

Decision Maker: **General Purposes & Licensing Committee**

Date: **30 November 2021**

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

Title: **REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES
2021**

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Ward: Not Applicable

1. Reason for report

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

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 Acting Returning Officer set out in this report and the Appendices with affect from the proposed re- publication of the revised Register of Electors on 1 February 2022

2.3 To note that polling districts and polling places will be kept under on-going review

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 The Bromley (Electoral Changes) Order 2021 implemented final recommendations made by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) for new electoral arrangements in London Borough of Bromley. This Order was made on 1 April 2021. New ward arrangements for Bromley successfully completed a 40-day period of Parliamentary scrutiny and will come into force at the local elections on 5 May 2022. Full details of the new wards are available at: <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/current-reviews/greater-london/bromley>
- 3.2 As a result of the above ward changes, under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Council is required to divide its new wards into polling districts and review all polling places. Therefore, the review process of redrawing new polling district boundaries within wards and redesignating new polling places commenced shortly after the GLA elections, held on 6 May 2021.
- 3.3 The differences between a polling district, place and station are as follows:
- A **polling district** is a geographical area created by the sub-division of an electoral area
 - A **polling place** is the building or area in which polling stations are located
 - A **polling station** is the room or area in the polling place where voting takes place
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 The new wards, polling districts and polling places arrangements will be implemented for the first time, for voting purposes at the local elections on the 5 May 2022.

The Review and Consultation

- 3.6 The Acting Returning Officer (ARO) formulated initial proposals for the future polling arrangements, and these formed the basis for consultation.
- 3.7 Notice of the review was published on the Council's website and the formal consultation period ran between 27 September 2021 and 29 October 2021. Documents relating to the review were made available on the Council's website. Representations were invited in writing via email or post. Full details of the review (including the ARO's initial proposals) are available at: https://www.bromley.gov.uk/info/200033/elections_and_voting/665/review_of_polling_districts_polling_places_and_polling_stations_2021
- 3.8 In addition, details of the review were sent by email and representations sought from the following:
- London Borough of Bromley Councillors
 - Members of Parliament for the constituencies of Beckenham, Bromley & Chislehurst, Orpington and Lewisham West & Penge
 - GLA Member for Bexley & Bromley
 - Agents for candidates who have stood in elections in London Borough of Bromley in recent years
 - Local constituency parties
 - The Acting Returning Officer of the London Borough of Lewisham
 - Disability and Community groups including Community Links Bromley, Age Concern, Bromley Mencap, Kent Association for the Blind, Disability Voice Bromley

- All private premises used as polling places at elections held in Bromley in recent years
- All public funded premises used as polling places (including schools) at elections held in Bromley in recent years
- All (new) polling places identified as possible alternative venues to schools for use at next year's local elections

3.9 All comments/representations received during the consultation period are detailed in Appendix 1. The ARO has a statutory obligation to respond to the consultation and his comments are incorporated in the Appendix. As can be seen, there were a relatively low number of responses (25), supporting the view that the current polling places used are predominantly satisfactory.

The Acting Returning Officer's Proposals

3.10 The ARO took into account the following considerations when drawing up his final recommendations/proposals:

- To seek to ensure that all electors in the borough have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
- To ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors with disabilities
- That the polling place should be in its own polling district (unless "special circumstances" apply, such as no suitable venue within the polling district boundary)
- To retain, as far as possible, the current network of polling districts and polling places for the majority of residents/electors to minimise disruption and confusion to voters
- To comply with the Electoral Commission guidance that no more than 2,500 electors are allocated to a polling station
- To make into separate polling districts the 'anomalies', for example where any parts of existing electoral areas may be split (i.e. no longer co-terminous) when the new (ward and/or parliamentary) boundaries come into effect
- To avoid the use of schools where suitable alternative premises are identified, available and suitable.

The Use of Schools as Polling Places

3.11 It is acknowledged that the use of schools as polling places can cause disruption to pupils, parents and teachers. However, schools are often the most suitable, and sometimes the only, appropriate building within a polling district. It should also be noted that the ARO has the legal right to use school buildings for polling (there is no such right with private premises) and schools are free of charge save for a reasonable amount for heating, lighting and additional caretaking (private premises can charge commercial hire rates i.e. can be significantly more expensive than schools).

3.12 At the recent GLA elections on 6 May 2021, we reduced the number of schools used as polling places from 34 to 15. A variety of new premises were used as alternatives including bowling clubs, public houses, restaurants, social clubs, a cinema and golf club. However, following feedback we received, a number of these alternative venues were not ideal and/or suitable and/or accessible and will not be used at future elections. This included:

- Geffreys Hall Community Centre (for Mottingham Primary School)

- Miller & Carter (for Pickhurst Infant & Junior Academies)
- Orpington Bowling Club (for Bromley Beacon Academy)
- The Gordon Arms (for Edgebury Primary School)
- The Graces Bar & Grill (for Steward Fleming Primary School)
- The Sundridge Park Club (Tennis & Squash) (for Parish CE Primary School)
- The Vue Cinema (for St Mark's Primary School)

3.13 This review has given us further opportunity to look at the use of schools and identify alternative venues, where appropriate. In some cases, where the ward/polling district boundaries have been re-drawn, some schools no longer have to be used e.g. Bullers Wood. In other cases, we have identified suitable alternative venues and no longer need to use the school e.g. St Nicholas Primary School. Unfortunately, there are a few instances where no suitable alternative venues have been identified and the schools remain the only suitable buildings in the polling districts e.g. St Mark's CE Primary School, Stewart Fleming Primary School and Pickhurst Junior School.

3.14 The proposed polling scheme uses the following 18 schools:

Scotts Park Primary School	St George's Primary School
Oaklands Primary School	Warren Road Primary School
Red Hill Primary School	St Peter & St Paul Catholic Primary School
Tubbenden Primary School	Marian Vian Primary School
Harris Girls Academy	St Johns CE Primary School
St Mark's CE Primary Academy	Valley Primary School
Manor Oak Primary School	Harris Primary Academy Orpington
St Paul's Cray CE Primary School	Stewart Fleming Primary School
Riverside West Wickham SEN School	Pickhurst Junior School

3.15 We will work closely with those schools identified as polling places to support them (if requested) to keep the majority of their building open on polling day, wherever possible - although it should be noted that many of the schools listed above already remain open.

Suitability of Polling Places

3.16 There are a number of factors that need to be considered when assessing the suitability of a polling place 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 turnout is expected to be low
- 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

3.17 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.

3.18 Where there are no appropriate alternative polling places, temporary/portable buildings (known as portacabins) have been used by the ARO as polling places (one sited at Queensmead Recreation Ground and one sited at Leaves Green Common). It is now acknowledged that these portacabins are not Covid secure, provide inferior accessibility to voters (especially those with disabilities), offer substandard accommodation for staff and are significantly more expensive than permanent premises.

3.19 The proposed polling scheme does not use any portacabins.

Recommendations

3.20 The ARO's final recommendations for polling districts and polling places in respect of this review are set out in **Appendix 2**

3.21 Subject to the approval by this Committee, the ARO's proposals/recommendations will be adopted, and the revised electoral register will be re-published on the new polling district boundaries on 1 February 2022. Candidates will be entitled to a copy of this new register on the publication of the notice of election (by 28 March 2022). Constituency parties will be entitled to a copy on publication of the revised register on 1 February 2022 (subject to the appropriate authorisation). Councillors can only receive their ward register on the current boundaries.

Risks that may arise

3.22 There is a reputational risk for the Council and the ARO if the review is not completed prior to:

- 1 February 2022 – the date we propose to re-publish the electoral register on the new boundaries, and/or
- 5 May 2022 – the date of the Local elections

3.23 There is a risk that electors whose polling place has changed may be unsure where they should go to vote on 5 May 2022. To minimise the risk, we will run an additional information campaign prior to the May elections to remind electors that their polling place may have changed through the following channels:

- Poll cards
- Bromley Council website
- Social media campaign

4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

None arising from this report

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None arising from this report

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Changes that are agreed which will result in residents being allocated a new/different building as a polling station will be publicised to the voters concerned when polling cards are sent at the 2022 Local elections. The cost of this election (including the poll cards) will be met by the Council.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None arising from this report

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The review of polling districts and polling places has been undertaken in accordance with the Representation of the People Act 1983, the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006, the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and the Bromley (Electoral Changes) Order 2021.

9. PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

None arising from this report

Non-Applicable Sections:	
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Representation of the People Act 1983 Electoral Administration Act 2006 The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006 Electoral Registration and Administration 2013 Bromley (Electoral Changes) Order 2021 Acting Returning Officer's comments and recommendations Consultation responses