

**Decision Maker: GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE**

Date: 6 November 2019

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent Non-Executive

**Title: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES  
2019**

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**Ward:** Not Applicable

## 1. Reason for report

To advise Members on the results and recommendations of the Returning Officer following a review of all polling districts and polling places in the borough

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 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 set out in this report and Appendix 3 with effect from publication of the revised Register of Electors on 1 December 2019.
  - 2.3 To note that following the final recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission's Electoral Review (due early to mid 2020), a further and more thorough review of the polling districts and polling places will be undertaken before the next compulsory review is required.

## Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: Not Applicable
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## Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable
  2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council
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## Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
  2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Electoral Services
  4. Total current budget for this head: Not Applicable
  5. Source of funding: Not Applicable
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## Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): Not Applicable
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: Not Applicable
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## Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement:
  2. Call-in: Not Applicable
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## Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: Not Applicable
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## Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): Not Applicable
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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**

#### **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 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 statutory review every five (5) years.
- 3.2 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of the compulsory reviews of the UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The next compulsory review must now be started and completed between 1 October 2018 and 31 January 2020 (inclusive).
- 3.3 Any proposed changes to the polling districts and/or the polling places will take affect from 1 December 2019 when the revised Register of Electors is published
- 3.4 There are three (3) significant factors to take into account for this review:
  - a)The timetable for these reviews was set out in legislation to coincide with the Fixed Term Parliament Act 2011. The intention was for these reviews to be completed by January preceding a May Parliamentary election. However, the 'snap' election in 2017, means that these are no longer coterminous
  - b)Bromley is currently undergoing an Electoral Review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). This is a major (and statutory) evaluation looking at the number of councillors in Bromley, the number of wards, their boundaries and names. Final proposals for this will not be laid before Parliament until mid 2020. Once accepted, a full and thorough polling district review (including the redrawing of polling districts within the new wards) will be required before the proposals are implemented for the Local Government Elections in May 2022
  - c)The only scheduled polls for the life of this review are the Greater London Authority elections in May 2020. However, there is much speculation of a 'snap' election being called imminently
- 3.5 As a result of the LGBCE review detailed above, it is possible that there could be extensive changes to the current polling districts with a high proportion of the electorate being required to vote at a different polling station in an entirely new/different ward from 2022.
- 3.6 As mentioned above, the polling districts and polling places will need to be reviewed at that stage, and given that multiple changes of polling station venues could potentially cause significant voter confusion, we are keen to minimise the amount of changes we implement in advance of 2022.
- 3.7 We are therefore proposing to undertake a **light touch** review of polling districts and polling places at this stage, complying with the requirements of the five year review but solely addressing any major disparities in electorate or unsuitability of polling stations. We will then conduct a more thorough review after the new wards are established, including taking into account such factors as electorate figures and property development forecasts.

#### **THE REVIEW PROCESS and CONSULTATION**

- 3.8 The Returning Officer reported on existing and proposed changes and this formed the basis for consultation – see **Appendix 1**

3.9 The formal consultation period ran from 10 September 2019 to 4 October 2019. 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 elector in the borough to make representations.

3.10 In addition details were sent by email to and representations sought from the following:

- London Borough of Bromley Councillors
- The Boroughs four Members of Parliament
- The GLA Member for the Bromley & Bexley constituency
- Local Agents
- Local Political Parties
- Local Disability Groups (including Bromley Mencap, DeafPlus, Community Links, Scope, Disability Voice and Kent Association for the Blind)
- London Borough of Lewisham's Returning Officer
- Booking secretaries of the (current) polling places including Head teachers of the schools that are used

3.11 All representations received during the consultation period are detailed in Appendix 2. A total of ten (10) responses were received – eight (8) from Councillors, one from the Head teacher of Cudham Primary School and one from the Returning Officer of London Borough of Lewisham.

3.12 As can be seen, there were a relatively limited number of responses with none from any elector. The lack of response by the public tends to support the view that the current polling arrangements are predominantly satisfactory and have all been shown at elections conducted in recent years to be practicable given the circumstances that prevail within the areas that they serve.

## **THE RETURNING OFFICER'S PROPOSALS**

3.13 The Returning Officer took into account the following considerations when drawing up his final recommendations:

- That all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as practicable in the circumstances
- That so far as reasonable and practicable, every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled
- That the polling place should be in its own polling district
- That no polling place should be shared by two wards because of the risks associated with holding different elections in the same polling place
- No more than 2,000 electors per polling station

## **SUITABILITY OF POLLING PLACES**

3.14 There are a number of factors that need to be considered when reviewing existing polling places or when assessing the suitability of new polling places for use, including:

- Availability – is the building readily available for hire in the event of any unscheduled elections
- Geographically central and reasonably accessible for the majority of the electorate
- Avoid barriers for the electors such as steep hills, major roads and rivers

- Sufficient space for the layout of the polling station (single or multiple) – even where there is a turnout
- General staff welfare facilities (toilets, kitchen, heating and lighting)
- Availability of parking
- Within reasonable walking distance of electors
- Suitable access from road
- Accessible doorways
- Drop kerbs, steps, pathways in reasonable repair, level access etc
- Reasonable lighting

3.15 Ideally there would be the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for electors in the area within which to establish polling stations. In practice, however, the choice of polling places will often be a balance between the quality of the building (access, facilities etc) and the proximity of the building to the electors.

## **SELECTION and COSTS OF POLLING PLACES**

3.16 Polling places located within publically funded premises (such as schools) are generally preferred by the Returning Officer as their availability can be relied upon. The Returning Officer has the statutory power to request a room in the premises and schools cannot refuse such a request. These premises are generally well located, accessible and suitable - see Appendix 3 for further details. The costs of these premises are usually relatively low, as the law provides that they are free of charge save for a reasonable amount for heating, lighting and additional caretaking.

3.17 Second preference for polling places are private premises (such as church halls and community centres). However, the Returning Officer cannot guarantee their availability, as owners/managers of the premises have the right to refuse hire at any time, without explanation. This can cause considerable inconvenience to both the Returning Officer and voters (especially in the event of an unscheduled poll), as alternative locations have to be secured within a very short timetable. Generally, these premises are more expensive, as commercial hire rates may be charged.

3.18 Where there are no other appropriate alternative polling places, temporary/portable buildings (known as portakabins) are used as polling places. Due to limited supply, these are sometimes difficult to procure. They often provide inferior accessibility to voters (especially those with disabilities and substandard accommodation for staff. They are significantly more expensive than other premises and the Returning Officer avoids using these unless there is no other option.

3.19 As a rough guide the average cost of:

- A publically funded polling place is around £165 (with the most expensive at £225.83)
- A private polling place is around £455 (with the most expensive at £1,300)
- A temporary polling place/portakabin is around £5,000 (includes installation of portable unit plus provision of portable toilet plus provision of power/generator and security)

There is a risk that if the Council stopped, or materially reduced, the number of publically funded polling places, it would not be able to recover the additional expenditure.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.20 The Returning Officer's final recommendations for polling districts and polling places in respect of this review are set out in Appendix 4

- 3.21 Following the final recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission's Electoral Review (due early to mid 2020), the Returning Officer will ensure that a further and more thorough review of the polling districts and polling places is undertaken within the new warding pattern, to take effect at the elections to be held on 5 May 2022 (and then used at all statutory elections held thereafter) and before the next compulsory review is required.

#### **4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN**

None arising from this report

#### **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

None arising from this report

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Changes that are agreed which will result in residents in a particular area being allocated a new/different building as a polling station (or a change of entrance) 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 governing body for that election (e.g. central government for national UK elections or referendums, the GLA for the London Mayoral and Greater London Assembly elections and the Council for local government elections).
- 6.2 If approval to the review is delayed until after the revised Register of Electors is published on 1 December 2019 (a statutory date), it may be necessary to re-publish the Register following the approval of changes which may involve additional costs to be met from the budgets allocated for Electoral Services

#### **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

None arising from this report

#### **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The review of Polling Districts and Polling Places has been undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006 and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 which requires the Council to complete this review by 31 January 2020.

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

#### **9. PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS**

None arising from this report

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Representation of the People Act 1983</li><li>• Electoral Administration Act 2006</li><li>• The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006</li><li>• Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013</li><li>• Returning Officer's comments and recommendations on current polling arrangements</li><li>• Consultation responses</li></ul>