



## Licensing and General Purposes Committee

<b>Title</b>	<b>Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023 – Returning Officer Proposals</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>8 November 2023</b>
<b>Report of</b>	<b>John Hooton - Chief Executive and Returning Officer</b>
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Appendices</b>	<p><b>Appendix A:</b> Representations Received during the Public Consultation and Returning Officer’s responses.</p> <p><b>Appendices B – I:</b> Maps showing proposed new Polling District and Polling Place arrangements in eight wards.</p> <p><b>Appendix J:</b> Map showing proposed ‘potential’ new Polling District and Polling Place arrangements in Colindale South ward.</p> <p><b>Appendix K:</b> Map showing proposed new Polling District and Polling Place arrangements in High Barnet ward.</p>
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### Summary

Following approval at the Licensing and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 20 July 2023, an Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places was launched on 31 July 2023 and a public consultation was held from that date until 15 September 2023.

A copy of all Representations received are provided within Appendix A, along with the Returning Officer’s (RO) response to each of them. Based upon the Representations received, and other work undertaken by Barnet’s Electoral services team, changes are being proposed by the Returning Officer to improve polling arrangements in nine wards across the borough.

These changes are detailed in the following Appendices:

Ward	Appendix	Ward	Appendix	Ward	Appendix
Burnt Oak	B	Hendon	F	*Colindale South	J
Childs Hill	C	Golders Green	G		
East Finchley	D	Mill Hill	H	**High Barnet	K
Edgwarebury	E	West Hendon	I		

\*The proposed changes in Colindale South are subject to confirmation of suitability, availability and acceptance of use for the polling place proposed within Colindale Gardens. It is requested that the committee approve this request on the basis that if no agreement is reached with the venue, or the venue is assessed as unsuitable, then the arrangements in the relevant polling district(s) will remain as at present.

\*\*The proposed changes in High Barnet were previously brought to the Council meeting on 25 Jan 2022 (Agenda Item 12.3) and titled 'HB Option B' (link provided at 9.2 below).

Subject to approval from the committee, when the Register of Electors is republished on 1 December 2023, it will be amended to reflect the new polling arrangements that are in place. Where confirmation for a preferred venue is still awaited, but is secured too late for the 1 December publication, the Register of electors will be republished in full at a later date, following two weeks' public notice being made beforehand and no later than 1 March 2023, in order to make the necessary amendments to the register.

## Recommendations

1. **That the committee 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. **That the Committee approve the proposed new arrangements for polling districts and polling places that are contained within Appendices B - I.**
3. **That the Committee 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. **That the Committee approve the proposed arrangements for the High Barnet polling districts and polling places, as contained within Appendix K.**

### 1. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 1.1 Whilst existing polling arrangements proved effective for use at the Local Government elections held on 5 May 2022, it is necessary to regularly review polling arrangements to ensure that they remain as appropriate and fit for purpose as possible in response to changing electorate figures, the availability of venues and various other ward or local area specific circumstances.
- 1.2 A public consultation was conducted between 31 July 2023 and 15 September 2023. Notice of the Review was published on the Council's website and in addition, all elected officials (Members of Parliament, Greater London Assembly Member and London Borough of Barnet Councillors) were written to directly on 27 July 2023. In addition, all venues currently used for polling were informed about the consultation on 31 August 2023.
- 1.3 Following a review of all the representations received to the public consultation between 31 July and 15 September 2023, where appropriate, Electoral Services have contacted and/or visited all the venues proposed as potential polling places, along with some that were proposed or identified outside of the public consultation period.
- 1.4 When assessing the suitability of a potential polling venue, Electoral Services have followed the following guiding principles (agreed by the Cross-Party Reference Group when polling arrangements were agreed for the new borough wards prior to May 2022):

- To ensure that all electors within each ward are within as reasonable and equitable distance of their polling venue as is practicable (whilst taking into account the operating capacity and accessibility of individual venues).
- To minimise the use of schools - seeking to use practical alternative arrangements for electors where these are available.
- To eliminate so far as possible the use of temporary, portable offices (which offer poor accessibility, poor facilities and can only serve very small numbers of electors at a time) in order to eliminate excessive costs and highly problematic logistical issues.

1.5 Where venues indicated that they would be available and were assessed as suitable for use as a polling place, geographical data analysis was then undertaken to evaluate how many electors could be served should the venue be used for polling within the relevant ward. This analysis was key to determining the proposals that are being put forward by the Returning Officer with regards to polling place venues and any amendments to polling district boundaries.

1.6 It is considered by the Returning Officer and Barnet's Head of Electoral Services, that the polling proposals being put forward as appendices to this report meet the following criteria:

- They better serve affected electors by offering superior polling facilities, accessibility and/or location in comparison with existing arrangements.
- and/or
- Where possible, they reduce inconvenience, caused by polling day arrangements, for local residents without any detrimental effect upon the voting arrangements for electors.

## **2. Alternative Options Considered and Not Recommended**

2.1 As a compulsory review does not have to be undertaken at present, there is an option to do nothing and simply leave all current polling places and polling districts as they are.

2.2 However, this option significantly increases the likelihood of enforced changes being necessary in the immediate run up to elections. This would mean that electors could be given late notice of changes to polling arrangements and increases the risk that electors do not know where they must go to vote on polling day.

2.3 The 'do nothing' option also increases the risk that current polling venues have not been adequately reviewed to consider whether local changes (to electorate sizes, or specific to the venue itself etc.) have impacted upon any specific venue's suitability for the polling district it serves.

2.4 Making no changes to polling places or polling districts following the public consultation and evaluations that have been carried out, will mean that identified opportunities to improve polling arrangements to the benefit of electors and/or residents will have been disregarded.

## **3. Post Decision Implementation**

3.1 When republished on 1 December 2023, the Register of Electors will be amended to reflect the new polling arrangements that are in place (the Register of Electors is organised by ward and polling districts and new elector roll numbers will be allocated on that basis).

3.2 Should any changes approved by the committee depend upon a future agreement to use a proposed polling venue and this agreement comes too late for the 1 December republication, the Register will be republished in full at a later date (following two weeks' public notice of this additional republication taking place), by no later than 1 March 2023.

- 3.3 The polling districts and polling places approved by the committee will be used for all statutory elections hereafter (at present, the first scheduled elections to take place are the Mayor of London and Greater London Assembly (GLA) Elections on 2 May 2024).

#### **4. Corporate Priorities, Performance and Other Considerations**

##### **Corporate Plan**

- 4.1 This report is aligned with the corporate plan pillar of ‘An engaged and effective council’. The priority set out is to ‘Transform our services to deliver the best outcomes we can, ensuring our services are easily accessible to residents and that their experience of contacting and engaging with the council is consistent, seamless, and focussed on their needs.

##### **Corporate Performance / Outcome Measures**

- 4.2 The review supports delivery of the measure how “We act on concerns of local residents and involve them in decision making”.
- 4.3 The Polling Districts and Polling Place review also ensures that the designation of polling districts and polling places in Barnet remain compliant with electoral legislation (in particular Elections Act 2022 (sec. 9)) and guidance issue by the Electoral Commission.

##### **Sustainability**

- 4.4 N/A within this report.

##### **Corporate Parenting**

- 4.5 N/A within this report.

##### **Risk Management**

- 4.6 By undertaking this review of Polling Districts and Polling Places, the Council mitigates the risk that electors find the arrangements for polling within the Borough to be hampered by poor accessibility or the provision of sub-standard facilities (given the practicable circumstances prevailing in each polling district).

##### **Insight**

- 4.7 In accordance with statutory requirements and guidance from the Electoral Commission, data from the Register of Electors is used to both assess and determine all polling arrangements proposed to the Council.

##### **Social Value**

- 4.8 N/A within this report.

#### **5. Resource Implications (Finance and Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT and Property)**

- 5.1 The Council is only responsible for the costs of conducting local government (local) elections, including, when held, local by-elections that elect the Borough’s own councillors. To cover the cost of these elections, the council contributes £0.178m per annum to an election reserve, which is then used to finance the local government elections every four years (c.£0.712m).
- 5.2 For other elections, all ‘actual and necessary’ costs are recovered by the Returning Officer from the relevant governing body for that election (e.g. central government for national UK elections or referendums and the GLA for the London Mayoral and Greater London Assembly elections).

5.3 Dependent upon any specific changes proposed to individual polling place venues (including any proposals that increase or decrease the overall number of venues used for polling), there can be minor changes to the overall cost of running elections.

## **6. Legal Implications and Constitution References**

- 6.1 In carrying out any review of polling arrangements, the local authority must comply with the steps set out in Schedule A1 Representation of the People Act 1983. The local authority is required to:
- publish a notice of the holding of a review
  - consult the (Acting) Returning Officer for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area
  - publish all representations made by the Returning Officer within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area and, if the authority maintains a website, by placing a copy on the authority's website (regulation 3 of the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006)
  - seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the (Acting) Returning Officer(s).
  - on completion of a review, give reasons for its decisions and, in accordance with regulation 4 of the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, publish:
    - all correspondence sent to an (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review
    - all correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability
    - all representations made by any person in connection with the review
    - the minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review
    - details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review
    - details of the places where the results of the review have been published
- 6.2 To comply with the requirements of the Representation of the People Act 1983 sections 18A-18E (as amended by section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013), the Council is required to undertake a compulsory review of all polling districts and polling places in the period between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (and then within the same period every fifth year after that). This review is proposed as a discretionary 'interim' review and is not intended to fulfil the obligation, as a further review will be conducted within the stipulated timeframe of the legislation.
- 6.3 Provision is contained within Section 18E RPA 1983 which provides that no election is to be questioned by reason of any informality relative to polling districts and polling places. Representations can be made to the Electoral Commission which may make directions to alter polling districts and/or polling places.
- 6.4 In accordance with Part 2B of the London Borough of Barnet's Constitution, the Terms of Reference & Delegation of Duties to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee include elections and electoral registration performance, polling places and polling district boundaries.

<b>7. Consultation</b>	
7.1	Details of consultation held have been given at 1.2 above.
7.2	The publishing of this report and its appendices (along with the report that went to Licensing and General Purposes Committee on 20 July 2023 to approve the PDPP Consultation) provide that the requirements of legislation as laid out in 6.1 have been met.
<b>8. Equalities and Diversity</b>	
8.1	No separate equalities impact assessment has been undertaken as 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).
8.2	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. In order to fulfil this requirement, the Head of Service for Health and Safety at the London Borough of Barnet will be asked to review and comment upon the arrangements for polling across the borough.
8.3	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 electors have the right to vote (following application and provision of relevant information within statutory election deadlines) by way of either a postal or proxy voting arrangement.
8.4	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).
<b>9. Background Papers</b>	
9.1	Approval for current polling arrangements in 20 of the 24 Barnet wards: <a href="#">Agenda for Constitution and General Purposes Committee on Thursday 6th January, 2022, 7.00 pm (moderngov.co.uk)</a> <b>(Item 8)</b> .
9.2	Approval for current polling arrangements in the remaining four Barnet wards: <a href="#">Agenda for Council on Tuesday 25th January, 2022, 7.00 pm (moderngov.co.uk)</a> <b>(Item 12.3)</b> .
9.3	Approval for the Polling Districts and Polling Places public consultation, based upon existing polling arrangements within Barnet: <a href="#">Agenda for Licensing and General Purposes Committee on Thursday 20th July, 2023, 7.00 pm (moderngov.co.uk)</a> <b>(Item 5)</b> .