is being implemented.
- On-going liaison with national and third-party data providers, including Census, Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Ordnance Survey (OS) regarding data quality and data releases.
- Discussions are ongoing with service areas with changes that may be required to systems that may be impacted by these changes; a further update will be provided in the future on the potential impact of this.

#### 4.9 Stakeholder Engagement workstream

- Following the delivery of the GLA Elections in May 2021, the Stakeholder Engagement workstream can now be progressed and proactive communications will commence in July 2021.
- Stakeholder Engagement Strategy is being developed to ensure that all stakeholders (residents, electorate, council members and leadership groups, council employees and partners, statutory bodies including emergency services) are aware of the forthcoming changes to the ward boundaries.
- Presentations are being planned to identified boards, forums and committees to ensure all relevant stakeholders are engaged with.
- Planned communications include regular internal and external messaging across digital and print channels to raise awareness of the ward boundary changes and how they will affect individuals, organisations and services. External activity will commence in July for an initial awareness phase, followed by a second larger phase in early January 2022.
- Internal communications will take place regularly via First Team, Yammer, face to face engagement and breakfast briefings to ensure all are aware of upcoming changes and potential impact on workstreams / future reporting etc.
- Communication channels will include:
  - Barnet First residents magazine - July and October
  - Updates on barnet.gov.uk news hub
  - Social media
  - Barnet First e-newsletter
  - CTN bulletin
  - First Team / Yammer / Breakfast Briefings
  - External mapping system
  - Face to face via committee meetings

#### 4.10 Cross-Party Reference Group

4.10.1 The Cross-Party Reference Group was established in January 2021 with the key functions agreed to:

- Enable input into the creation of new polling districts within the new wards
- Share local knowledge to help identify and select the best possible polling places
- Ensure ongoing engagement between members, the political parties and officers on the operational requirements of the new ward boundaries within the council
- Engage with residents and key stakeholders to raise awareness and preparations for the new ward boundaries coming into effect in May 2022
- Have oversight of the project which reviews the Residents Forums and Area Committees arrangements in the context of the new wards.

4.10.2 The Reference Group acts as a forum for open (non-political) conversation on topics such as:

- Location of new polling district boundaries (which are primarily determined by electorate numbers) and polling places within the new ward boundaries.
- Engagement with electors (promoting good public awareness) on new arrangements ahead of the Local Election in May 2022.
- Engagement with political groups and other relevant and interested parties ahead of the Local Elections in May 2022.

4.10.3 The membership of the Cross-Party Reference Group is made up of representatives each of the main political parties as well as relevant officers of the council. The meetings are chaired by the Head of Assurance and Business Development.

4.10.4 So far this year, the Group has met four times. At these meetings the group has:

- Agreed the Terms of Reference
- Discussed availability of mapping tools as well as issuing maps with the new warding arrangements
- Discussed options for the constitute Resident Forums and Area Committees, including naming and allocated areas for the Committees.

4.10.5 Discussions at the Cross-Party Reference Group meetings have focused on the new polling places within the new wards, with considerations given to the following geographical locations:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colindale North</li> <li>• Colindale South</li> <li>• West Hendon</li> <li>• Hendon</li> <li>• Cricklewood</li> <li>• Childs Hill</li> <li>• Golders Green</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Barnet</li> <li>• Underhill</li> <li>• Totteridge and Woodside</li> <li>• West Finchley</li> <li>• East Finchley</li> <li>• Finchley Church End</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edgware</li> <li>• Edgwarebury</li> <li>• Mill Hill</li> <li>• Burnt Oak</li> <li>• Garden Suburb</li> </ul>
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4.10.6 The next meeting to be held in July will cover the remaining wards:

- East Barnet
- Barnet Vale
- Whetstone
- Brunswick Park
- Friern Barnet
- Woodhouse

4.10.7 The final meeting in September will be used to prepare the final proposals of polling places and polling districts by the Returning Officer for approval at the CGP Committee in October 2021.

### Key milestones:

4.11 The table below outlines key future milestones and the timeline for update to the committee on progress and key decision points.

Key Activity	Date	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Residents Forums/Area Committees</li> </ul>	Jun-Nov 2021	Review Residents Forums/Area Committees and seek Member agreement for revised arrangements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commence pro-active communications with partners and stakeholders</li> </ul>	July 2021	Implement communications plan to ensure key stakeholders are aware of the new warding arrangements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constitution &amp; General Purposes Committee</li> </ul>	4 Oct 2021	Presenting 1 <sup>st</sup> draft of new polling district and polling places - for CGP Committee discussion and feedback

• Constitution & General Purposes Committee	10 Jan 2022	Final polling district and polling places report - for CGP committee <b>final approval and decision.</b>
• Full Council	Jan 2022 (tbc)	Final proposal for Resident Forums and Area Committee arrangements to be agreed.
• Publication of Census data (different datasets released)	From Mar 2022	The impact of Census output areas on the implementation of new ward boundaries will be reported in early 2022
• Publication of Register	1 March 2022	Publication of register in time for Local Election 2022 – with new wards and Polling Districts
• Local Government Elections Polling Day	<b>5 May 2022</b>	Local Government elections to elect councillors to new warding arrangement
• Annual Council	May 2022	Following the local elections, new councillors will be allocated to committees

## 5 IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

### 5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

5.1.1 The Barnet Plan sets out the four priorities for the borough. The plan focuses on the key outcomes we are seeking to achieve and how we will work to achieve those outcomes. This work supports the council's priority of Clean, Safe and Well Run.

5.1.2 This LGBCE review of Barnet's electoral arrangements (i.e. council size and ward boundaries) is designed to ensure that the London Borough of Barnet continues to have an optimal number of elected Members and that wards offer electoral equality to the borough's electors.

### 5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

5.2.1 The LGBCE's final recommendations that Barnet retains a council size of 63 councillors will have no new cost implications arising with regards Elected Member resources or servicing from the Electoral Review.

5.2.2 It will be necessary for Barnet's Electoral Services to review and amend the polling district and polling place arrangements that will be required from May 2022.

5.2.3 Should it be assessed that additional polling places are required, there will be additional costs incurred during the conduct of local elections (i.e. additional polling venue hire costs and additional polling station staff costs). The costs for elections other than local elections are recovered from the relevant governing body (e.g. Parliamentary elections are paid for by the Cabinet Office and London Mayoral/GLA elections are paid for by the GLA).

5.2.4 Local elections costs are currently funded by a ringfenced reserve, contributed to annually to absorb cost fluctuations in a local election year and minimise the impact. Increased costs, as a result of the polling district and polling place arrangements, will likely result in increased overall local elections costs, and therefore, require an increased local elections reserve going forward. The annual contribution level shall be reviewed in 2021/22, once cost implications are known, in order to propose for

decision a more appropriate annual reserve contribution from 2022/23.

### **5.3 Social Value**

5.3.1 Maintaining electoral arrangements that promote electoral equality, strong community identity and effective and convenient local government, ensures that eligible residents can participate in statutory elections and referendums. In turn this ensures that they are properly represented in the democratic processes of the borough and in the decision-making of the Council.

### **5.4 Legal and Constitutional References**

5.4.1 Section 56 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act) requires that the LGBCE review 'from time to time' every principal local authority in England and make recommendations about electoral arrangements (but not their external boundaries).

5.4.2 The Constitution and General Purposes Committee terms of reference includes oversight of "Electoral Services including: elections and electoral registration performance; and polling places and polling district boundaries and to make recommendations thereon to the Council."

5.4.3 The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a duty under Section 9(1) of RPA1983 to maintain:

- a) a register of parliamentary electors for each constituency or part of a constituency in the area for which he acts; and
- b) a register of local government electors for the local government areas or parts of local government areas included in the area for which he acts.

5.4.4 The ERO has a duty under Section 9A of RPA1983 (as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (ERA2013)) to take all necessary steps to comply with his duty to maintain the electoral register, and to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, persons who are entitled to be registered in the register (and no others) are registered in it.

5.4.5 Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 deals with the review of polling districts and places. Schedule 1A of the act deals with consultation and representations from the Returning Officer, electors and such persons who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises for example for disabled persons.

### **5.5 Risk Management**

5.5.1 If ward boundaries are not periodically reviewed to ensure that Barnet has an appropriate number of councillors, then there is a risk of there being an inequity in councillors' case work across the borough. Moving ward boundaries and/or creating

or removing wards enables ward to contain a broadly consistent number of electors (and residents) in each ward.

5.5.2 Poorly defined ward boundaries or polling district boundaries could result in eligible electors being disadvantaged when voting at elections or in extreme cases, being disenfranchised altogether.

## 5.6 Equalities and Diversity

5.6.1 The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The equality duty covers the nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Public authorities also need to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership status. In the exercise of their functions, As such, Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups;
- foster good relations between people from different groups.

5.6.2 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services. This is done by:

- removing or minimising disadvantage suffered due to their protected characteristics.
- taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

5.6.3 The LGBCE considered the equality implications throughout the boundary review and the all annual reviews of polling districts and places. Officers do not consider that there is any negative impact on equalities.

## 5.7 Corporate Parenting

5.7.1 Not applicable

## 5.8 Consultation and Engagement

5.8.1 The LGBCE ran the public consultation on the electoral review of Barnet ([www.lgbce.org.uk/barnet](http://www.lgbce.org.uk/barnet)) which was widely publicised by the Commission and Barnet Council.

5.8.2 The Cross-Party Reference Group has been set up to discuss and review of polling districts and polling places, and elected members are engaged throughout the process.

## 5.9 Insight

5.9.1 The data included in LGBCE report is publicly available via the LGBCE website

([www.lgbce.org.uk/barnet](http://www.lgbce.org.uk/barnet)).

## 6 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 [Local Government Boundary Commission for England Review of LB Barnet ward boundaries](#)
- 6.2 **Constitution and General Purposes Committee** Thursday 16 January 2020, Agenda Item 8, [LGBCE New electoral arrangements for Barnet Council Final Recommendations](#)
- 6.3 **Constitution and General Purposes Committee** Monday 12 October 2020, Agenda Item 8, [Implementing the final recommendations from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England \(LGBCE\)](#)