

## LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

### Meeting of the General Purposes Committee 24<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Report from the Democratic Services Manager

For action	Wards affected: All
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### Report Title: POLLING DISTRICT REVIEW

#### 1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report summarises responses to consultation following the June elections on the current polling district arrangements and asks members to consider changes that would benefit electors in Brent.

#### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That members take decisions on proposed changes to existing polling district arrangements set out later in this report at paragraphs 3.6, 3.11, 3.14, 3.20, 3.23, 3.26, 3.29 and 3.32.

#### 3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 The current ward and polling district arrangements have been in place since 2002, during which time there have been full Council elections, a parliamentary by election in Brent East and, earlier this year, elections to the European Parliament, the Greater London Authority and for the London Mayor.
- 3.2 After the elections in June this year, the Electoral Services Manager wrote to all members seeking their views on the existing polling district boundaries. Whilst it is not within the Council's power to alter ward boundaries, it was thought that improvements to polling districts could be made in the light of experience gained from the elections that have taken place in the last two years.
- 3.3 Several members replied to the consultation. In addition, councillors and one member of the public submitted comments independently of the consultation. All these comments have been incorporated into this

report. Some of the views stated referred to the suitability of polling stations, a matter on which I will report to a future meeting of this Committee. I want in this report to concentrate on proposed changes to boundaries for our polling districts which, if agreed, can be implemented in time for the publication of the revised electoral register on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2004.

- 3.4 A summary of the consultation and resulting proposals follows and any further comments received will be reported to the meeting.

### **BARNHILL WARD**

- 3.5 Magnolia Court is currently in polling district NBA2. (See map at appendix 1). Electors living there currently have to vote at Harrow and Wembley Progressive Synagogue Hall on Preston Road. The polling station for neighbouring district NBA1, at Preston and Mall Youth and Community Centre on The Mall, is much closer for these electors, many of whom are elderly. A ward councillor has proposed that Magnolia Court therefore move to NBA1 which seems entirely sensible. There are about thirty electors in Magnolia Court which will not make a significant difference to the districts' relative sizes.

- 3.6 **RECOMMENDED:**

that Magnolia Court transfer from polling district NBA2 to NBA1.

- 3.7 A ward councillor has also proposed that, in view of the small number of electors in districts SBA5 and SBA6, these two districts be merged into one (see map at Appendix 2). These districts are identical to former districts in the old St Andrew's ward and cover the Chalkhill estate from Bridge Road in the west to Blackbird Hill in the east. There are approximately 2000 electors in total in these districts although this number is likely to increase with continuing redevelopment in the area.

- 3.8 The current polling stations for the two districts are Chalkhill Primary School and English Martyrs Church Hall. The school is placed in a reasonably central location and could accommodate an additional polling station. However, this is an area with traditionally low turnout at elections and the only apparent benefit of the suggested change is one fewer polling place. Given that the existing arrangements appear satisfactory and that altering them may depress turnout even further, I would argue for the retention of two polling districts.

- 3.9 However there are two boundary changes that I believe would be of benefit. Electors in the cul de sac St Davids Close currently vote at English Martyrs Church Hall but are geographically closer to Chalkhill Primary School. The boundary line may be easily re-drawn so that they are transferred into SBA5 district, as shown by the broken line in the south eastern corner of the district on the map at Appendix 2.

3.10 The other change would acknowledge the redevelopment that is taking place in the area. Currently the boundary line skirts now-demolished properties and continues through the area that is occupied by the Asda superstore. As this makes little sense, I am proposing that it be re-drawn as shown on the map at Appendix 2. No electors would be affected as a result of the change.

3.11 **RECOMMENDED:**

that the existing arrangements for polling districts SBA5 and SBA6 be retained subject to St Davids Close transferring to SBA5 district and the boundary line between the two districts being re-drawn to take account of redevelopment in the area.

### **BRONDESBURY PARK WARD**

3.12 The boundary between districts EBP3 and EBP4 runs along the middle of Aylestone Avenue (map at Appendix 3). This means that electors on one side of the road live and vote in district EBP4 at Malorees School despite living opposite Queens Park Community School, the polling place for electors in EBP3. Similarly, many electors at the northern end of EBP4 will most likely pass Aylestone School on their way to voting at Malorees School. Electors are understandably unhappy at passing one polling station to reach their own.

3.13 Neither of these districts is large with approximately 900 electors in each. Rather than trying to re-draw the boundary line between the two districts to accommodate residents on Aylestone Avenue, it may be preferable to merge the two districts into one. This would not increase by very much the distance to the polling station for residents of Christchurch Avenue, where their current polling station, Malorees School is situated. Other electors in the same district will be barely affected at all in this respect as the polling place will be centrally and conveniently located in the new polling district. Merging the districts would also have the added benefit of a school not being required to close on election day.

3.14 **RECOMMENDED:**

that polling districts EBP3 and EBP4 be merged into one district.

### **DUDDEN HILL WARD**

3.15 Polling District EDU4 is the largest in the borough with over 3000 electors (map at Appendix 4). It is nearly identical to a former district in the old Gladstone ward but with the addition of streets east of Park Avenue North. Although it is a large district, its polling place at Gladstone Park School on Sherrick Green Road is centrally located.

- 3.16 There is nevertheless some concern that the district is too large and the polling place too far from its eastern end at Chandos Road. Ward councillors report that electors in and around Chandos Road share this concern.
- 3.17 Electors in this area prior to the ward boundary changes voted at the Pakistan Community Centre. This polling place now serves voters in Mapesbury ward.
- 3.18 It would be possible to divide EDU4 into two districts with the new district comprising all of Park Avenue North and all the roads to its east. The new district would include around 800 electors. A broken line in the map at Appendix 4 shows the proposed boundary line.
- 3.19 The polling place for the new district would be Pakistan Community Centre which as I mentioned above currently serves Mapesbury voters. While the Returning Officer does not favour polling places serving two electoral areas for fear of potential confusion at the counting of votes, there is precedent elsewhere in the borough. Officers have visited Pakistan Community Centre and consider that the space can be managed so as to accommodate electors from different wards without causing confusion.
- 3.20 **RECOMMENDED:**

that EDU4 district be divided into two districts by drawing a boundary line along the rear of the houses at the western side of Park Avenue North.

### **FRYENT WARD**

- 3.21 A ward councillor has asked that an additional polling district be created in this ward. He would like to see NFR5 district divided into two with a new polling place in the Wakeman's Hill Avenue area (map at Appendix 5). The closure of Buck Lane to traffic at the Kingsbury Road end is said to make it difficult to reach Oliver Goldsmith School on Coniston Gardens by vehicle.
- 3.22 NFR5 district is a large one with sufficient electors for two polling stations. The current polling place is at Oliver Goldsmith School but officers have carried out a site visit and believe that electors at the north eastern end of the district are not best served by this. The broken line on the map at Appendix 5 suggests a way in which the district could be divided in two and there is scope for locating a portakabin on the wide pavement of Wakeman's Hill Avenue to serve electors in the new district.

3.23 RECOMMENDED:

that NFR district be divided into two districts as proposed in the map at Appendix 5 and a new polling place established on Wakeman's Hill Avenue.

**MAPESBURY WARD**

3.24 A ward councillor has asked that the boundary line between districts EMA1 and EMA2 be altered (map at Appendix 6). It is suggested that Anson School, the polling place for EMA2, is remote from voters at the farthest end of the district.

3.25 The justification for EMA2's existing boundaries is that many residents will journey along the busy Anson Road towards Cricklewood Broadway and public transport routes on a regular basis and therefore ordinarily pass the polling station. However, residents on Oman Avenue may well prefer the slightly shorter distance to Mora School. The map at Appendix 6 shows a broken line proposing an alternative boundary line between the two districts. The proposed new line also splits Olive Road between east and west rather than north and south.

3.26 RECOMMENDED:

that the boundary between EMA1 and EMA2 districts be re-drawn as suggested on the map at Appendix 6 of this report.

**PRESTON WARD**

3.27 A suggestion has been made that polling districts NPR4 and NPR5 be merged into one (map at Appendix 7). Currently voters in NPR4 vote at Wembley Manor Junior School on East Lane while voters in NPR5 vote at Wembley Manor Infants School on the same site. Some confusion is said to occur as a result of the proximity and similarity in name of the two polling places.

3.28 There are currently around 1700 electors in NPR4 and a little over 600 in NPR5. A merger would therefore not create an unduly large district and, if the electorate were to remain the same size, would result in one fewer polling station being required.

3.29 RECOMMENDED:

that the two polling districts NPR4 and NPR5 be merged into one.

**WELSH HARP WARD**

3.30 A local resident has complained on behalf of an elderly elector in the NWH2 district of Welsh Harp ward that this district has been drawn without regard for elderly residents in this area. The polling place is

3.31 Woodfield School at the top of Wood Lane and serves some electors who previously voted at the more conveniently placed Fryent School on Church Lane.

3.32 I share the concern of the elderly elector and agree that a boundary change is desirable. The map at Appendix 8 includes a broken line suggesting how the district may be divided. The electors nearest Church Lane would vote at Fryent School. Again, while the Returning Officer does not favour polling places serving two electoral areas for fear of potential confusion at the counting of votes, there is precedent elsewhere in the borough. The remaining electors would continue to vote at Woodfield School.

3.33 **RECOMMENDED:**

that NWH2 district be divided as suggested on the map at Appendix 8.

#### **4.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the Council to divide its area into polling districts and to keep them under review. In exercising these powers, all electors must be given “such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances”.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Any increase in the number of polling districts and/or polling stations would incur additional costs in terms of building hire and extra polling station staff. These costs are met by the Council only in the case of Council elections and by elections.

5.2 The cost of hire of Council-owned buildings is limited to meeting the expenses incurred in heating and lighting. At the other extreme, the hire of an individual portakabin costs around £2,000.

#### **6.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None specific.

#### **7.0 DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 This report is wholly concerned with the accessibility of polling stations to all voters in Brent.

#### **8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

8.1 Letter from Electoral Services Manager to all councillors and replies setting out comments on the current electoral arrangements.

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