



General Purposes Committee
22 January 2024

**Report from the Corporate Director
of Governance**

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

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| Wards Affected: | All |
| Key or Non-Key Decision: | Not Applicable |
| Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act) | Open |
| List of Appendices: | Three Appendix 1: Maps outlining the existing arrangements and proposed changes Appendix 2: Summary of the (acting) Returning officer's proposal Appendix 3: Comments received in response to the proposal |
| Background Papers: | None |
| Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details) | Matt Rae, Electoral Services Manager 020 8937 2612 Email: matt.rae@brent.gov.uk Amira Nassr, Head of Chief Executive and Members Services 020 8937 5436 Email: amira.nassr@brent.gov.uk |

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 In accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, every local authority in England and Wales must undertake and complete a review of all polling districts and polling places in its area within a 16-month period commencing from 1 October 2023 to 31 January 2025. A review, triggered by the Local Boundary Commission for England took place in 2021 with changes effective for the May 2022 elections. A similar review therefore took place recently.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note that a review of the Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations of the London Borough of Brent has taken place. The recommendations resulting from this are included in this report.
- 2.2 To note that the consultation on the review findings took place between 30 October and 8 December 2023. As part of the review representations were sought from all elected representatives for Brent, the (Acting) Returning Officer for the London Borough of Harrow, the (Acting) Returning Officer for Westminster City Council, the Brent Disability Forum, members of the public and all existing polling stations.
- 2.3 To note feedback from these has been taken into account when making the recommendations.
- 2.4 To agree the recommendations set out in 2.6 in this report to be effective from the publication of the revised electoral register on 1 February 2024.
- 2.5 To delegate to the Chief Executive designation of alternative polling places in the event of any polling place not being available at any election or better provision being identified, following consultation with the Party Whips and respective ward councillors.
- 2.6 Summary of recommendations:

Alperton Ward:

- 2.6.1 It is recommended that polling district AL4 be moved to Lyon Park School from the Grand Union Community Hub. Polling district AL3 will remain at the Grand Union Community Hub. The polling district boundary to be amended so that AL3 will incorporate the residents of the St Georges, Grand Union area.

Kingsbury Ward:

- 2.6.2 It is recommended that the polling station currently located at KY1 Village School be moved to Kingsbury Service Club.

Queensbury Ward:

- 2.6.3 It is recommended that polling district QY2 be split and allocated to QY1.

Sudbury Ward:

- 2.6.4 It is recommended that the Sudbury Baptist church be used and a new polling district created.

Wembley Central Ward:

- 2.6.5 It is recommended that a new polling location is identified for polling district WC3. Further options are currently be explored. Polling district WC4 will remain at Ealing Road Library.

Wembley Hill Ward:

- 2.6.6 It is recommended that the polling locations remain the same.

Willesden Green:

- 2.6.7 It is recommended that that polling locations remain the same. However, a minor amendment to be made to the WN2 and WN3 boundary.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 The Polling District, Polling Places and Polling Station review aligns with a number of the Borough Plan priorities, ensuring that our communities are given a fair opportunity to vote.

3.2 Background

- 3.2.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires each electoral registration authority in England, Scotland and Wales to carry out a review of both its polling district boundaries and its polling places every five years. Members are asked to make a decision on new electoral arrangements in time for any changes to be incorporated into the Revised Register for Brent being republished on 1 February 2024.

- 3.2.2 Polling districts, polling places and polling stations may be defined as follows:

A **polling district** is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a ward or an electoral division.

A **polling place** is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. However, as there is no legal definition of what a polling place is, the geographical area usually defined as the premises inside which voting takes place.

A **polling station** is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district.

- 3.2.3 The Council is required to give notice of the review and to consult with interested parties, including organisations with a particular interest and expertise in advising on access to buildings for people with different types of disability.

Alperton Ward

- 3.2.4 Grand Union Hub was extremely busy at the last local election. Moving AL4 to vote at Lyon Park Primary School will ease congestion in the Grand Union Hub. The polling district line will also be redrawn between AL3 and AL4 so that the polling location for residents of St Georges, Grand Union will remain the Grand Union Hub. There are currently no adequate polling locations nearer to the Abbey Estate in AL3 so this is the only alternative at present. It is hoped that Abbey Estate Community Centre, which has plans to be refurbished, could be used in the future.

Kingsbury Ward

- 3.2.5 A request was made by the Village School not to be used as a polling station. As a Special Educational Needs school, parents find it difficult to find childcare when the school closes on polling day. An alternative venue has been found with the Kingsbury Service Club. The venue has adequate space, is accessible with plenty of parking and is close to the school.

Queensbury Ward

- 3.2.6 Representations were made to move all electors from the portacabins in QY1 to Queensbury Methodist Church. Whilst we recognise that portacabins are not the most desirable polling stations, doing so, would mean far too many electors in one location. The recommendation, therefore, is to split the ward with the electors in the vicinity of the portacabin continuing to vote in that location and the electors west of Stag Lane to vote at Queensbury Methodist Church. The new polling district boundary will run down Stag Lane and the previous boundary running down Waltham Drive and Wimborne Drive will be removed. This will remove the need for one of the portacabins, reduce costs and provide an alternative polling station for residents that is closer by.

Sudbury Ward

- 3.2.7 Representations were made to use Sudbury Baptist Church and create a new polling district. Feedback from the 2022 local elections was that there was confusion from voters south of the underground line about what polling station they were voting at. It is proposed that Sudbury Methodist Church remains as a polling station and a new polling district created south of the underground line and Sudbury Baptist Church be used as an additional polling station. The Baptist Church has been used in previous years.

Wembley Central Ward

- 3.2.8 Feedback from the 2022 local elections indicates that Ealing Road Library was very busy. The polling location took on both polling districts of WC3 and WC4 meaning it had a very large electorate, which currently stands at just over 7,000. Exploration of additional polling stations to service the WC3 district is currently underway.

Wembley Hill Ward

- 3.2.9 Representations were made to find a new Polling location in the Northwest of the ward as it was felt the current polling location was too far for some electors. However, with much of that area being residential, no suitable locations have been identified. Wembley Primary school was considered but this is very close to the current polling location of St Augustine's Church Hall. We will continue to explore other options.

Willesden Green Ward

- 3.2.10 Representations were made to move to the new Brent Indian Community Centre. The centre is still undergoing building work which is due for completion in March. It is therefore proposed that this be reviewed again after the GLA election when the centre is operational and a site visit has been made.
- 3.2.11 Representation was also made for a minor amendment to the polling district boundary for five properties to be moved from WN2 to WN3 so that all properties on Park Avenue North are in one polling district, which was accepted.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 4.1 As outlined above, the consultation period ran from 30 October to 8 December 2023. Notice of the consultation was sent to all members of the Council. All existing and proposed polling stations were contacted. Disability groups that are members of Brent Disability Forum were also contacted. In addition, the consultation was publicised through the Council's webpage.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 The cost of Council elections and by-elections is met by the local authority. For all other elections, funding is provided either by the government or the Greater London Authority.
- 5.2 Any increase in the number of polling stations would incur additional costs in terms of building hire, equipment and polling station staff. The cost incurred from using Council maintained buildings is limited to covering heating, lighting and cleaning costs. These costs are met by the Council only when used for Council elections or by-elections.
- 5.3 The proposed changes outlined above are not expected to lead to any significant change in the overall cost of running individual elections, due to the limited timespan over which elections are held.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1 The Council has a duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) to divide its area into polling districts for parliamentary elections, to designate a polling place for each polling district, and to keep these under

review. In doing so, the Council must give all electors such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

- 6.2 The review referred to in this report is a legal requirement under the Electoral Administration Act 2013.

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 7.1 Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a duty when exercising their functions to have 'due regard' to the need:

- a) To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- b) Advance equality of opportunity; and
- c) Foster good relations between those who share a "protected characteristic" and those who do not.

- 7.2 This is the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The 'protected characteristics' are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

- 7.3 The purpose of the duty is to enquire into whether a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic. In other words, the indirect discriminatory effects of a proposed decision. Due regard is the regard that is appropriate in all the circumstances.

- 7.4 The purpose of the polling district and polling places review is to ensure that no elector is discouraged from voting because of any inconvenience placed in their way by the choice of polling station location in their area.

- 7.5 One of the key considerations for the proposed changes is around accessibility for different protected characteristics, that is, ensuring that access to the polling stations is equal for everyone. It is in the local authority's best interest to ensure the polling approach maximises participation, therefore it is already part of normal procedure to ensure the polling places are accessible - for example, in relation to the location of the polling place and within premises where the voting takes place. Additionally, the report demonstrates through the proposals how Brent is seeking to make changes to improve accessibility based on the stakeholder feedback.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 8.1 The council declared a climate and ecological emergency in 2019 and set out to do all in its gift to become carbon neutral on a borough-wide basis by 2030.

- 8.2 Electors being within walking distance of a polling location is a consideration. However, all benefits have to be weighed up when selecting a polling location to ensure the accessibility of premises for all electors is taken into consideration.

8.3 Polling staff should be reminded of the council's climate change objectives as part of their training, in particular to minimise any excessive energy use at polling stations, recycle correctly and to encourage support staff to travel to and from their polling station via sustainable modes of transport (walking, cycling, public transport) or electric vehicle where possible. It is acknowledged that polling station managers and inspectors typically require car usage in order to transport equipment and ballot papers safely and securely.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations

9.1 There are no direct human resources or property implications.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 Any changes to polling districts or polling location would be communicated to electors on their poll card as well as other comms channels encouraging electors to check their polling location.

Report sign off:

Debra Norman

Corporate Director of Governance