



Draft Report of: (Acting) Returning Officer

| Meeting of: | Date | Agenda item | Ward(s) |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------|---------|
| Audit Committee | 19 September 2017 | | All |

| Delete as appropriate | Exempt | Non-exempt |
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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 2017 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 and Barnsbury wards
- 2.2 To decide which of the three potential buildings identified at paragraph 3.8 should be adopted as the polling place for Polling District NHEC in Highbury East ward
- 2.3 To note the comments regarding St George's 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 fuller further review took place in Sept 2015 and took effect from 1 December 2015. This report seeks approval to the proposed changes set

out in the report which shall have affect at the forthcoming Local Council elections in May 2018 (and any other elections after 1 December 2017 for a period of 4 years). 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 Additionally, 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 August 2017.

PROPOSED CHANGES

3.6 Highbury West Ward

There have been issues in this ward over several years in identifying a suitable venue for the residents to the immediate south of the Emirates stadium. A venue has been available for the last 2 years, the Arsenal Hub, at the junction of Queensland Road and Benwell Road. However, this venue's security policy is not compatible with the needs of a polling station so we again need to find an alternative.

The Great Hall at London Met on Holloway Road is the only alternative venue in the Polling District. It is accessed via Holloway Road and will be well known in the area. The Hall itself is accessed via a flight of stairs but also has a working lift for those that need it.

It is regrettable that Arsenal Hub can no longer be used as it was an excellent venue. However, an elector's right to cast their vote should not be conditional and any enforced bag checks could leave the Returning Officer exposed to accusations of impeding the democratic process.

| Polling District | Proposed Polling Place | Properties | Electorate | Polling Stations |
|------------------|---|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| NHWE | The Great Hall, London Metropolitan University, Holloway Road, London N7 | 1440 | 2003 | 1 |

The review in 2015 where the new Polling District above (NHWE) was created, omitted some properties from the new PD in error and they remained in NHWD voting at Hind House. This has now been corrected the properties concerned are in the table below.

| Road Name/Numbers | Previous Polling District | Properties | Electors |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 30-48a Hornsey Road (inc Branston House and Rollit House) | NHWD | 118 | 161 |
| 134A – 234A Holloway Road | NHWD | 74 | 59 |
| NHWE new Total | | 1632 | 2223 |

Comments received to initial proposal

The Islington Green Party commented to this proposal in the initial draft as follows:

“the Arsenal Hub is an excellent, central venue for the PD, and we are very disappointed at the decision by the club. The move will inconvenience voters in the north of the PD and will nudge even more to postal or not voting, neither of which are in our opinion good for democracy. We would like the council to impress upon the Club that if “Arsenal in the community” is to be more than a PR figleaf, it could start by genuinely making club facilities – which successive councils have bent over backwards to create - genuinely serve the community. Some flexibility on their part is surely not impossible”.

3.7 **Barnsbury Ward**

| Polling District | Proposed Polling Place | Electorate | Properties | Polling Stations |
|------------------|--|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| SBAA | New River College Cloudesley Square | 2614 | 1771 | 2 |

This venue is now rebuilt and voting can take place again here in future. Access to the new building is via Cloudesley Square, which is where voters have accessed polling for the last couple of years at the Celestial Church of Christ which was used as a temporary measure whilst the school was being rebuilt. **It is therefore highly recommended that New River College is once again adopted as the designated polling place for SBAA polling district.**

Comments received to initial proposal

No comments have been received to this proposal.

3.8 **Highbury East Ward**

For many years the Highbury Quadrant School has been used as the Polling Place for Mildmay Ward Polling District NMIC, within which it is located. However, it has also been used for Polling District NHEC which is in Highbury East ward.

Two potential alternative venues have been identified within NHEC which would alleviate the pressure on Highbury Quadrant school which gets very busy due to hosting four polling stations. The Returning Officer is aware that political party tellers can sometimes find the current situation at Highbury Quadrant School challenging. A new Polling Place for NHEC would mean voters would be voting within the boundary of the polling district.

No changes are proposed to Mildmay district NMIC which would continue to vote at Highbury Quadrant School.

3.81 **Option 1.**

| Polling District | Potential Polling Place | Electorate | Properties | Polling Stations |
|------------------|---|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| NHEC | Highbury Grove 6th Form Centre, Highbury New Park | 3020 | 2012 | 2 |

This is located at the far south of the polling district and is accessible from Highbury New Park. It has a separate entrance which means it does not impact on the school which can remain open as it can be entirely segregated.

This is offered as an option as it satisfies the requirement of having a venue within the polling district.

However, it would be a significant distance walk for most of the polling districts population who tend to be at the north or centre of the district which could have an impact on voter turnout.

Comments received to initial proposal

Islington Green Party have commented as follows:

“there are pluses and minuses here – but we calculate that around 2/3 of the voters in the PD will end up walking more, with the consequences for voter turnout noted above. We are therefore opposed to this change, on balance”.

Cllr Russell also commented

“The proposed polling station (H Grove School) means most residents in polling district C will have to walk quite a lot further to go and vote. Highbury Grove School is at the furthest corner of the polling district and the area is not at all permeable to walking. Highbury Quadrant School is not in the polling district but it is very convenient for people living in Parkview estate and Crowfield House and the Chestnuts and Taverner and Peckett Sq on Highbury Grange. People in Aberdeen Park can cut through Seaforth Cresc to get there”.

3.82 **Option 2**

| Polling District | Potential Polling Place | Electorate | Properties | Polling Stations |
|------------------|--|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| NHEC | St Joan of Arc Community Centre, Kelross Road | 3020 | 2012 | 2 |

Since the publication of the initial review a further venue has come to the Returning Officers attention as a potential polling place. The St Joan of Arc Community Centre on Kelross Road is situated just within Polling District NHEB and would mean a very minor tweaking of the polling district boundary which would essentially just need to be lifted to include 19 further electors into NHEC from NHEB. This venue sits more at the population centre than Option 1 and therefore would mean much less of a walk for voters. The venue itself meets all the necessary criteria for us to and is happy to be used.

3.83 However, consideration should be given to issues of continuity and the potential impact on voter turnout if polling were to move from the long-established existing location notwithstanding its being located slightly outside of the ward (See paragraph 4.2.3 below). Members of the committee are therefore invited to choose between the existing place Highbury Quadrant School or Option 1 or Option 2 above.

3.9 **St George’s Ward**

St George’s Church Centre is the venue for NSGA and NSGB due to no suitable location being available in NSGA. Comments have been made previously around adequate signage and challenges for party workers/tellers on polling day being able to successfully note who has/hasn’t voted and the increased likelihood of these being missed at these stations leading to residents being wrongly called upon later in the day and reminded to go and vote having already done so.

Whilst it is acknowledged this is a challenge for parties, there have been no complaints made by voters in relation to this issue. Given that this has been a long-standing arrangements and there is still no suitable alternative within NSGA polling district it is recommended leaving arrangements as they are at present.

Comments received to initial proposal

Islington Green Party commented:

“we recognise the trade-offs being made here, and while the current arrangement is far from ideal, we

agree that the status quo is acceptable”.

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.

4.2.3 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.

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.

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: None

Background papers: None.

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Director of Law and Governance

Date

Received by:

Date

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