

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
13 NOVEMBER 2024

Subject Heading:

Polling District and Polling Place Review

SLT Lead:

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Policy context:

There are no direct resource implications.

Financial summary:

There are no direct resource implications.

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

People - Things that matter for residents -

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy –

Resources - A well run Council that delivers for People and Place. - X

SUMMARY

The London Borough of Havering has undertaken a review of all Polling Districts and Polling Places in accordance with the requirements of section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and the Elections Act 2022). This action fulfils the council's duty to conduct a compulsory polling district and polling places review in the period of 1 October 2023 until 31 January 2025.

The review includes both internal and external feedback. The Council held a Public Consultation from 12 August 2024 to 16 September 2024 (Timetable – Appendix A). As part of this consultation direct communication was also made with existing polling stations, Councillors, MP's and community groups, 18 responses were received.

Feedback from Presiding Officers and Polling Station Inspectors from both the GLA and the Parliamentary Elections held in 2024 has also been included and formed part of this review.

Following each election, officers will undertake a review and specifically look at any issues that have arisen in relation to Polling Stations. Relevant feedback has been considered whilst undertaking this review.

The aim 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 and to ensure that:-

- Polling places fall within the polling district wherever possible.
- Account is taken of justifiable complaints by electors, feedback from staff and any responses received from this consultation.

This report seeks to approve the proposed changes set out in the report and if agreed, these changes will be incorporated into the register published on 2 December 2024 and will be ratified at the Full Council meeting being held on 20th November.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Governance Committee endorse the changes to the Polling Place for Polling District EL4 (Elm Park Ward).

That the redrawing of the boundary for Polling District UP2 (Upminster Ward) are endorsed.

All other Polling districts and polling places remain unchanged.

If these recommendations are agreed that Full Council on 20th November approve the decision of the Governance Committee.

REPORT DETAIL

Consultation was undertaken as follows:

- All elected representatives, political parties and relevant stakeholders were given notification of the review.
- Copies of the proposals were available for public inspection at all libraries in Havering, and the Town Hall.
- Direct Communication was sent to existing Polling Places and to Havering Community groups.
- The consultation appeared on the Councils Website and Calendar Brief throughout the period.

It is proposed that no changes are made to the existing polling districts and places in the following Wards:

Beam Park	Marshalls and Rise Park
Cranham	Mawneys
Emerson Park	Rainham and Wennington
Gooshays	Rush Green and Crowlands
Hacton	South Hornchurch
Harold Wood	Squirrels Heath
Havering Atte Bower	St Alban's
Heaton	St Andrews
Hylands and Harrow Lodge	St Edwards

A summary of all responses received to the public consultation can be found in Appendix B.

Feedback from Presiding Officers and/or Polling Station Inspectors has also been considered.

Responses to feedback received are listed below:

Cranham Ward - CM2

Two responses were received via the public consultation regarding the distance some electors had to walk to Upminster Methodist Church. There are no suitable alternatives within the current Polling Districts. Consideration was also given to the redrawing Polling District lines however this would not result in alternative premises becoming available.

Elm Park Ward - EL4

After careful consideration it is recommended that the Polling Place for Polling District EL4 be changed from Bretons Community Hall to Scargill Infant School. It is

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felt that this change would allow for more accessibility to voters and prevent them from having to cross the A125 to reach their Polling Place.

Polling staff feedback provided in the GLA and Parliamentary Elections 2024 indicates that Bretons Social Hall is not sufficiently accessible to all voters. Within the accessibility checklist of the polling Station logbook, it was noted that the walk from the car park to the Polling Station is long and uneven, and insufficient outdoor lighting at the venue made the walk even more challenging. The Presiding Officer reported that voters complained of their difficulty crossing Rainham Road (A125), and of the lack of public transport to the venue.

The EL4 polling district map (Appendix C) clearly indicates the division between Elm Park's residential area and Bretons Social Hall by Rainham Road. To mitigate the impact this poses to electorate accessibility; it was necessary to consider all other potential venues for Polling Places within the District. The potential alternative venues identified were: St. Alban's Catholic Primary School (RM12 5LN) and Scargill Infant School (RM13 7PL). Although the Review Rationale orders that use of schools be avoided where suitable alternative premises are available, the Polling District Review has ascertained that there are no other suitable alternative venues. Our recommendation is thus motivated by the Council's legal duty to provide accessible services.

Scargill Infant School is recommended as the replacement Polling Station for Bretons Social Hall on account of its comparative proximity to the residential area of the district (as shown on Appendix D). It is the favourable option as electors are neither required to cross a busy A road in order to access it, nor traverse an uneven pathway. There is a zebra crossing leading directly to the site on Mungo Park Road, and as the school has previously been used as a Polling Place, it fulfils the suitable accessibility requirements such as provision of parking (including disabled parking) and access to ramps. The school has offered the use of their Main Hall as a Polling Station.

Gooshays Ward - GS3

A more suitable entry point into the station at Mead School has been negotiated allowing for easier access and some designated parking has been made available. A staffing review will be carried out prior to the next election to assess staffing requirements, which should eliminate any queuing situation.

Harold Wood - HW4

The current allocated Polling Place for electors in HW4 is St Peter's Church, Gubbins Lane. In the Public Consultation, a respondent complained of the insufficient parking area around and space within the Polling place. They requested for the Station to be relocated to Harold Wood Neighbourhood Centre. Two alternative venues were identified: The Hub and Harold Wood Neighbourhood Centre. The Hub was discovered to be unsuitable as its meeting rooms aren't spacious enough to serve as a polling station, and the Harold Wood Neighbourhood Centre is unable to be hired due to contractual commitments.

It is, therefore, recommended that the Polling Place for Harold Wood continues to be St Peter's Church, Gubbins Lane.

Mawneys - MN2

A response was received via the public consultation regarding the distance some electors had to walk to Collier Row Parish Hall and Catholic Club. There are no suitable alternatives within the current Polling Districts. Consideration was also given to the redrawing Polling District lines however this would not result in alternative premises becoming available. The suggestion of Rise Park Academy and Havering Road Methodist Church both fall outside of Mawneys wards, so are therefore unsuitable.

Mawneys - MN4

A response was received via the public consultation regarding the distance some electors had to walk to the Church of the Good Shepherd. There are no suitable alternatives within the current Polling Districts. Consideration was also given to the redrawing Polling District lines however this would not result in alternative premises becoming available.

Rainham and Wennington Ward - RW4

A full review was undertaken in 2021 to review all polling places with a view to reducing the number of schools used as Polling Stations, whilst the use of schools dropped significantly, it was not possible to find an alternative for Brady Primary school. The use of schools as polling stations is kept under review, an alternative provision is always the preferred option, and will remain so.

St Albans Ward - AL2

Although parking is not a specific requirement when considerations are being made, part of our checklist process is to enquire about parking and negotiate some spaces for electors on Polling Day. Some limited parking is available at Romford Evangelical Church.

St Edwards Ward - SE1

This change took place as part of the Ward Boundary review. St Johns Hall is no longer within St Edwards Ward. There is no alternative suitable venue within this polling district.

Upminster Ward - UP2

Recommendations were submitted for the redrawing of the polling district boundary along Brookdale Avenue and Brookdale Close. The current boundary runs down the middle of the road (as shown on Appendix E) and the recommendation is for the boundary to go behind the properties and bring all electors into UP2 (as shown on Appendix F). The entrance to the current polling station: Gwillcoo Hall, is located on Brookdale Avenue.

Upminster Ward - UP6

A response was received via the public consultation regarding the distance some electors had to walk to Corbets Tey School. There are no suitable alternatives within the current Polling Districts. Consideration was also given to the redrawing Polling District lines however this would not result in alternative premises becoming available. A full review was taken in 2021 to review all polling places with a view to reducing the number of schools used as Polling Stations, whilst the use of schools dropped significantly, it was not possible to find an alternative for Corbets Tey School. The use of schools as polling stations is kept under review, an alternative provision is always the preferred option, and will remain so.

The Review Rationale

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 consider 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.

Background Information

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 2021 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 Local Government Boundary Commission reviewed all the Ward boundaries in Havering 2021 with a subsequent review of Polling Districts and location of Polling Places/Stations taken and implemented for the Local Elections held on Thursday 5 May 2022 mirroring the changes to the ward boundaries.

The Parliamentary Boundary Review has also taken place with changes incorporated within the current Polling places and districts scheme.

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. 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.