

Report No.
RES11104.

London Borough of Bromley

PART 1 - PUBLIC

Decision Maker: Council

Date: 24 October 2011

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES
2011

Contact Officer: Carol Ling, Electoral Services Manager
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Chief Officer: Doug Patterson

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 To outline the results and recommendations of the Returning Officer following a review of all polling districts and polling places in the borough
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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 To note the outcome of the review and the consultation undertaken
- 2.2 To approve the proposals and recommendations of the Returning Officer outlined in Appendix 3 with effect from 1 December 2011
- 2.3 To note that polling districts and polling places will be kept under on-going review

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: N/A.
 2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: N/A
 2. Ongoing costs: N/A.
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Electoral Services
 4. Total current budget for this head: £N/A
 5. Source of funding: N/A
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): N/A
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory requirement.
 2. Call-in: Call-in is not applicable.
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): N/A
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Yes.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Attached

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 Background

- Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 the Council is required to divide its area into polling districts and to designate polling places for each of those districts, to keep those polling districts under review and to undertake a full statutory review as a minimum every four years.
- This review must be completed by the end of 2011. Any proposed changes to the polling districts and/or the polling places will take effect from 1 December 2011 when the new Electoral Register is published. They will be in place for the London Mayor and GLA Assembly Elections in May 2012.
- The Council must seek to ensure that all electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and have regard to the needs of electors who are disabled.

3.2 The Review and Consultation

- The Returning Officer reported on existing and proposed changes and this formed the basis for consultation – see **Appendix 1**.
- The formal consultation period ran from 15 August 2011 to 23 September 2011. A public notice was published giving notice of the review, and full details of the review were placed on the Council's website, inviting any resident to make representations.
- Details were sent by e-mail/letter to all Councillors, local MPs, the local GLA Member, local political parties, local voluntary disability groups (including BATH, SCOPE, Community Links Bromley, Disability Voice Bromley, Kent Association for the Blind, Deaf Access), and the London Borough of Lewisham Returning Officer.
- In addition details were sent to the owners/booking secretaries of the (current) polling places (including Headteachers of the schools that are used).
- The comments/representations received during the consultation period are set out in **Appendix 2**.
- As can be seen, there were a relatively limited number of responses to the consultation. In the main responses were from Councillors and the local Conservative Associations. The lack of response by the public tends to support the view that on the whole electors are happy with the current arrangements.

3.3 The Returning Officer's Proposals

- The Returning Officer took into account the following considerations when drawing up his recommendations:
 - The Council must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
 - The Council must seek to ensure that, so far as is reasonable and practicable, every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled
 - Ideally (except in exceptional circumstances) the polling place should be in its own polling district

- No polling place should be shared by two wards because of the risks associated with holding different elections in the same polling place
- Ideally there should be no more than 2,000 electors per polling station
- There is a general assumption for the use of schools as polling places (see below)
- The use of portakabin type temporary buildings is rarely a practicable alternative. To achieve proper disabled access they need to be sizeable, which presents problems in finding suitable locations. Also, the cost of hire is significant, as it will normally include a generator, toilet, ramp, furniture and security (over £2,800)
- Poor designation of polling districts and polling places could have an adverse effect on the administration and integrity of future elections, directly impacting on the electorate

3.4 The Use of Schools for Polling Places

- The Council currently uses some forty schools for polling places.
- The Local (Orpington and Bromley & Chislehurst) Conservative Associations have made general comments during the consultation period that the Council ‘should try very hard to stop using schools as polling stations’. This view has been supported by a couple of Councillors.
- In recent years (i) a small number of Headteachers have asked that their school no longer be used as a polling place (although no Headteacher has responded to this consultation even though they were all sent details); and (ii) one complaint has been received from a parent concerning the closure of her child’s school on polling day and the inconvenience it had caused her.
- The Returning Officer has given careful thought as to whether we should continue to use schools as polling places. On balance, he has come to the conclusion that the present situation/arrangements should continue for the following reasons:
 - The Council can requisition schools for polling purposes under the Representation of the People Act 1983. This includes all mainstream schools irrespective of how they were procured, and includes academies, foundation schools and voluntary aided schools.

Private premises always carry the risk that use for polling may be refused, sometimes at short notice. There may be a change of ownership or policy or an alternative booking may be preferred.

- Schools cannot charge a hire fee – only a reasonable amount for heating, lighting and caretaking. The average cost for using a school as a polling place is about £207, using private premises (such as a church hall) is about £390 and using a portakabin type temporary building is about £2,800. This means that there are major cost savings using schools as polling places.
- Schools often lie at the centre of the communities they serve, and are usually more able than other premises to provide all the necessary facilities (e.g. safe storage, appropriate working conditions for election staff) and are generally convenient and easily accessible to all voters including those with disabilities.

- There is often the perception that children lose a day's education when a school closes on polling day. This is not the case where a teacher in service training day is set to coincide with polling day. To facilitate this schools are notified of scheduled elections well in advance. It also enables parents to be made aware of the situation in good time for them to put in place appropriate child care arrangements, if required.
- Depending on the layout of the school, some Headteachers take the decision to remain open on polling day if they are satisfied that they can ensure the security of children whilst allowing unimpeded access to voters.
- People become used to where they vote and despite all appropriate statutory notice of change, including poll cards, many become confused when change becomes necessary due to the unavailability of the usual building. It is therefore very important when considering any change to polling arrangements, to be sure that there is clear evidence that the change would benefit the majority of the electorate.

3.5 Recommendations

Some changes have been made to the Returning Officer's initial recommendations as a result of the comments/representations received during the consultation period. The current recommendations are set out in **Appendix 3**.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None arising directly from this report.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Changes that are agreed which will result in residents in a particular area being allocated a new/different building as a polling station will be publicised to the voters concerned when polling cards are sent at an election. The cost of this will be met by the relevant body (which would be the GLA for the GLA Elections in 2012, the Government for a Parliamentary election or the Council for Ward By Elections, whichever election takes place first).

If approval to the review is delayed until after the new Electoral Register is published on 1 December 2011 (a statutory date), it would be necessary to re-publish the Register following the approval of changes which would involve additional costs to be met from the budgets allocated for Electoral Services.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This review of Polling Districts and Polling Places has been undertaken in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983, and the Electoral Administration Act 2006, which requires the Council to undertake a full statutory review as a minimum every four years.

Failure to comply could lead to the Council being in breach of its official duty.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None arising directly from this report.

Non-Applicable Sections:	
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation of the People Act 1983 • Electoral Administration Act 2006 • The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006 • Returning Officers comments and proposals on current polling arrangements • Consultation responses