



Report of: (Acting) Returning Officer

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Audit Committee	22 September 2015	All

Delete as appropriate	Exempt	Non-exempt

## **SUBJECT: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places**

### **1. Synopsis**

- 1.1 This report sets out proposed changes to polling districts and 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 revised Register of Electors on 1 December 2015 and for all elections for four years thereafter.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 To agree to the changes set out in this report in relation to Highbury West ward
- 2.2 To decide which of the two potential building identified at paragraph 3.6 should be adopted as a polling place for St Peter's ward
- 2.3 To note the comments regarding Barnsbury ward and that all other wards remain unchanged.

### **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. However, 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. An interim review took place in January 2015 which noted a further interim review would be needed later in the year. This report seeks approval to the proposed changes set out in the report which shall have affect at the forthcoming Mayoral and GLA elections in

May 2016. 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.

3.3 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

3.4 Electorate and property figures are as at 1 September 2015.

## PROPOSED CHANGES

### 3.5 Highbury West Ward

There has been an ongoing issue in this ward where some residents to the immediate south of the Emirates stadium have been required to attend a polling place that is up to 15 minutes further way than the proposed new polling place.. Whilst the number of actual complaints has been minimal it is recognised by most interested parties that this was not an ideal situation and that as soon as a suitable venue was found that a proposal for change be made.

A venue has now become available, the Arsenal Hub, at the junction of Queensland Road and Benwell Road which this report proposes can resolve the ongoing problem of the last few years.

The proposal is to create a fifth Polling District (NHWE). A Map of the proposed new polling scheme for the ward is attached at Appendix 1.

The effect of this would be that the number of electors attending Hind House in NHWD and Aubert Court Community Centre in NHWC would be reduced. The below sets out the details of the five polling districts.

#### Polling Places

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Properties	Electorate	Polling Stations
<b>NHWA</b>	<b>St Thomas' Church Hall</b>	<b>1569</b>	<b>2697</b>	<b>2</b>

No change to this polling district or polling place.

Polling District	Potential New Polling Place	Properties	Electorate	Polling Stations
<b>NHWB</b>	<b>St John's Highbury Vale School</b>	<b>2055</b>	<b>3291</b>	<b>2</b>

No change to this polling district or polling place.

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Properties	Electorate	Polling Stations
<b>NHWC</b>	<b>Aubert Court</b>	<b>1588</b>	<b>2632</b>	<b>2</b>

The polling place venue remains the same but the electorate attending here is reduced by 1117.

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Properties	Electorate	Polling Stations
<b>NHWD</b>	<b>Hind House</b>	<b>1603</b>	<b>2184</b>	<b>1</b>

The polling place venue remains the same but the electorate attending here is reduced by 585.

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Properties	Electorate	Polling Stations
<b>NHWE</b>	<b>The Arsenal Hub</b>	<b>1440</b>	<b>1702</b>	<b>1</b>

The new polling district would consist of the following streets/electors:

Road Name/Numbers	Previous Polling District	Properties	Electors
Benwell Road	NHWD	202	274
Ashburton Triangle	NHWD	249	311
Drayton Park 1-63	NHWC	65	102
Queensland Road	NHWC	728	677
Bryantwood Road	NHWC	110	192
Courtney Road & Courtney Court	NHWC	86	146
Total		1440	1702

### 3.6 St Peter's Ward

In 2013 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.

Below are extracts of a letter submitted by the Chair of Governors at New North prior to the General Election regarding the schools continued use where they ask that an alternative venue is found for the GLA 2016 elections – The full representation can be found at Appendix 2:

“I am writing to confirm that the governors of the New North Academy are strongly opposed to our school being used as a polling station.

We are the fifth most deprived school in Islington, with 56.5% of our pupils qualifying for Free School Meals. Attendance and punctuality are key school priorities. Our pupils need to be in school, learning, every day. They cannot afford to lose over .5% of their annual teaching entitlement because their school is closed.

...We know that there has been a welcome move away in Islington from using schools as polling stations when this requires the school to be closed. We believe our school should be included in this

initiative.

...We do not feel that the borough would be acting with the best interests of our children at its heart if it used its powers to insist that our school is closed.”

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
<b>SSPA</b>	<b>New North Academy</b>	<b>3409</b>	<b>2291</b>	<b>2</b>

Polling District	Possible Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
<b>SSPA</b>	<b>Popham &amp; Cumming Community Centre</b>	<b>3409</b>	<b>2291</b>	<b>2</b>

Popham & Cumming has again been assessed and the building is suitable to be used as a polling place, although access for those unable to use stairs may take 2 or 3 minutes longer than for other voters.

We have for several years been trying to move away from using schools as polling places where a suitable alternative exists within the Polling District. New North Academy has urged the Council to not use the school.

The committee is asked to consider and decide which building should be designated as the polling place.

### 3.7 **Barnsbury Ward**

#### Existing Polling Place

Polling District	Current Polling Place	Electorate	Properties	Polling Stations
<b>SBAA</b>	<b>Celestial Church, Cloudesley Square</b>	<b>2614</b>	<b>1771</b>	<b>2</b>

This venue was used at the UK Parliamentary General Election as the New River College was and still is in the process of being demolished and rebuilt. There is an issue with a step up once inside the venue. This did not result in any issues this time but is an inherent risk with the venue that we will have assessed and will take all reasonable steps to mitigate the risk. The only viable alternative is the Lift centre in White Lion Street, which is an excellent venue but not conveniently located. It is therefore recommended that Celestial Church continues to be the designated Polling Place for this district

## **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 Resident 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. As noted above, access to the Popham Community Centre may take slightly longer for voters unable to use stairs.

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 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:**



14 September 2015

Assistant Director Governance and HR

Date

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