

ELECTIONS COMMITTEE		
Report Title	Polling district and polling place review 2011	
Key Decision	n/a	Item No.
Ward	n/a	
Contributors	Malcolm Constable, Electoral Services Manager	
Class	Part 1	Date: 7 November 2011

1. Purpose

To review the Council's arrangements for polling districts and places

2. Recommendation

To recommend to Council that the polling districts and places set out in Appendix A, which includes amendments in paragraph 6 of this report, be adopted and the changes be included in the Electoral Register published on 1 December 2011 and that they be effective at subsequent elections.

3. Background

- 3.1. Section 18C(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA1983) places a duty on all local authorities to review their UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places every four years.
- 3.2. The Council keeps its polling districts and places under continuous review both prior and subsequent to elections. However the Electoral Administration Act 2006 imposed a statutory duty to review Polling Districts and Places every four years. The first such review was completed in November 2007 and the changes detailed therein were recommended to the Committee for endorsement on the 20 November 2007 for subsequent approval by the Council at its meeting on the 28 November 2007.
- 3.3. Inevitably changes are forced on us by the unavailability of some polling stations prior to elections for example through school rebuilding or privately owned stations either being pre-booked, refurbished or being used for other purposes e.g. day nurseries. We also get feedback on a continuous basis from Presiding Officers and Visiting Officers on the suitability of accommodation during an election. Whilst the Council is asked to approve the polling districts and polling places of UK Parliamentary constituencies within the authority boundary, the Acting Returning Officer (ARO) is ultimately responsible for running Parliamentary

elections and must take all necessary steps to ensure the effective running of elections, including the provision of polling stations.

- 3.4. When conducting such reviews particular emphasis is placed on access and the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

4. The Review process

- 4.1. Section 18 of the RPA1983 introduced a number of changes in respect of the way in which the review of polling districts and polling places must be undertaken. Polling Districts and Polling Places are defined as follows:

Polling District	Geographical area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors.
Polling Place	The building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the ARO.
Polling Station	The room or building chosen by the ARO where the voting takes place for each election.

It should be noted that the review focuses on the polling districts and places within the current authority, ward and parliamentary boundaries. These boundaries are not part of this review. There is currently a Boundary Commission for England (BCE) Review of Parliamentary Boundaries under way –see separate report “Parliamentary Boundary Review” submitted concurrently with this report. The Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) has confirmed that there are no plans to review ward boundaries in Lewisham in the foreseeable future.

- 4.2. The Electoral Commission has no role in the conduct of the review but is responsible for reviewing representations submitted in accordance with Section 18 RPA 1983 after publication of the review. However it has, issued practical guidance as to the conduct of the review which we are following. A copy of the guidance is attached as Appendix B.
- 4.3. In accordance with Section 18 of the RPA1983 a notice (Appendix C) was published on 27 June 2011 inviting representations from any elector in the area or persons with particular expertise in relation to access and facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. The consultation period ran from the date of publication of the notice with representations to be received no later than Friday 5 August 2011.
- 4.4. Along with publication of the notice we also provided lists of polling districts, stations and electorate together with ward maps on our website giving the ARO’s provisional recommendations

Letters explaining the purpose of the review and inviting representations were sent to the Mayor, MP's, MEP's, the GLA Constituency Member, ward councillors, party agents, Lewisham Disability Coalition, Lewisham Association of People with Disabilities, the RNIB, Action on hearing Loss (RNID) and Scope.

5. Representations

5.1. Representations have been received from

Councillor Stella Jeffrey - proposing changes to the Polling Districts and polling station arrangements in Lewisham Central Ward.

Scope - who amongst other things emphasise the importance of ensuring that Trinity Church Hall and St John the Baptist Church are "fully accessible following the review"

The Lewisham Green Party - proposing that the number of polling districts /stations should be reduced from 6 per ward to 4 per ward in order to reduce costs , optimise use of staff and reduce reliance on portakabins or other unsatisfactory accommodation

Frankie Sulke - Executive Director for Children and Young people who would like us to consider removing all schools from the list other than those which can at least stay partially open.

Councillor Vincent Davis proposing changes polling districts in Ladywell Ward

- 5.2. The full representations have to be published, along with any correspondence relating to them at the conclusion of the review. Recommendations from Councillors Jeffrey and Davis have been incorporated in the recommendations in paragraph 5 below and the ARO's final recommendations (Appendix A).
- 5.3. The Lewisham Green Party's proposals are not specific. Furthermore we comply with the Electoral Commissions capacity and staffing guidelines for polling stations which indicate a maximum of 2,500 voters in person per polling station. It is difficult to see how this would be achieved if the Lewisham Green Party's proposals were adopted. It is also unlikely that the cost savings referred to could therefore be achieved.
- 5.4. We visited the two polling stations mentioned by Scope and could not identify any issues and wrote to Scope accordingly, who acknowledged they were satisfied with our response.
- 5.5. As the Committee is aware, we use 39 schools as polling stations. The ARO is entitled to use such schools and any other publicly funded building

as polling stations. We make strenuous efforts to minimise the impact on schools by only using primary schools and then try to work with them to keep them open. For example, an appropriate segregated area such as the nursery part of the school can be used if it that satisfies both the school's and the ARO's risk assessments. Schools are frequently the only suitable places in the polling district that meet the accessibility criteria and meet the Electoral Commission's performance standards for ARO's in ensuring "that all voters have a good experience."

6. ARO's Recommendations

Having considered all the representations received and feedback from inspection of polling places and districts by the Electoral Services team, the ARO makes the following recommendations

6.1. Brockley Ward

6.1.1. Confirm the use of St John with Holy Trinity Church, St Johns Vale as the polling station for polling district DBR1 which has been used in place of the portakabin on the slip road at opposite Lloyd Villas and the corner of Breakspears Building since the May 2010 elections

6.1.2. In the polling district DBR6 designate Ashmead Primary School as the polling place and split the station into two. Ashmead Primary school will replace St Stephens Church of England Primary School in Albyn Road. The electorate exceeds the voters in person capacity set by the Electoral Commissions guidelines of 2,500 and St Stephens is too small to accommodate two polling stations.

Consideration was given to the possibility of using both sites in the polling district as polling station but this would have meant closing both schools.

6.2. Evelyn Ward

6.2.1. In polling district DEV5 change the polling station to the Lewington Centre which is almost directly opposite the current polling station at St Katherine's and St Bartholomew's Church Hall. Access, lighting and general upkeep of the property are superior to the existing station.

6.3. Ladywell Ward

6.3.1. In response to a representation made by Councillor Davis, move 203 properties and 372 electors in polling district DLA1 to DLA6. The polling station for these electors will change to Crofton Park Baptist Church, which has temporarily replaced Gordonbrock Primary School whilst it is being rebuilt, from John Evelyn Education Centre. The Baptist Church is much more convenient to them. This means that electors in the following streets:

Huxbear Street

Abbotswell Road
Elsiemaud Road
Chudleigh Road
Brockley Road

would in future vote at Crofton Park Baptist Church, and not at John Evelyn Education Centre/Gordonbrock School as previously.

- 6.3.2. Designate the Link Line Building (Roseview), 122 Marsala Road as the polling place for polling District DLA2 which will enable the use of either the Roseview lounge in the building or continued use of a portakabin. There is a minor access issue to resolve with the use of the lounge in the building.
- 6.3.3. Designate Crofton Park Baptist Church in polling district DLA6, used in the May 2011 Referendum, as the polling station whilst Gordonbrock School is being rebuilt.
- 6.4. Lewisham Central Ward
 - 6.4.1. In response to representations received from Councillor Jeffrey, for the polling district DLC3, locate a portakabin in Cornmill Gardens. The portakabin is more central to voters in the polling district than Lewisham Methodist Church which is outside the polling district and involves crossing a major road, Molesworth Street, and walking through the shopping centre.
 - 6.4.2. Move 53 properties and 55 electors in Hither Green Lane from DLC5 to DLC1. This means that they would vote at Brindishe Green Primary School, rather than the Saville Centre.
- 6.5. New Cross Ward
 - 6.5.1. Designate All Saints Community Centre in polling district DNE5 as the polling station. The originally designated polling station at Hatcham Temple Grove School has not been used since its closure in 2008.
- 6.6. Telegraph Hill Ward
 - 6.6.1. In polling district DTE3, keep the polling place unchanged as St James Hatcham Church of England School but move the polling station to the Family Learning Centre on the opposite side of the Road (used for the Referendum in May 2011) to enable the main school to remain open.
 - 6.6.2. In polling district DTE4, change the polling place to Hatcham Oak Children's Centre in Wallbutton Road (used for the Referendum in May 2011) from Haberdasher Aske's Hatcham College in Pepys Road as building works now make this inaccessible.
- 6.7. Whitefoot Ward

- 6.7.1. Designate portakabin at Hafton Road, in polling district EWH2, as the polling station which has been used since the European Elections in 2009, instead of Meridian Court.
- 6.8. Bellingham Ward
 - 6.8.1. In polling district WBE2, designate Blackheath Hockey & Catford Cyphers Cricket Club, Rubens Street, used in the Referendum May 2011, as the polling station instead of the portakabin at Rutland Walk Sports and Social Club.
- 6.9. Downham Ward
 - 6.9.1. The polling station in polling district EDO1 would revert to Meadows Community Centre which was approved as the polling station for the district in the 2007 Polling District and Polling Place Review. Meadows Community Centre was temporarily replaced by Catford Wanderers Sports Club, but has been refurbished following its flooding prior to the European Parliamentary Election in 2010.
- 6.10. Forest Hill Ward
 - 6.10.1. In polling district WFO4, designate Horniman Primary School used in the Referendum in May 2011 as the polling station instead of the portakabin in the car park at Horniman Primary School.
- 6.11. Sydenham Ward
 - 6.11.1. In polling district WSY7, designate Our Lady and St Phillip Neri School used in the Referendum in May 2011 as the polling station instead of Sydenham Catholic Club

7. Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising.

8. Legal implications

Each polling district must have sufficient and suitable designated polling places that provide 'such reasonable facilities for voting that are practicable in the circumstances' including accessibility for electors with disabilities. The Council is under a duty to promote equality for those with a disability and the recommendations in this report are drafted with this duty in mind.

9. Crime and disorder implications

There are no crime and disorder implications arising.

10. Equalities implications

All recommended polling places are accessible for people with disabilities and efforts have been made to ensure that polling places are conveniently accessible for all abilities and ages

11. Environmental implications

There are no environmental implications arising.

Background documents and originator

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