



Report of: (Acting) Returning Officer

Meeting of:	Date	Agenda item	Ward(s)
Audit Committee	29 January 2015		Highbury East, Barnsbury, Holloway & St Peter's and Highbury West

Delete as appropriate	Exempt	Non-exempt
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SUBJECT: Change of Polling Places – Highbury East, Barnsbury and Holloway Wards

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 This report sets out a proposed change to three polling places following a consultation process carried out in accordance with the Electoral Administration Act 2006.
- 1.2 This change will take effect with the publication of the alterations list to the Register of Electors on 1 February 2015 and have effect for the General Election on 7 May 2015.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To agree to the changes set out in this report in the following wards:-

Highbury East
Barnsbury
Holloway
- 2.2 To note the comments regarding Highbury West and St Peter's Ward in paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10.
- 2.3 To delegate to the Chief Executive (as (Acting) Returning Officer) the designation of Popham and Cumming Community Centre or New North Academy as the Polling Place for St. Peter's Ward.

3. Background

Introduction

- 3.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The compulsory review must be started and completed between 1 October 2013 and 31 January 2015 inclusive. Subsequent compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013. Interim reviews may be carried out if needed. Following each election officers review the running of the election and specifically look at

any issues that have arisen to do with polling places or polling districts.

- 3.2 The substantive review took place last in October 2013 and the new polling scheme was approved by the Audit Committee on 30 January 2014. However, two polling places are no longer available and so this report seeks approval to the proposed changes set out in the report which shall have effect at the forthcoming UKPGE in May 2015. An interim review is therefore needed. The steps required for a review have been undertaken, including the publication of proposals and consultation on them.
- 3.3 Section 18B (4) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 states that in conducting a review of polling places the authority must:
- a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
 - b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.
- 3.4 In addition the polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district
- 3.5 Electorate and property figures are as at 1 December 2014.

PROPOSED CHANGES

3.6 Highbury East Ward

Existing Polling Place

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
NHEA	Drayton Park School Drayton Park London N5 1PJ	3274	2091	2

Drayton Park School is situated on the western edge of the polling district. It has level access and has been used as the polling place for this polling district for some years. However, in order to enable the school to remain open we used an outbuilding for the elections in May 2014. The available space is very small and continued use could have implications for the efficient management of the double station that is required for the polling district particularly at a UK Parliamentary General Election where turnout will be significantly high.

Proposed Polling Place

Polling District	Potential New Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
NHEA	The Crescent Suite 70 Ronalds Road, London, N5 1XA	3274	2091	2

This venue was visited in September 2014. The building has level access to the side entrance and a large central hall. For most electors in the Polling District it will be easier to reach than Drayton Park School as it is slightly more centrally located but also only a two minute walk from the old polling place. The venue offers good polling facilities. It is therefore recommended that The Crescent Suite is designated as the Polling Place for the NHEA polling district.

3.7 **Barnsbury Ward**

Existing Polling Place

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
SBAA	New River College Dowrey Street London N1 0LS	2614	1771	2

New River College has been the designated Polling Place for several years and is well placed for the majority of voters. However, it is being demolished. Therefore we needed to find a suitable alternative.

Proposed Polling Place

Polling District	Potential New Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
SBAA	Celestial Church, Cloudesley Square	2614	1771	2

This venue in the centre of Cloudesley Square has been visited and is suitable to be used as the Polling Place. It is also very close to the previous venue so should cause minimal inconvenience to voters on the day. The Church has been booked and they are happy for us to use it.

3.8 **Holloway Ward**

Existing Polling Place

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
SHYB	Goodinge Community Centre North Road	3834	2735	2

This polling place will not be available as it is due to be demolished.

Proposed Polling Place

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
SHYB	Drovers Day Centre/Hungerford Nursery	3834	2735	2

This venue is just a few yards from the current venue on the same road so will make no difference to electors in terms of distance travelled and will not cause any issues regarding awareness of location. The venue was visited and assessed in December 2014 and is entirely suitable for polling, has level access throughout and all the necessary facilities. The venue is happy to be used for polling and it has been booked for May 2015 already.

If the proposed changes are agreed, all electors will receive information via our election awareness raising/participation letters in February which will include a map of the new polling location. All electors will also receive a poll card in April highlighting the change. Good signage would be in place at both the new and old polling place to alert electors to the change also.

3.9 Highbury West

We have said in previous reviews that Highbury West should be kept under review. There is an issue in Polling District C that requires those living in Queensland Road, Bryantwood Road and Benwell Road area to vote at Aubert Court. Although this has been the case for a few elections now, the increased population particularly in Queensland Road make this less than ideal. A suitable potential polling place has been identified at Queensland Road sports centre but is not yet ready. As the change would require a redrawing of two polling districts NHWC and NHWD which would then require republishing the Elector Register it is recommended that there is no change for this year but that it be noted that we expect to come back to committee after the general election with recommendations for change once we have been able to assess the venue once it is open and accessible to the public.

3.10 St Peter's

At the review last year Audit Committee moved the polling place at Polling District SSPA from Popham and Cumming Community Centre back to New North Academy. This year the Academy has stated it no longer wishes to be used as a polling place and has asked if we can find an alternative venue. We are currently in discussions with the Academy about this, and the council is entitled to use the school as a polling place, but the situation is on-going. As the next meeting of this committee comes after the date by which a decision needs to be made, it is proposed that the designation of the polling place is delegated to the Returning Officer. It will be either the New North Academy or Popham and Cumming Community Centre, both of which are suitable venues for polling to take place.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial implications:

The costs of the polling districts and polling places review will be met from within existing budgets.

4.2 Legal Implications:

4.2.1 The Representation of the People Act 1983 section 18D requires that local authorities designate the polling places within their Parliamentary constituencies. Under Representation of the People Act 1983, Returning Officers have the right to use certain public buildings (including schools that receive public funds) for use as polling stations at elections.

4.2.2 Section 18B (4) of the RPA 1983 states that in conducting a review of polling places the authority must:

- a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
- b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

4.2.2 In addition the polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district.

4.3 Equality Impact Assessment:

4.3.1 Electoral Services considered a review of all possible polling places and used a suitability and access checklist. This was drawn largely from the recommendations in Scope's Poll Report 4 published following the 2005 General Election. One checklist has been completed for each existing poll place and all proposed new polling places.

4.3.2 All polling staff receives equalities training as part of the induction for working on the election.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1 The Electoral Registration & Administration Act 2013 requires all authorities to keep polling districts and polling places in its area under review.

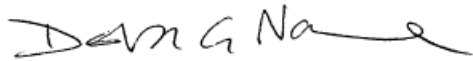
5.2 The proposals have been made following non-availability of the designated venues for the election in May 2015. Representations have been sought from political groups and the report takes into account informal conversations held with members and party agents.

Appendices

Background papers: None.

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



Assistant Director Governance and HR

Date

Received by:

Head of Democratic Services

Date

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