

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Full Council

**Date:** 19/01/2022

**Subject:** Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

**Report of:** Kim Smith, Chief Executive and (Acting) Returning Officer

**Report author:** Zoe Wilkins, Electoral Services Manager

**Responsible Director:** Rhian Davies, Director of Resources.

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## SUMMARY

The Council must divide each parliamentary constituency in the area into polling districts, to designate polling places for those polling districts, and to keep these under review.

New ward boundaries will come into effect at the local council elections in May 2022.

As a result, Hammersmith & Fulham must review polling districts and places and approve a new polling scheme to be implemented at the local council elections scheduled for 5 May 2022.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council approve the adoption of parliamentary polling districts and parliamentary polling places as set out in the scheme contained in Appendix 1.
  2. That Council approve the adoption of the scheme contained in Appendix 1 in relation to all other referenda and elections held within the borough.
  3. That Council instruct the Electoral Registration Officer to make the necessary amendments to polling districts and to revise and republish the electoral register on 1 February 2022.
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**Wards Affected:** ALL

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<b>Our Values</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the H&amp;F Values</b>
Doing things with local residents, not to them	Local residents have been encouraged to respond to proposals, and the consultation process has been extended for as long as possible to allow

	maximum participation.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	Cost savings will be achieved by discontinuing the use of temporary cabins as polling stations where possible.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	The proposals support using permanent buildings rather than cabins as part of the permanent scheme, marginally reducing carbon footprint.

## Financial Impact

- The new polling arrangements do not include any temporary cabins as polling stations, saving a forecasted £6,500 for hire and installation costs compared to previous years. This saving is partially reduced by the need to hire new stations in some districts at an estimated £2,000.
- However, should any designated polling stations become suddenly unavailable due to unforeseen circumstances, then there is a risk that temporary cabins may be needed to mitigate this.
- Poll cards, maps and voter information will need to be amended to take account of new ward and polling district boundaries.
- The costs of any amendments required as a result of this decision will be met from existing revenue budgets and reserves funding for local elections.

## Legal Implications

Section 18A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) requires that the Council divide each parliamentary constituency in the area into polling districts, to designate polling places for those polling districts, and to keep these under review.

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## **Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report - none**

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### **Proposals and Analysis of Options**

1. Due to the complexity of the proposals, with maps and tables, please see the separate document at Appendix 1 which sets out the proposals and the reasoning behind them, and Appendix 2 which provides detailed maps.

### **Reasons for Decision**

2. Under Section 18A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) the Council is required to divide each parliamentary constituency in the area into polling districts, to designate polling places for those polling districts, and to keep these under review.
3. Following the Local Government Boundaries Commission for England (LGBCE) review of wards in the borough, it has become necessary to determine new polling district boundaries and designate polling places to accommodate the new ward boundaries.

### **Equality Implications**

4. Local authorities have a duty to review the accessibility of all polling places to disabled voters and ensure that every polling place and prospective polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to disabled voters 'so far as is reasonable and practicable' (Representation of the People Act 1983, Section 18 (2)(a)).
5. An Equality Impact Assessment, shown in Appendix 3 was developed alongside the review to consider the review's impact on electors who have protected characteristics.
6. In order to determine the accessibility of polling places, a standard questionnaire, shown in Appendix 4 was used to assess the suitability of new stations or considering the comparative merits between potential venues.
7. Presiding Officers were also asked to complete the same questionnaire for existing polling places, and to advise on any other matters that residents may have raised with them with regards to the suitability of existing polling places.
8. Electoral Commission guidance, shown in Appendix 5, provides further information on considering accessibility issues.

9. Groups and individuals considered to have expertise in access issues within the Hammersmith & Fulham area were invited to respond to the Acting Returning Officer's representations in the public consultation.

## **Risk Management Implications**

10. There is a risk to the Council should the polling arrangements not be agreed in time for the next council elections on 5 May 2022 when new ward boundaries come into effect.
11. There is a risk that electors whose polling place has changed may be unsure where they should go to vote at the next election in May 2022.
12. To minimise the risk, the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer 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:
  - Council's website
  - Social media
  - Updated maps on poll cards
  - Information in libraries
  - Additional wayfinding and signage at new polling places
13. In reviewing polling places, the reasonable facilities for staff at polling stations during elections has also been considered, as has the space, facilities and general safety for members of the public visiting their polling stations. All new polling places which are approved will be assessed to ensure that they comply with accessibility requirements.
14. All existing polling stations were assessed for COVID 19 safety at the GLA elections in 2021. Proposed new stations have been assessed for size and ventilation / possibility of using one-way systems at future elections.
15. Two stations, Manor Court and John Betts House, that were not used at the GLA elections have been removed from the polling scheme due to COVID 19 safety requirements and/or changes to ward boundaries making them less favourable locations for the wards in which they are situated.

*Implications verified by: David Hughes, Director of Audit, Fraud, Risk and Insurance, tel: 07817 507 695.*

## **Climate and Ecological Emergency Implications**

16. Using permanent rather than temporary buildings decreases, slightly, the use of fossil fuels in polling stations, as they afford better insulation and lower costs for heating than temporary, mobile units. Similarly, there is further small reduction in fossil fuel use as there is no need to transport a temporary structure into the borough.

*Implications verified by: Hinesh Mehta, Strategic Lead, Climate Emergency, tel 07960 470125*

## **Consultation**

17. The notice of review was published ahead of initial proposals being produced so that interested parties could provide their thoughts and ideas for incorporation into the proposals, if desired.
18. The initial proposals were published on 8 October 2021 and were open for six weeks to all residents, stakeholders and interested parties. Representations were specifically sought from local disability action groups on the accessibility and suitability of polling places.
19. The Council used Citizenspace as the main pathway for responses, although emails, letters or other written methods of response were also encouraged via the Council website and email.
20. Links to the consultation and invitations to respond to the proposals were sent to all Councillors, both local Members of Parliament that represent the borough, and to local political party organisers and agents active at the most recent sets of elections.
21. 962 contacts (residents and tenants representatives) were emailed directly inviting them to respond to the proposals either online or via email or post.
22. Further information was published on social media including Facebook, Nextdoor and Twitter with links to the council's website and consultation.
23. Presiding Officers were asked to offer comments about the suitability of the venues currently used as polling places.
24. There were 22 responses, and these are summarised in Appendix 4.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1 – Polling District and Places Review 2021 – Final Proposals
- Appendix 2 – Maps of proposed new polling arrangements
- Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact assessment
- Appendix 4 – Responses to consultation
- Appendix 5 – Electoral Commission guidance extract