



Constitution and General Purposes Committee

4 October 2021

Title

**Implementing the New Warding Arrangements
for the London Borough of Barnet –
Project Update (June – September 2021)**

Report of

John Hooton - Chief Executive,
Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer

Wards

All

Status

Public

Urgent

No

Key

No

Enclosures

None

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Details**

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Summary

The new electoral arrangements for Barnet Council will come into effect at the Local Government elections on 5 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 and made up of 15 three-councillor and 9 two-councillor wards.

This report summarises progress since June 2021 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, since last reported to the Committee in June 2021, of the project to implement the new warding arrangements in Barnet - including the work of the Cross-Party Reference Group which has enabled collaboration between council officers and 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 be elected to 15 three-councillor 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 24 new wards for the first time). This means that the Register of Electors must be re-published under the new wards prior to the election.

- 1.3 This report outlines the programme of work progressed since last reported to CGP in June 2021 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 Register of Electors must be re-published under the new wards ahead of the election (so that poll cards can be issued to electors within their new wards and relevant new polling districts)
- 4.2 The new electoral arrangements for Barnet Council will then come into effect at the local elections on 5 May 2022.
- 4.3 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.

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** was 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 have completed assessment visits to every potential polling place that was identified or suggested as an alternative or additional venue to existing polling places.
- A polling district and polling place proposal has been designed for all 24 wards, utilising analysis of straight-line distance and road network distance for all electors to potential polling places
- These draft polling place and polling district proposals were reviewed at the Cross-Party Working Group on 14 September who agreed that proposals should be shared at CGP Committee for comment, ahead of the statutory public

consultation (when they will be published as the Returning Officer's (RO) Proposals).

- Public consultation will take place from mid-October to end of November inviting residents, elected officials and other stakeholders to comment on the proposals.
- Following the public consultation, final proposals (incorporating any amendments that the RO makes during the consultation) will be submitted to CGP Committee for approval in January 2022.
- The Register of Electors will then be fully re-published following CGP Committee in January reflecting the new polling district and ward codes (all electors will be designated a new roll number) before poll cards are issued for the May 2022 elections.

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 has been to review Resident Forums and Area Committee arrangements which currently have a ward/area link. Up to May 2021 there has been a focus 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 for the reconstitution of Area Committees and Residents Forums have been developed and initial proposals were reported to the Members at the Cross-Party Reference Group on 14 July 2021. The reference group provided feedback on the options and these were reworked and reported for consideration on 14 September 2021. Members have requested that the proposals be discussed within their Groups and feedback will be reported to officers. Further Member meetings will be scheduled to review and refine the options following feedback if this is necessary. Following Member review, the changes will be reported to this committee for approval.
- Final proposals must be 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 continues to engage with cross-council services to ensure case management systems are ready for ward boundary changes, further meeting arranged for Q2 to ensure preparedness.
- Upgrade to Geographical Information System (GIS) capability has commenced and will go live Q3. This will provide a public facing interactive tool to encourage self-service on the council's website.

- New Ward boundaries have been uploaded to the local insight tool (<https://barnet.communityinsight.org/>)
- 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. Census output consultation currently taking place.

4.9 Stakeholder Engagement workstream

- Following the delivery of the GLA Elections in May 2021, the Stakeholder Engagement workstream has now progressed and proactive communications have commenced.
- Proactive communications has include: Barnet First Residents magazine (w/c 19th July), Barnet First e-newsletter (July), CTN Bulletin (July), First Team (July), Senior Management Briefing (Aug), and all staff Breakfast Briefing (September)
- Stakeholder Engagement Strategy has been 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 have been delivered to identified boards, forums and committees to ensure all relevant stakeholders are engaged with, including Health and Wellbeing Board, Safer Communities Partnership Board (July) and Borough Resilience Forum (July)
- Following approval at CGP Committee, the public consultation for the proposed polling district and polling places will be promoted during October through to mid-December encouraging feedback on the proposals.
- Phase 2 of the communications strategy will then take place in January 2022 through to May to promote the final approve polling district and polling places ahead of the Local Elections in May 2022.

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 The Group has met five 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 all the new Wards.

4.10.6 During the final meeting in September the final proposals of polling places and polling districts were discussed in preparation for presentation at the CGP Committee for review and comment ahead of the statutory public consultation period.

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
• Review of Residents Forums/Area Committees	Jun-Nov 2021	Review Residents Forums/Area Committees and seek Member agreement for revised arrangements
• Constitution & General Purposes Committee	4 Oct 2021	Presenting 1 st draft of new polling district and polling places - for CGP Committee discussion and feedback
• Statutory Public Consultation on Polling District and Polling Places	Mid Oct-Dec 2021	Public consultation inviting residents, elected officials and other stakeholders to comment on the polling district and polling places proposal.
• Constitution & General Purposes Committee	6 Jan 2022	Final polling district and polling places report - for CGP committee final approval and decision.
• 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	5 May 2022	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 Following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's 'Electoral Review' of Barnet, a draft order was laid before Parliament in July 2020. This has subsequently become Statutory Instrument 2020 No. 1106 'The London Borough of Barnet (Electoral Changes) Order 2020'. This legislates that the new wards within Barnet come into effect from 6 May 2022.
- 5.4.3 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."
- 5.4.4 The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a duty under Section 9(1) of Representation of the People Act 1983 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.
- 5.4.5 The ERO has a duty under Section 9A of Representation of the People Act 1983 (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.
- 5.4.6 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) 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.

5.8.3 The draft proposals for new polling districts and polling places will be presented for statutory public consultation in October inviting comments on the new electoral arrangements in Barnet. Feedback from the consultation will be presented to CGP Committee in January 2022 as part of the final proposals.

5.9 Insight

5.9.1 The data included in LGBCE report is publicly available via the LGBCE website (www.lgbce.org.uk/barnet).

5.9.2 Updated insight information can be found in Barnet's Local Insight Tool (<https://barnet.communityinsight.org/>)

5.9.3 New Census outputs will be based on new ward boundaries and will be available from March 2022.

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 \(LGBCE\)](#)
- 6.4 **Constitution and General Purposes Committee** Monday 22 June 2021, Agenda Item 7, [Implementing the new warding arrangements for the London Borough of Barnet - Project Update](#)