

# POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

*Reporting Officers: Head of Democratic Services and Electoral Services Manager*

## SUMMARY

1. Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2013, the Council has a statutory duty to conduct a regular review of its polling districts and polling places. The current review must be completed by 31 January 2025. The last such review was completed in 2019.
2. The aim of the review is to seek to ensure that:
  - (a) all the electors in the borough have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and
  - (b) so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those with disabilities.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the proposed polling arrangements within the Borough for 2025 onwards, as detailed in Appendix B, be approved subject to the Returning Officer being instructed to:

- a) seek the use of alternative venues, where possible to school buildings in the following Wards:
  - Belmore,
  - Eastcote,
  - Hayes Town,
  - Hillingdon East,
  - Northwood Hills,
  - West Drayton
  - Wood End and
  - Yeading
- b) seek potential additional venues in Charville and Ruislip Wards

## INFORMATION

3. The Head of Democratic Services in his role as the Borough's Returning Officer, has conducted the statutorily required review of Polling Places within the Borough.
4. The aim of the exercise is to make voting convenient to electors, providing places that are well located within communities, avoiding road safety hazards and using any existing boundaries (i.e. open space land, railway lines etc) but with an eye to economising where possible – particularly in view of the number of electors who now choose to vote by post.
5. This exercise does not allow the movement of ward boundaries. Such changes would be determined by the Local Government Boundary Commission. This is merely to determine whether the electors in each ward are best served by the proposed polling arrangements.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

6. To ensure clarity in discussing issues arising from the review the following definitions are used:
- **polling district;** a geographical sub-division of an electoral area i.e. a UK parliamentary constituency, a European parliamentary electoral region, a ward or an electoral division.
  - **polling place;** 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 could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.
  - **polling station;** the actual area where the process of voting takes place, which must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district.

## REVIEW PROCESS

7. Public Notice of the review was published widely, and views were invited from all Councillors, the three local MP's, local political parties, various residents' associations, community groups, the operators of all the current polling stations, as well as such persons as the Council thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. The consultation ran for approx' 3 months and concluded on 31 October 2024.
8. There is no requirement to change existing arrangements if it is felt that these are suitable, but consultation must take place so that the process is seen to be open and fair and any decision to make no change must be clearly supported by a reason, such as that the current arrangements are considered satisfactory.
9. The Returning Officer must comment on all existing polling stations and any proposed or possible new ones. His comments were included in the consultation documents issued.
10. The final stage of the review is for Council to consider all the proposals and comments received, approve and then publish the results of the review. The completion of this review does not preclude a further review of polling places should circumstances change e.g. a better venue becomes available or an existing polling place is no longer available.
11. It is for this reason that a number of the recommendations are for the Returning Officer to explore alternative venues to the number of schools that are used across the Borough as this was a recurring theme of the responses received.
12. Approximately 235 responses were received, mainly from the online consultation process. The majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the current arrangements. Those with comments on the current arrangements are included in the attached Appendix B, by Ward.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

13. The costs of the public consultation were met from existing budgets. The cost of running elections are met by the body overseeing the poll and it is only for local elections where this cost is met by the authority.
14. Naturally, venues used as polling places are entitled to make an appropriate charge and, although this is a consideration, it should not be the overriding factor when Council is selecting the number of and suitable locations.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

15. The Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2013, places a duty on all local authorities to review all parliamentary polling districts and polling places every five years.

## **EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

16. In accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty, the proposals of the review have been assessed with regard to any potential adverse impact on groups with protected characteristics. It is not considered that there is any significant adverse effect arising from these recommendations.

## **EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES**

17. The review is based on the number of electors on the current register of electors and the current warding arrangements. The aim of the exercise is to make voting convenient to electors, providing places that are well located within communities, avoiding road safety hazards and using any existing boundaries.
18. The borough currently has 59 polling districts. Each polling district should serve approximately equal numbers of electors and polling locations should be 'logical' i.e. electors should not have to travel past another polling place to get to their own and none should be shared by different wards.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: Various written responses to consultation; maps of all polling locations

# Appendix A – Warding Arrangements from May 2022

