

## GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

<b>Subject Heading:</b>	Polling District and Polling Places Review
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<b>Policy context:</b>	There are no direct resource implications.
<b>Financial summary:</b>	There are no direct resource implications.

### The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Places making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connections making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>

### SUMMARY

The Local Government Boundary Commission has reviewed all of the Ward boundaries in Havering, which has subsequently seen the number of wards being increased from 18 to 20.

The London Borough of Havering is undertaking a review of all Polling districts, Polling places and Polling stations In accordance with the requirements of section

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18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013).

Under the provisions within the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the previous statutory review was undertaken in 2019.

A further interim review of all Polling Stations was taken in January 2021, as a consequence of the Covid Pandemic. These arrangements were implemented for the GLA election in May and resulted in the number of schools being used as Polling Stations significantly reduced. A full assessment of venues based on risk assessments, suitability, ownership and availability was undertaken Borough wide as part of this process.

The review of Polling Districts and location of Polling Places/Stations will need to be taken and implemented in time for the Local Elections to be held on Thursday 5 May 2022 to mirror the changes to the ward boundaries.

The Parliamentary Boundary Review Consultation is currently taking place these proposals are based on Havering's existing Wards and referred to in maps HC1.1 DR, HC2.1 DR and HAB6.1 HU. A request has been submitted to make minor amendments to the proposals with the effect of aligning the proposed parliamentary boundaries with the local ward boundaries.

### **The Proposals**

At the end of this report you will find the following appendices:

The timetable is shown as Appendix 1.

A map for each ward showing proposed polling districts, along with individual Polling Districts within the Ward – Appendix 2.

A Spreadsheet showing Proposed Polling Stations for each new ward/polling district detailing previous ward/polling district where applicable – Appendix 3.

Comments and suggestions received during the Consultation Period - Appendix 4

Proposed Change to original recommendation for Hacton Ward - Appendix 5

A spreadsheet showing Recommended Polling Places and Districts - Appendix 6.

To note that all proposed Polling Stations have been used at previous Elections, with the exception of 2 venues Scotts School in Hacton Ward and Central Harvest Church in Marshalls and Rise Park Ward.

### **The Review Rationale**

The parameters for the process of drawing the districts are:

There should be no more than 2500 electors (excluding absent voters) allocated to a particular polling station as per the Electoral Commission Guidance.

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Consideration has been given to projected elector ratios that were used as part of the Ward Boundary Review in relation to the size of venues.

To ensure all electors have reasonable facilities for voting, and as far as possible polling places are accessible to all electors.

Where current polling districts can continue as the major part of the new districts, and there are sensible reasons for continuing with existing arrangements, then this principle has been followed.

Suitable existing polling stations be used where possible.

To take into account natural boundaries for example railway lines, major roads and rivers.

Polling places fall within the Polling District wherever possible

The use of schools be avoided where suitable alternative premises are available.

### **REPORT DETAIL**

The consultation period started on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021, concluding on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2021 and was advertised via the Havering Council website, Havering Living, all libraries and direct communication with existing Polling Stations, Interested parties and Community groups. Comments were invited on the proposals, recommending to offer alternative suggestions for consideration where the proposal is not supported.

The outcome of the consultation is reported to Governance Committee and will be put before Council for approval in time to enable the Electoral Registration Officer to make any alterations necessary to the polling districts when it is next revised on 1 December 2021.

### **Background Information**

Following each election officers will undertake a review and specifically look at any issues that have arisen in relation to the polling places.

The aims of the review is to ensure that as far as possible polling places are accessible to all, and to review polling staff and elector feedback.

An on-going accessibility audit and checklist is completed for each venue at every election by the Presiding Officer and the Polling Station Inspectors, and any relevant information has been considered whilst undertaking this review.

As schools are generally at the heart of the community and are more likely to be Disability Discrimination Act compliant than private buildings, the continuation of their

use for polling would seem to be unavoidable. Also the Representation of the People Act 1983 gives the Returning Officer the right to use such buildings free of charge only reimbursing heating, lighting and cleaning costs. However the timing of elections often clashes with examinations and schools are finding it more and more difficult to accommodate polling. As part of this review every effort has been made to avoid the use of a school where a suitable alternative has been identified. Where this has not been possible to achieve this also allows the opportunity to ask all Head-teachers of proposed polling places to consider if there is a separate part of their school that could be used for polling which would be more convenient for them, and where appropriate allowing for the school to remain open.

In addition consideration has been given to consultation responses received, as detailed in Appendix 4. and responses given.

In summary, following the conclusion of the consultation period no changes are being propose in relation to 86 polling places as proposed in Appendix 6, with one change of venue from the Havering Dog Training Centre to Harold Court School referred to in Appendix 4.

A change is being proposed in relation to two Polling Districts and one Polling Place as detailed in Appendix 5 in Hacton Ward.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Governance Committee endorse the changes to polling places and polling districts set out in Appendix 5 and 6 and recommend their changes for approval by Full Council.

To note that the Parliamentary Boundary Review consultation is currently taking place based on Havering's existing wards.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

**Financial implications and risks:** Any increase in the amount 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.

### **Legal implications and risks:**

The Representation of the People Act 1983 section 18D requires that local authorities designate the polling places within the Parliamentary Constituencies.

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Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, Returning Officers have the right to use certain public buildings (including schools that receive public funds) for use as polling stations at elections.

**Human Resources implications and risks:** None.

### **Equalities implications and risks:**

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex/gender, and sexual orientation.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

In all situations, urgent or not, the Council will seek to ensure equality, inclusion, and dignity for all.

It has been reviewed to ensure that all eligible electors can access a polling station, and Staff receive equalities training as part of the mandatory Polling Staff training for each election.

All existing Polling Stations had an accessibility checklist and risk assessment, which was completed at the Greater London Authority elections held in May 2021. Any new or proposed polling station will undergo a new accessibility checklist and risk assessment to ensure they are accessible for all residents.