

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Title of Report: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Date: 24 October 2007

Summary of this Report

1. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires the City Council to review its polling districts and polling places by 31 December 2007 and then subsequently within every four years.
2. A public consultation was launched in August inviting views on the current pattern of polling districts and polling places and the attached report addresses the issues raised in the responses made and sets out proposals for change by officers. The proposals in this report are also being displayed in an exhibition prior to the current cycle of Area Forum meetings and all councillors are being informed of the proposals in this report for their wards. It is likely that further suggestions for change will be made following publication of the proposals in this report and these will either be tabled or reported orally at the Committee.
3. The principles underlying the approach to establishing polling districts and polling places in both the previous and current review have been:
 - a) To retain the current network of polling places and polling districts as far as possible to minimise disruption to voters;
 - b) To try and identify new polling places in areas where the existing provision is inadequate or no longer fits the current boundaries;
 - c) To aim, but only as a guideline, to have an average of three polling places per ward wherever practicable;
 - d) To ensure, as far as practicable, that any new polling places are accessible to people with disabilities;
 - e) To try and minimise disruption to schools.
4. In total the report recommends (a) moving nine polling places on a permanent basis; (b) moving one temporarily for next May's GLA elections – in the event of building works preventing use of the usual location; and (c) invites a decision on the suggestion that a fourth polling district and two new polling places be designated for Westbourne Ward.

5. The proposals result in discontinuing use of two locations that currently have no disability access and in the longer term permanently moving out of five schools.

Recommendations

- (a) That the Committee approve the following proposed changes in polling places for the reasons given (to be effective from the publication of the new electoral register on 3 December 2007):
- (1) ARC (Abbey Road) from St John's Wood Library to Robinsfield Infant School solely for the GLA Elections on 1 May 2008 (should the library be unavailable for those elections due to building works)
 - (2) CSB (Church Street) from King Solomon Academy to Christ Church Bentinck School (due to the redevelopment of the Academy site)
 - (3) KBC (Knightsbridge & Belgravia) from St Peter's School to St Peter's Church Hall, Eaton Square (to minimise disruption to the school and to provide a more centrally located polling place within the polling district)
 - (4) LVC (Little Venice) from St David's Church Hall to St Mary's Church Hall, St Mary's Terrace (as St David's Church Hall is no longer available for letting and the recommended alternative St Mary's Church Hall is very close by)
 - (5) MHB (Marylebone High Street) from the Central Synagogue to All Souls Clubhouse, 141 Cleveland Street (to provide an improved location with disability access)
 - (6) MHC (Marylebone High Street) from Marylebone School to the University of Westminster, Marylebone Road (as the existing polling place area within the school is to be rebuilt)
 - (7) RPA (Regent's Park) from Barrow Hill School to The Village Club, Barrow Hill Estate (off Allitsen Road) (to avoid closure of the school on polling day)
 - (8) RPB (Regent's Park) from Rudolf Steiner House to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, 100 Park Road (due to building works at Rudolf Steiner and the new location being more centrally located within the polling district)
 - (9) WEC (West End) from St George's School to the Grosvenor Chapel Meeting Room, South Audley Street (effective after the GLA elections in May 2008 as the new location is already booked next May, to avoid closing the school on polling day)
 - (10) WBC (Westbourne) from Edward Wilson School to the Stowe Centre (to restore the polling place to its previous location prior to rebuilding works and to avoid having to close the school on polling day)

- (b) That the Committee agree that officers continue to try and identify a possible new polling place within Hyde Park Ward to serve the northern part of the Ward (including the new residential area within the Paddington redevelopment) for further consideration by the Committee
- (c) That the Committee agree to retain the current polling district boundaries within Westbourne Ward, rather than create a fourth polling district and designate two new polling places within the ward
- (d) That the Committee note that the Chief Executive has delegated powers to designate alternative polling places in the event of any polling place not being available at any election, following consultation with the Party Whips and respective ward councillors.



City of Westminster

General Purposes Committee

Item No:	
Date:	24 October 2007
Classification:	For General Release
Title of Report:	Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places
Report of:	Director of Legal and Administrative Services
Wards involved:	All
Policy context:	Management of the Council
Financial summary:	The cost of using polling places is met from the specific budget provision for the relevant election
Report Author:	Nigel Tonkin
Contact details	Tel: 020 7641 2756 Email: ntonkin@westminster.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This paper sets out the current pattern of polling districts and polling places within the City of Westminster and recommends proposals for change.
- 1.2 The current pattern of electoral wards within Westminster was determined by the Government on the recommendation of the (then) Local Government Commission.
- 1.3 The existing Westminster ward boundaries are set and are not part of this review, although they will be reviewed periodically in future by the Electoral Commission.
- 1.4 The current (a) Cities of London & Westminster and (b) Regent's Park & Kensington North parliamentary constituency boundaries will change at the next General Election – on whatever date that is held.
- 1.5 The two parliamentary constituencies covering the City of Westminster will then be made up of the following City of Westminster wards:

(a) Cities of London and Westminster constituency:

Bryanston & Dorset Square
Churchill
Hyde Park
Knightsbridge & Belgravia
Marylebone High Street
St James's
Tachbrook
Vincent Square
Warwick
West End
and the City of London

(b) Westminster North constituency:

Abbey Road
Bayswater
Church Street
Harrow Road
Lancaster Gate
Little Venice
Maida Vale
Queen's Park
Regent's Park
Westbourne

- 1.6 Attached is a map showing the pattern of existing ward boundaries, polling district boundaries and polling places as at the last City Council elections in May 2006, which was the starting point for this review.

- 1.7 A ward is the basic building block on which parliamentary constituencies are put together. The wards, polling districts and polling places are the same in Westminster for both local government and parliamentary elections
- 1.8 Attached as Appendix B is an alphabetical listing by ward of the current polling places, their electorates and the number of polling stations at each polling place. A “polling station” is a desk in the building at which ballot papers are issued – there may be up to 3 such “stations” or desks in a polling place.
- 1.9 The Appendix also identifies those polling places that currently have inadequate disability access.
- 1.10 The current pattern of polling district boundaries within wards and the location of polling places was last comprehensively reviewed during 2000 and 2001. This new pattern first came into effect at the City Council elections in May 2002.
- 1.11 The opportunity has been taken since May 2002 to change polling places where more convenient or better polling places have been identified or where a change had to be made because the existing polling place was no longer available for whatever reason.
- 1.12 The principles underlying the City Council’s approach to polling districts and polling in both the previous and current review were:
- a) To retain the current network of polling places and polling districts as far as possible to minimise disruption to voters;
 - b) To try and identify new polling places in areas where the existing provision is inadequate or no longer fits the current boundaries;
 - c) To aim, but only as a guideline, to have an average of three polling places per ward wherever practicable;
 - d) To ensure, as far as practicable, that any new polling places are accessible to people with disabilities;
 - e) To try and minimise disruption to schools.
- 1.13 The pattern of provision will never be ideal or suit all electors, but the current boundaries and places were drawn to try and maximise convenience to electors by using the best locations available.
- 1.14 Council officers continue to look for possible alternative locations, particularly where disability access is currently inadequate or the existing polling place location could be improved. The number of inaccessible polling places has gradually been declining as building owners have gradually been improving access or alternative places are used instead. A separate disability audit is being carried out of all polling places to identify ways in which any access

difficulties can be overcome or reduced before the next timetabled elections on 1 May 2008 (GLA and Mayor for London).

- 1.15 Elections happen very infrequently and sometimes with very little notice, so the City Council is appreciative of the co-operation of polling places in providing their buildings for the day so that local electors have a convenient place where they can go and vote – often at considerable inconvenience, particularly to parents of school children.
- 1.16 This paper sets out a comprehensive set of proposals for polling districts and polling places for the whole area of the City of Westminster.
- 1.17 Consultation proposals were issued in August and comments on the current pattern were invited. Only a few suggestions were put forward and these are addressed in this report, although others are likely to arise after publication of this report.

2. POSSIBLE CHANGES

- 2.1 At the start of this review and the consultation, there were no firm proposals to make any changes to polling district boundaries and to make only one change of polling place – to use the Stowe Centre instead of Edward Wilson School in the WBC polling district of Westbourne Ward.
- 2.2 However officers have used the opportunity of this review to try and identify better alternative locations and to deal with those instances where building works or other reasons require a new location. A brief rationale explaining the current and proposed provision in each ward (listed alphabetically) is set out below:

1. Abbey Road Ward

- 2.3 The most northerly of Westminster's wards is divided into three separate polling districts by two major roads running north/south. The three districts follow an historic pattern and so most long-standing electors in the ward are voting where they have voted for many years.
- 2.4 It has been suggested that the ARA (St Mark's Church Hall) and ARB (St John's Wood Synagogue) polling districts could be realigned on an east/west axis and an alternative polling place designated instead. Comments were invited on this proposal and officers are currently investigating a possible alternative polling place in the north of the ward. If no better alternative location can be identified, it is recommended that the status quo be retained, particularly as the current pattern is well-established for electors who have been voting at these two locations for many years.
- 2.5 The third polling place for the ward is in the ARC polling district (St John's Wood Library). It is geographically well located next to the St John's Wood underground station, but is small and cramped. Despite the drawback of its size, the location is good and it currently appears to be the best available

option. The library is due for refurbishment in the New Year so a temporary alternative location may be required for next May's GLA elections. It is therefore proposed to use Robinsfield Infant School at next May's elections if the building works are still in progress and then to revert back to St John's Wood Library at subsequent elections.

2. Bayswater

- 2.6 The polling place for the BWA polling district is a well-known local landmark (Small Hall, Porchester Centre) and is geographically central. The boundaries between the BWB (College Park Special School) and BWC (St Stephen's School) polling districts have to remain unchanged as the current parliamentary boundaries remain in force until the next General Election and cannot be changed until afterwards.
- 2.7 Currently the BWC polling district forms part of the existing Regent's Park & Kensington North constituency, whilst the remainder of the ward is in the Cities of London and Westminster constituency. At the next parliamentary election all of the ward will be in the Westminster North parliamentary constituency.

3. Bryanston & Dorset Square

- 2.8 The BDA (West London Synagogue) and BDB (Seymour Leisure Centre) polling districts have well located polling places. The BDC polling district (St Paul's Church) has a polling place right on the northern edge of the polling district fronting on to households in another ward (Church Street). However the polling place is exceptionally well appointed and is the preferred location in the absence of any alternative location being identified more centrally to the polling district, which ideally would be nearer Marylebone Station or Dorset Square. The BDC polling district is currently in the Regent's Park & Kensington North Constituency, but will be united with the rest of the ward in the Cities of London & Westminster constituency at the next General Election.

4. Church Street

- 2.9 The CSA (Gateway Primary School) polling district is well-established. The former Marylebone Lower House, North Westminster Community School Sports Hall has up to now been the polling place for the CSB polling district. However this site is now being redeveloped for the new King Solomon Academy and so is not available for use as a polling place. Until redevelopment is complete, it is proposed to move the polling place temporarily to the nearby Christ Church Bentinck Primary School. Unfortunately this will require the Primary School to close for polling day. The Greenside Community Centre is a relatively new polling place and well located within the CSC polling district.

5. Churchill

- 2.10 The ward is geographically bisected by the main railway line into Victoria Station, which also forms the polling district boundary. The ward only has two polling districts and polling places.
- 2.11 All electors in polling district CHA to the east vote in the Churchill Gardens Youth Club and in the west in CHB polling district at St Barnabas School. Disability access into the school is currently limited.

6. Harrow Road

- 2.12 All three polling districts in the ward have clear boundaries and well located polling places – HRA (Emmanuel Church Hall), HRB (Fernhead Road Methodist Church Hall) and HRC (St Peter's Primary School).

7. Hyde Park

- 2.13 The ward currently has two polling districts with long-established polling places – HPA (St John's Church Nursery) and HPB (St John's Parish Church). As more residential properties have been built in the northern part of the ward within the Paddington redevelopment and as the electorate has increased there is a justification for a third polling district and a new polling place north of Praed Street. Comments and suggestions of possible polling places were invited within the consultation. No adequate facility has yet been identified, but officers will continue to explore any possible options that arise.

8. Knightsbridge & Belgravia

- 2.14 The ward is well-served by three polling districts and polling places – KBA (St Paul's Hall), KBB (Royal Geographical Society) and KBC (St Peter's School). The School is just outside the KBC polling district and so it is proposed to relocate the polling place instead to St Peter's Church Hall, Eaton Square. This will enable the school to operate unhindered on polling day and the new location is also better located within the polling district.

9. Lancaster Gate

- 2.15 The ward has three polling districts with three long-standing polling places – LGA (St Mathew's Church Hall), LGB (St James & St Michael's School) and LGC (Hallfield Infants School). The first two polling places have inadequate disability access, but are the currently the best locations that have been identified.
- 2.16 At the next parliamentary election the ward will transfer in to the Westminster North parliamentary constituency.

10. Little Venice

- 2.17 The ward and polling district boundaries were unchanged in 2002, so electors benefit from a long-established pattern of no change. The polling districts are LVA (St Joseph's School), LVB (St Saviour's School) and LVC (St David's Church Hall). There is currently no disability access to St Joseph's School. St David's Church Hall is no longer available as a polling place for future elections so it is proposed to relocate the LVC polling place around the corner to St Mary's Church Hall, St Mary's Terrace.

11. Maida Vale

- 2.18 The ward and polling district boundaries were similarly unchanged in 2002. The polling districts are MVA (Maida Centre) and MVB (Essendine Primary School). The ward would benefit from a third polling district and polling place if a suitable location could be identified. Essendine Primary School may still be undergoing building works in May 2008, in which case the polling place may need to be relocated temporarily, but officers have not yet identified a suitable alternative. Officers will also continue to explore finding a new polling place so that the MVA polling district can be sub-divided.

12. Marylebone High Street

- 2.19 The polling places within the ward are not ideal. MHA (St Vincent's School) is on the edge and not central to its polling district. MHB's polling place (Central Synagogue) has steps and so has no disability access. It is proposed to relocate the MHB polling place instead to All Souls Clubhouse, 141 Cleveland Street. Using the back entrance from Greenwell Street provides direct (including disability) access to the main hall. Attempts have also been made over the years to find an alternative polling place for MHC (St Marylebone School), which is on the edge of the polling district and has inadequate disability access. Due to forthcoming renovation, the school block that has previously been the polling place will not be available. It is therefore proposed to relocate the polling place to the Chiltern Hall in the main University of Westminster campus on Marylebone Road. Should that not prove suitable in the longer term the fall back would be to move to the old gym within St Marylebone School (which can be entered via a separate entrance behind Marylebone Church and accessible via the gardens from Marylebone High Street). This fall back location would enable the remainder of the school site to operate unhindered and so not require the closure of the school, but has relatively poor access from the street.

13. Queen's Park

- 2.20 This ward benefits from having four polling districts with four relatively newly identified and well appointed polling places so no changes are contemplated - QPA (St Jude's Church Hall), QPB (Beethoven Centre), QPC (New Avenues Youth Project) and QPD (St Luke's Church Hall).

14. Regent's Park

- 2.21 It is proposed to change two of this ward's three polling districts – RPA and RPB leaving one unchanged - RPC (Liberal Jewish Synagogue). The proposal is to move out of Barrow Hill School (RPA) to the Village Club, around the corner on the Barrow Hill Estate (off Allitsen Road). The school will no longer then have to close for the day. Rudolf Steiner House in RPB polling district is on the edge of the polling district and is currently undergoing building works. It is proposed instead to relocate the polling place to the Conference Room of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists using the rear entrance from 100 Park Road, which is also a more central location within the polling district.

15. St James's

- 2.22 This ward has a wide geographical spread so has 4 rather than the average 3 polling districts to improve accessibility to electors, The polling places for SJA (St Clement Danes School) and SJD (Abbey Community Centre) polling districts are geographically centrally located. The polling places for SJB (Charing Cross Library) and SJC (Westminster City School) are on the margin of their polling districts, but nevertheless are close to the main concentration of electors in both districts.

16. Tachbrook

- 2.23 All three polling places in the ward are long-standing and centrally located within their polling districts – TBA (St Saviour's Church Hall); TBB (Westminster Cathedral School) and TBC (Lillington Gardens Estate Hall). The Estate Hall is located in the middle of the Estate so requires more directional signage for residents unfamiliar with its location.

17. Vincent Square

- 2.24 All three polling places are reasonably well located within each of the polling districts – VSA (Millbank School); VSB (Hide Tower Hall) and VSC (Hinsley Hall) – and so no changes are proposed.

18. Warwick

- 2.25 The polling place for WAB (Sherborne House) is well located. The other two polling places for WAA (Holy Apostles Church Hall) and WAC (Victoria Children's Library) are on the edge of their polling districts but are the best available locations identified to date within the districts.

19. West End

- 2.26 This ward is geographically large and so is well served with four polling places. With the exception of WEA (St Anne's Church Hall), all the other three polling places have inadequate disability access and so this ward is the top priority in requiring improved disability access provision within the other three

districts – WEB (Dance Works, Balderton Street), WEC (St George's School) and WED (All Souls School). It is proposed in future to use a meeting room at the Grosvenor Chapel (South Audley Street) instead of St George's School, but this is already booked for 1 May 2008, so this change would only become effective after 1 May 2008.

20. Westbourne

- 2.27 This ward is relatively well served with its three polling places – WBA (Warwick Community Centre), WBB (St Mary of the Angels School) and WBC (The Stowe Centre). The Stowe Centre was not used as the polling place in the most recent elections due to the rebuilding of the Centre so temporarily the polling place had to revert to being at Edward Wilson School. Transferring the polling place back to the Stowe Centre from Edward Wilson School will mean one less Westminster school needing to close on polling day.
- 2.28 A Ward Councillor (Councillor Boothroyd) has submitted a number of suggestions centred on relocating the WBA and WBC ward boundary along the Grand Union Canal and dividing the existing WBA polling district into two along the Harrow Road. This would involve replacing the Warwick Community Centre with two new polling places. Councillor Boothroyd argues that turnout in the ward is low; the WBA polling district has the second highest electorate in the City (after HPB which is in a two polling district ward); and the current polling place (Warwick Community Centre) is not well known in the area and also may be redeveloped in the next few years. He further suggests that if the area to the west of the Harrow Road does not justify a polling place of its own, these electors are added instead to the WBB polling district and so would vote at St Mary of the Angels School.
- 2.29 Officers have visited all the possible suggested polling places to assess their suitability. The officers' reasons for not supporting the possible alternative polling place locations put forward are:
- (a) The Westminster Adult Education Services Centre in Amberley Street, although geographically well-located, does not have a suitable space within the centre for use as a polling place
 - (b) The Maida Vale Library has no suitable space and is also on the edge of the polling district
 - (c) The Amadeus Centre is also on the edge of the polling district and not available for letting on a Thursday (currently the standard day for all elections)
 - (d) The Amberley Clubroom has adequate space but is located off a main road and difficult to find for anyone not living in the immediate vicinity, particularly at night
 - (e) The Harrow Road One Stop is not considered a possible polling place as it isn't large enough to accommodate a polling place without closing completely

as an One Stop to the general public for the day. This would cause considerable inconvenience to a significant number of local residents

(f) Paddington Arts has adequate space, but is not on a main road and so not easy to locate. If a polling place were to be established nearby, officers would propose reverting instead to Our Lady of Lourdes and St Vincent de Paul Church Hall (on Woodfield Place)

- 2.30 As the ward is already served by three polling places, the presumption is against creating a fourth. The Warwick Community Centre is also located centrally within the ward and on the main public artery through the ward on Harrow Road. The area to the west of Harrow Road in the WBA polling district has not had a sufficient electorate to justify having a polling district of its own. If the Warwick Community Centre does become unavailable for a temporary period during building works, in the absence of a better option, officers would propose using either The Stowe Centre or Edward Wilson School instead until the rebuilding was complete. The barrier of Westway is also considered to make the distance too great for any electors within the existing WBA polling district to be added to the WBB polling district and be redirected instead to St Mary of the Angels School.

3. IMPROVING DIABILITY PROVISION

- 3.1 Priority has been given in this review to identify locations which provide improved disability access over the previous provision and to move out of schools where practicable.
- 3.2 Although it can only be a temporary measure until adequate access is established, where any polling place is currently inaccessible (for example) to wheelchair users temporary door bells are positioned outside the building. Any elector can then use these to call for a member of the polling station staff to come out to them so that they are not denied their right to vote when they turn up in person at the polling place to vote.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The City Council is required to conduct a review of its polling districts and polling places prior to 31 December 2007 and then within every four years.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The cost of hiring polling places at elections is covered by the Government or GLA for Parliamentary and GLA elections and by the City Council every four years for the City Council elections.

Background Papers:

1. Polling District Review Proposals, 17 August 2008
2. Review Submission from Councillor David Boothroyd, 1 October 2007.

Background Information

If you have any queries about this report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Nigel Tonkin on 020 7641 2756