



## Constitution and General Purposes Committee

6 January 2022

<b>Title</b>	<b>Late Addendum on proposals for new Polling Districts and Polling Places</b>
<b>Report of</b>	John Hooton - Returning Officer for Barnet
<b>Enclosures</b>	Appendix 29 – Alternative Polling Proposals for High Barnet Appendix 30 - Equalities Impact Assessment on the two polling proposals for High Barnet ward
<b>Officer Contact Details</b>	John Bailey, Head of Electoral Services 020 8359 3008 - <a href="mailto:john.bailey@barnet.gov.uk">john.bailey@barnet.gov.uk</a>

### Summary

An additional representation on the proposals for polling arrangements in High Barnet ward was submitted by the Labour Group (via Councillor Geof Cooke) following publication of the full proposals shared at Agenda Item 8.

In response an Alternative Proposal has been developed for High Barnet ward that could serve electors for polling in High Barnet ward.

### Officers Recommendations

1. The committee is asked to decide whether to designate the original Returning Officer Proposal for High Barnet or the Alternate Proposal for High Barnet as the official polling arrangements to be used in this ward at elections.

#### 1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

- 1.1 The representation put forward by the Labour Group raised concerns about the accessibility of two polling venues within the High Barnet proposals in the Returning Officer proposal for High Barnet (attached as an appendix to agenda item 8), as many pedestrian electors in two of the proposed polling districts for High Barnet, would need to cross Barnet Road.

- 1.2 The proposed polling districts, in the Returning Officer proposal for High Barnet, served by Arkley Club and St Peter's Church Hall would each serve in-person voters that are registered on both sides of Barnet Road.
- 1.3 The Labour Group representation proposed that Whittings Hill School be used as a polling venue instead of St Peter's Church Hall and that the polling districts be redrawn to avoid the need for in-person pedestrian electors to cross Barnet Road.
- 1.4 An alternative proposal has been developed that meets these proposals (attached as Appendix 29).
- 1.5 Based on the assessment of Whittings Hill School, carried out following a visit by the Head of Electoral Services on 2 December 2021, it is believed that the school would decide that it must close on polling days if used as a polling station, due to their safeguarding duties towards pupils.
- 1.6 The committee is asked to choose either the original Returning Officer proposal or the Alternative Proposal as the designated polling arrangements to be used in the new High Barnet ward.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 It is critical that the borough's new polling arrangements are decided upon at the committee meeting on 6 January 2022.
- 2.2 The new polling arrangements must be implemented within the Register of Electors, so that it may be fully re-published with all electors allocated to their new wards and polling districts. This work must be completed before any preparations for the forthcoming local government elections on 5 May 2022 can properly commence.

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

- 3.1 In accordance with the provisions of Statutory Instrument Order 2020 No. 1106: ***The London Borough of Barnet (Electoral Changes) Order***, the new wards within Barnet are legislated to come into effect from 5 May 2022. There is no lawful alternative to introducing new polling districts and polling places to serve these new wards at the elections on 5 May 2022.
- 3.2 To adopt the initial proposals without consideration to the representations received during the statutory public consultation could lead to an appeal being lodged by electors to the Electoral Commission. This in turn could have a negative effect on the perceived fairness and transparency of future elections within Barnet.

## **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 Following the committee's decision on the polling arrangements for High Barnet, these will be used to re-publish the Register of Electors. This in turn will enable eligible electors within High Barnet to be sent poll cards and to vote within the chosen arrangements at future elections within the ward.
- 4.2 The list of designated polling places and maps detailing the designated new polling districts will be published on the website.

4.3 The designated polling arrangements will be used for the conduct of all future statutory elections within the borough.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

5.1 **Corporate Priorities and Performance** – all as per main report at Agenda Item 8

5.2 **Social Value** – all as per main report at Agenda Item 8

5.3 **Legal and Constitutional References**– all as per main report at Agenda Item 8

5.4 **Risk Management** – all as per main report at Agenda Item 8

### **5.5 Equalities and Diversity**

5.6.1 In addition to the Equalities Impact Assessment (provided as Appendix 28 to the main report at Agenda Item 8), the Head of Electoral Services has completed an Equalities Impact Assessment specifically on the two proposals for High Barnet ward (the Returning Officer Proposal and the Alternative Proposal) – this is attached as Appendix 30.

5.6.2 The legislation governing this review requires that representations are sought from persons who are considered to have an expertise in access to locations for persons with different forms of disability. To fulfil this requirement, Barnet's Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing has reviewed the proposals and the Equalities Impact Assessment for High Barnet.

5.6.3 The delivery of this electoral process is strictly governed by legislation, which is in itself designed to provide for reasonable access for all electors – including persons who have different forms of disability (so far as is reasonably practicable in the circumstances). In addition to providing polling stations that are as accessible as practicable in the circumstances, Part 2 Representation of People Act 2000 provides that all voters have the right to request the use of postal or proxy voting arrangements.

5.6.4 Effective processes and activities with regards to registering residents on the electoral roll, in compliance with all relevant electoral legislation, ensures that all eligible individuals can choose to exercise their democratic rights in the manner in which they choose (as allowed by law).

5.6 **Corporate Parenting** – all as per main report at Agenda Item 8

5.7 **Consultation and Engagement** - all as per main report at Agenda Item 8

5.8 **Insight** – all as per main report at Agenda Item 8

**6. BACKGROUND PAPERS-** all as per main report at Agenda Item 8