



City of Westminster

General Purposes Committee

Date:	18 October 2011
Classification:	For General Release
Title:	Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places
Report of:	Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Management of the Council
Financial Summary:	The cost of using polling places is met from the Government grant in respect of UK and European Parliamentary elections and referendums, from the GLA in respect of London Mayor and GLA elections and by the City Council for its own elections
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires the City Council to review its polling districts and polling places every 4 years. A review was last carried out in 2007 when proposals were reported to the General Purposes Committee on 24 October 2007.
- 1.2 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. All councillors are being kept 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 The report seeks views on whether any polling places, those for BDC and WED polling districts included, should be re-designated and whether additional polling districts should be created in Hyde Park and Maida Vale wards.
- 1.5 The proposals result in discontinuing use of two locations, one that currently has no disability access (WED) and the other which is located well away from the main concentration of residents (BDC).
- 2. Recommendations**
- 2.1 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 1 December 2011):
- (1) BDC (Bryanston and Dorset Square) from St Paul's Church in Rossmore Road to St Cyprian's Church in Glentworth Street,(to provide an improved location closer to the main concentration of residents)
 - (2) WED (West End) from All Souls School in Foley Street to the Fitzrovia Community Centre in Foley Street (to avoid closure of the school on polling day and to provide disabled access).
- 2.2 That the Committee agree that officers continue to review whether a new polling place within Hyde Park Ward is needed to serve the northern part of the Ward (including the new residential area within the Paddington redevelopment)
- 2.3 That the Committee agree to retain the current polling district boundaries within Westbourne Ward.
- 2.4 That the Committee agree to retain the current polling district boundaries within Maida Vale Ward, rather than create a third polling district
- 2.5 That the Committee note that the initial proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries published by the Boundary Commission for England on 13 September 2011 (there is a consultation period of 12 weeks on the initial proposals ending on 5 December 2011) deliver a challenging set of constituency boundary mapping proposals which do not lend themselves, in

terms of voter comprehension and understanding of the building blocks of voting, to the creation of new polling districts and a movement away from the existing pattern of polling districts and polling place designations.

- 2.6 That the Committee note that in terms of the process for future polling district and polling place reviews the Government has published draft legislation for pre-legislative scrutiny by Parliament (the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee will consider the proposals) which will make changes to the timing of polling place and district reviews in Great Britain to bring them in to line with the proposals to set Parliamentary terms to 5 year periods, and the five year cycle for UK Parliamentary boundary reviews implemented by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.
- 2.7 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.

3. Background

- 3.1 This paper sets out the current pattern of polling districts and polling places within the City of Westminster and recommends proposals for change.
- 3.2 The current pattern of electoral wards within Westminster was determined by the Government on the recommendation of the (then) Local Government Commission.
- 3.3 The existing Westminster ward boundaries are set and are not part of this review.
- 3.4 The current (a) Cities of London & Westminster and (b) Westminster North parliamentary constituency boundaries will change at the next General Election. The Boundary Commission for England has commenced its review of parliamentary constituency boundaries and has decided that it would be desirable to use whole wards to create constituencies so that a total constituency electorate that is within 5% of the 'UK electoral quota' of 76,641 electors can be arrived at.
- 3.5 The current parliamentary constituencies covering the City of Westminster are 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

- 3.6 On 13 September 2011 The Boundary Commission for England published initial proposals for new constituency boundaries in England. This publication marked the start of a 12-week period of consultation on the initial proposals, ending on Monday 5 December 2011. Information on this review can be found at information@bcommengland.x.gsi.gov.uk.

The Commission's initial proposals, in respect of the Westminster City Council area, are as follows:

Camden and Regent's Park is comprised of four Westminster wards (Bryanston and Dorset Square, Church Street, Marylebone High Street, Regent's Park, plus seven London Borough of Camden wards.(the electorate for this constituency is given as 79,897)

Paddington is comprised of nine Westminster wards (Abbey Road, Bayswater, Harrow Road, Hyde Park, Lancaster Gate, Little Venice, Maida Vale, Queen's Park, Westbourne) plus four Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea wards.(the electorate for this constituency is given as 80,251)

Westminster and Kensington is comprised of seven Westminster wards (Churchill, Knightsbridge and Belgravia, St James's, Tachbrook, Vincent Square, Warwick, West End) plus eight Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea wards.(the electorate for this constituency is given as 78,616)

In addition the Government has published draft legislation for pre-legislative scrutiny by Parliament (the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee will consider the proposals) which will make changes to the timing of polling places and district reviews in Great Britain to bring them in to line with the proposals to set Parliamentary terms to 5 year periods, and the five year cycle for UK Parliamentary boundary reviews implemented by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011.

- 3.7 Attached is a map, Appendix A, showing the pattern of existing ward boundaries, polling district boundaries and polling places as at the referendum on the voting system for United Kingdom parliamentary elections on 5 May 2011, which was the starting point for this review.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 Attached as Appendix B is an alphabetical listing by ward of the current polling places, any re-designations recommended at this review and the electorates per polling district. The number of polling stations at each polling place will be determined by the Returning Officer in advance of any election and will vary according to the size of the eligible electorate at that election and the likely turnout. 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. Polling districts such as HPB and WBA have relatively high electorates and may be assigned more polling stations than polling places with smaller electorates such as KBA and TBB.
- 3.10 Appendix B also identifies those polling places that currently have inadequate disability access (door chimes will be used at these polling places).
- 3.11 The current pattern of polling district boundaries within wards and the location of polling places was last comprehensively reviewed during 2000 and 2001 and again in 2007. This new pattern first came into effect at the City Council elections in May 2002.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 The principles underlying the City Council’s approach to polling districts and polling places in the 2000, 2001 and 2007 reviews 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.

- 3.14 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.
- 3.15 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 been declining as building owners have gradually been improving access or alternative places are used instead.
- 3.16 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- often at considerable inconvenience, particularly to parents of school children- so that local electors have a convenient place where they can go and vote.
- 3.17 This paper sets out a set of proposals for polling districts and polling places for the whole area of the City of Westminster.
- 3.18 Consultation proposals were issued in August and comments on the current pattern were invited. All suggestions made are addressed in this report, although others may arise after publication of this report.

4. Possible Changes

- 4.1 At the start of this review and the consultation, there were proposals to look into the creation of an additional polling district/place in the north part of Hyde Park ward as further residential developments have been completed post the previous 2007 review. Similarly the possibility of the creation of an additional polling district and polling place within the south-east part of Maida Vale ward was looked into. In terms of changes of polling place from those polling places used at the 2011 referendum it was proposed that concerted efforts be made to find an alternative polling place to BDC polling place (St Paul's Church) and WED polling place (All Soul's School). None of the proposals were firm proposals.
- 4.2 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. Work has been ongoing since the last review with information being collected at every set of elections since then. A brief rationale explaining the current and proposed provision in each ward (listed alphabetically) is set out below:

1. Abbey Road Ward

- 4.3 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 a historic pattern and so most long-standing electors in the ward are voting where they have voted for many years.

- 4.4 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. One comment received was that doing this " would appear to break-up (in terms of which polling places to use), as many natural communities as it would re-unite and as the current situation has existed for some time, it is hard to see a strong case for change". 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. Although there may be a case for a move to an ARB polling place which is located more to the north it is recommended that St John's Wood Synagogue be retained as the ARB polling place (some of the more northerly located buildings identified all had dis-benefits attached to their use and there is an issue with residents in the southern part of the ward, in the ordinary course of their business, generally travelling in a southerly and not in a northerly direction).
- 4.5 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. At the present time there are no planned changes to the library as part of the review of library services,

2. Bayswater

- 4.6 The polling place for the BWA polling district is a well-known local landmark (Small Hall, Porchester Centre) and is geographically central. The polling place used by voters in the BWB polling district at the 2011 referendum (Bayswater Families Centre) was first used at the combined General Election and City Council Elections on 6 May 2010 (The College Park Special School was used for elections prior to this before its demolition). It is proposed that Bayswater Families Centre be designated as the polling place for BWB polling district. The polling place for BWC polling district (St Stephen's School, Westbourne Park Road) has good disabled access and is also a well-known local site. Comment was received that the polling district layout was poor in that there is a concentration of polling places within a relatively small (as compared to other wards) geographical spread. It is recommended that the status quo be retained at this review but that officers continue to monitor this issue with a view to ensuring that voters do not encounter any difficulties in voting.

3. Bryanston & Dorset Square

- 4.7 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). Although this BDC polling place is exceptionally well appointed, representation was made that the location of the polling place was well away from the main

concentration of residents and that elderly residents of Dorset Square and Glentworth Street had to take the bus to get to the polling station. (written evidence formed from a case study and recently submitted by Dr Orford and Professors Rallings and Thrasher to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee of the House of Commons confirms the anecdotal evidence that distance to travel to vote affects turnout especially in the case of lower salience elections such as those to the European Parliament and local council elections). St Cyprian's Church in Glentworth Street was suggested as a more conveniently located venue. Officers visited St Cyprian's during the review and found that St Cyprian's met all the necessary criteria, including that of disabled access. It is proposed that St Cyprian's Church in Glentworth Street be designated as the polling place for BDC polling district.

4. Church Street

- 4.8 The CSA (Gateway Primary School) polling place is well-established. It is however on the edge of the polling district. It is recommended that Gateway Primary School be retained as the polling place at this review, because it is so well established but that officers continue to monitor whether another polling place can serve voters better, while ensuring that minimal confusion is created amongst voters (See note below on Derry Hall). The CSB polling place at the referendum was moved from Christ Church Bentinck School to Church Street Library. Church Street Library is located on the boundary of CSA and CSB and it was suggested that it can serve both CSA and CSB polling districts. The proposal is that CSA and CSB polling districts have separate polling places in order to minimise confusion for voters- CSA (Gateway Primary School) and CSB (Church Street Library). During the course of this review officers confirmed that the area available within Church Street Library was cramped and could not easily accommodate two polling stations/ issuing tables. Other parts of the library, beyond the main reception area were either not accessible or were cluttered with shelving. Officers visited a number of possible alternative polling places but were not able to find one that met all the essential criteria, including the provision of disability access. Church Street library has perfect disabled access. It is therefore proposed that Church Street library be designated as the polling place for CSB polling district but that officers continue to look for another better location. King Solomon Academy in Penfold Street was considered by officers as a possible alternative polling place for CSB polling district, but it was agreed, after discussion with staff at the Academy, that closing the school or any part of the school on polling day would have a number of obvious dis-benefits and there was also an issue in terms of the level of disability access which could be offered. Derry Hall in Penfold Street was also considered as a possible CSB polling place. This hall, although small, has good disabled access- but is located just outside the polling district (within CSA) and is not therefore deemed suitable. Church Street Childrens Centre in Whitehaven Street was looked at as a possible CSB location but was not deemed suitable. In terms of CSC polling district, Greenside Community Centre is a relatively new polling place and well located within the polling district and it is proposed that this polling place be retained as the polling place for this district.

5. Churchill

- 4.9 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.
- 4.10 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

- 4.11 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). Although ideally we would wish not to use schools as polling places it was considered that St Peter's Primary School is so well established and has such good facilities that any case for a move away from using it as the polling place for HRC polling place would need to be a very strong one. It was suggested that Ernest Harris House Community Hall in Elgin Avenue could be used as the polling place for HRC polling district. But officers were advised by the House office that a space could not be made available and that because sheltered accommodation was provided this presented a number of issues for staff who would be tasked with an additional elections role. St Peter's Church on the corner of Elgin Avenue and Chippenham Road was also suggested as a possible alternative polling place for HRC polling place. Officers noted that there are 5 steps leading to the church's main entrance and that there is a narrow path with a bend in it by the side of the church leading to the entrance of the church which may prove difficult for unassisted wheelchair users to navigate around.

7. Hyde Park

- 4.12 The ward currently has two polling districts with long-established polling places – HPA (St James'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 it may be deemed that 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

- 4.13 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 Church Hall). The Church Hall is on the very edge of the polling district so not ideally geographically located. But it is a well known building within the locale and the

fact that it is so well known does outweigh any dis-benefits attached to its geographical location.

9. Lancaster Gate

- 4.14 The ward has three polling districts with two of the three, LGA and LGB having long-standing polling places – LGA (St Mathew's Church Hall), LGB (St James & St Michael's School). LGC (Pickering Hall, Hallfield Estate) replaced Hallfield Infants School at the 2011 referendum.. The first two polling places have inadequate disability access, but are currently the best locations that have been identified. Although Pickering Hall is a little cramped it is proposed that it continue to be the polling place for LGC polling district. Its location just opposite the school is a good one.

10. Little Venice

- 4.15 The ward and polling district boundaries were unchanged in 2002, so electors benefit from a long-established pattern of no change. The polling districts and polling places are LVA (Sharp Suite, St Joseph's School), LVB (St Saviour's School) and LVC (St Mary's Church Hall). Although St Mary's Church Hall is located at the most southerly part of the LVC polling district it is a well known local landmark. All three polling places have disability access. It is proposed that all three places continue to be used.

11. Maida Vale

- 4.16 The ward and polling district boundaries were similarly unchanged in 2002. The polling districts and polling places are MVA (Maida Centre) and MVB (Essendine Primary School). It has been suggested in the course of previous reviews that the ward may benefit from a third polling district and polling place in the south-east part of the ward if a suitable location could be identified. Comments and suggestions were invited within the consultation. No adequate facility has yet been identified, but officers will continue to explore any possible options that arise.
- 4.17 The creation of a third polling district would, in all likelihood, require the MVA polling district to be sub-divided. This sub-division is not really justified on the basis of the number of electors within this polling district alone. One of the comments received was that the MVB polling place could be more centrally located within the polling district.

12. Marylebone High Street

- 4.18 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. Although there is disabled access, this cannot be described as perfect disabled access. Stairs are needed to access areas of the building and there is no lift. The space used for polling is also on the smallish side of that which we require. We have tried to accommodate the poll by utilising a space which is all on one level, but unfortunately there is no way of expanding the polling place area into another

room. MHB's polling place (Central Synagogue in Hallam Street) has steps and so has no disability access. Officers sought to find an alternative polling place to the Central Synagogue and visited the All Souls Clubhouse, with its main entrance at 141 Cleveland Street, in order to establish whether this building could deliver a better voter experience. Officers found that All Souls offered two entrances with disabled access. The 141 Cleveland Street entrance and another entrance in Greenwell Street (although the latter entrance is accessed through using a ramp). The major stumbling block however to using All Souls as a polling place is that it is on the very edge of the polling district and away from the main concentration of voters. London Borough of Camden properties are just across the road. Re-designating All Souls as the polling place for MHB, especially in advance of a major election, may have more dis-benefits to voters than benefits. It is therefore proposed that the Central Synagogue in Hallam Street be retained as the polling place for MHB and that officers continue to search for a more suitable polling place within this polling district. MHC (The Hellenic Centre) replaced St Marylebone School as the polling place for this polling district at the combined elections on 6 May 2010. It was suggested that the Hellenic Centre also be used as the polling place for MHA on cost grounds as it is big enough. It is however proposed that separate polling places be retained for MHA and MHC so as to minimise disruption and confusion for voters. As part of this review, and because of differing opinions expressed, officers contacted staff at the Hellenic Centre to confirm the status of its disability access provision. Staff at the Hellenic Centre confirmed that there is good disabled access. There are five steps on entering the building for which the Centre offers a stair climber. In addition there is a fully functioning lift and disabled toilets.

13. Queen's Park

- 4.19 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). A suggestion has been made that QPD could go to/ merge into QPB if numbers of polling places are to be reduced. This is not recommended as a change of this type would prompt redrawing of all polling district boundaries within this ward and could in all probability cause ward boundary issues.

14. Regent's Park

- 4.20 No change is contemplated for this ward's three polling districts in terms of the polling places used at the 2011 referendum- RPA (Village Club, Allitsen Road), RPB (Rudolf Steiner House) and RPC (Liberal Jewish Synagogue).Although Rudolf Steiner House is on the edge of the polling district it is geographically well located for the bulk of electors within the district. The space traditionally used as a polling place at Rudolf Steiner House is not ideal and as part of this review officers sought to identify whether an area on the ground floor of Rudolf Steiner House could be used in future. At previous elections voters have had to use a rather old-fashioned lift to access the polling place area on the 2nd floor (an additional poll clerk has had

to be appointed to ensure that the lift is used correctly and a door-chime affixed to the wall on the ground floor so that disabled voters can alert polling station staff that they have arrived to vote). Following a visit to Rudolf Steiner House officers have been able to secure a foyer area on the ground floor, situated to the left of the main entrance on Park Road, as a polling place area. This new area will offer voters a much improved voting facility.

15. St James's

- 4.21 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 (Methodist Central Hall) are on the margin of their polling districts, but nevertheless are close to the main concentration of electors in both districts. It is possible that Charing Cross library will be relocated to a different site (to be identified) in the next few years, but certainly not before 2013. Due to the possibility of relocation and because of the library's lack of disabled access (steps leading to the main entrance and no lift or alternative access available) officers sought to find an alternative polling place for SJB polling district. Officers visited St Martin's Crypt (St Martin- in -the- Fields), Trafalgar Square and were offered the use of St Martin's Hall on one of the lower floors as a polling place area. Access to St Martin's Hall is made either via a spiral staircase and then walking past an exhibition area, the main reception desk and the entrance to the restaurant or by using two separate lifts, the first to the ground floor and then the second onto the lower floor. A significant drawback in seeking to use St Martin's Hall as a polling place is that voters would need to walk a relatively long distance, as compared to other polling places, from initial entry into the building to the polling place area. It was unclear where tellers would sit and signage would have been an issue. It was made clear that hire was just of St Martin's Hall , and that it would be business as usual in other areas of the Crypt- this would have presented security and other issues for the proper management of the poll. It is therefore proposed that Charing Cross Library be designated at this review as the polling place for SJB polling district and that if, in future, Charing Cross library can no longer be used as a polling place that the Crypt be seriously considered as an alternative polling place.

16. Tachbrook

- 4.22 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. It was suggested that St James the Less Church Hall in Thorndike Street may be easier to locate for TBC voters, but officers visited St James the Less Church Hall and found that it did not offer as good a set of amenities as does the Lillington Gardens Estate Hall. Voters in TBC are also now used to the location of their

established polling place. Other than this TBC issue, this ward is well served by its polling places.

17. Vincent Square

- 4.23 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

- 4.24 The polling place for WAB (Dryburgh Hall) is well located. The other two polling places for WAA (Holy Apostles Church Hall) and WAC (Victoria Library) are on the edge of their polling districts but are the best available locations identified to date within the districts. At the present time there are no planned changes to the library as part of the review of library services. No changes are proposed to the polling districts and polling places within this ward

19. West End

- 4.25 This ward is geographically large and so is well served with four polling places. WEA (St Anne's Church Hall) and WEC (Grosvenor Chapel Meeting Room, South Audley Street) have adequate disabled access. The other two polling places, WEB (Dance Works, Balderton Street) and WED (All Souls School) have inadequate disability access and so this ward was the top priority in requiring improved disability access provision. In addition there are obvious issues attached to All Souls School having to close on polling day. A suggestion was made that Fitzrovia Community Centre in Foley Street replace All Souls School as the polling place for WED polling district. Officers visited the Fitzrovia Community Centre as part of this review and found that it met all the essential criteria, including providing good disability access. There is also the obvious benefit of the Centre being sited just over the road from All Souls School. It is therefore proposed that Fitzrovia Community Centre be designated as the polling place for WED polling district. As part of this review, and because of different opinions expressed as to the adequacy of disabled access provision at WEC (Grosvenor Chapel Meeting Room), officers were able to confirm that this place offered good disabled access. A portable ramp is situated at the front of the Chapel and access is via the main doors and through the Chapel itself. In terms of the WEB polling place (Dance Works, Balderton Street) officers made a number of visits to buildings in the locale which, it was hoped, may have offered up a suitable alternative. Amongst the visits made, all to no avail, were the following; West London College on North Row (no available halls/ rooms with suitable disabled access), The Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral on Duke Street (no disabled access), Mayfair Library (no disabled access), RC Church of Immaculate Conception on Farm Street (no disabled access).

20. Westbourne

- 4.26 The three polling places, WBA (Warwick Community Centre), WBB (St Mary of the Angels School) and WBC (The Stowe Centre) are well established and have good disabled access and good facilities for staff. The Stowe Centre was briefly replaced at a previous election, while undergoing refurbishment, by Edward Wilson School.
- 4.27 Suggestions were made at the review in 2007 that the Westbourne Ward is of a size and shape which does not lend itself to having three polling districts and that it should have four polling districts. This has raised attendant issues as to where the existing three polling places should best be placed within the ward. It is proposed that a fourth polling district should not be created as the solution appears to lie in changing ward boundaries at the next review of ward boundaries.
- 4.28 Although this review is not able to effect any changes to ward boundaries, comment received in the context of this review included one that Westbourne's ward boundary is the most illogical in the City of Westminster and that any problems pertaining to polling places stemmed from this underlying issue. Within the existing ward boundaries it was suggested that the southern border of WBA could be moved back to the canal and that this would consequently make WBA and WBC polling districts more "average" in size.
- 4.29 A Ward Councillor (Councillor Boothroyd) has submitted a scheme for three revised polling districts. Councillor Boothroyd's scheme includes the following suggestions; that a revised WBA polling district should be bounded by Grand Union Canal on its southern edge, then following the ward boundary over the Formosa Street footbridge and up Shirland Road, down Marylands Road and then down Harrow Road to join up with the canal at the Harrow Road bridge. It was suggested that the best polling place for a revised WBA polling district would be the Amberley Club Room (an alternative polling place suggested was the Westminster Adult Education Services Centre in Amberley Street). Councillor Boothroyd suggests that the current boundary of WBB polling district be retained but that the currently designated polling place, St Mary of the Angels School be replaced by the Bayswater Families Centre, in accordance with the policy to move away from schools wherever possible. In respect of the WBC polling district Councillor Boothroyd suggests that the new polling district boundary will run from the ward boundary in the centre of Formosa Street footbridge, west along the Grand Union Canal to Harrow Road, north- west and west along the Harrow Road to Great Western Road, then south along Great Western Road to the existing polling district boundary and that the currently designated polling place, the Stowe Centre should be replaced as a polling place by the existing polling place for WBA, the Warwick Community Centre.

- 4.30 A Ward Councillor (Councillor Hug) has submitted alternative options or a set of secondary proposals to those made by Councillor Boothroyd. Councillor Hug's proposals include using the Grand Union canal as the boundary between WBA and WBC, taking the existing elements of the Warwick and Brindley Estates from WBA into WBC. This alternative would require finding an alternative polling place for WBA – options offered being the Amberley Club Room , the Westminster Adult Services Centre in Amberley Street or the One Stop Building on Harrow Road. Councillor Hug has also suggested a further option of having 4 polling districts instead of 3. In this further option, only WBB polling district would remain the same and divisions of the current WBA and WBC polling districts would take place. Our Lady of the Lourdes and St Vincent de Paul Church or the Paddington Arts Club were suggested as a polling place for one new polling district, the Amberley Club Room or the Westminster Adult Services Centre in Amberley Street for another polling district and no suggestion for polling place was made in respect of the fourth polling district.
- 4.31 Officers have considered all the polling district boundary options for change made by the councillors for Westbourne Ward and visited all the possible suggested polling places to assess their suitability. The officers' reasons for not supporting any move to revise the existing polling district boundaries or to change polling place locations are as follows:
- 4.32 (a) Any solution appears to lie in changing ward boundaries, not polling districts. A desktop exercise was carried out by officers which involved mapping Councillor Boothroyd's three polling district scheme across the Westbourne ward. This exercise found that 2,217 electors would find themselves in a different polling district. This is a significant churn. WBA polling district, which at the date of this report has 4113 electors, would be reduced to 1799 voters. WBC polling district, which at the date of this report has 1585 voters, would increase to 3802 voters. Any differences between the size of the respective polling district electorates would not therefore be narrowed and WBC polling district would merely reflect the relatively high electorate total that WBA polling district currently shows.
- (b) Changes to polling district boundaries, irrespective of the options offered, will cause confusion amongst voters. Voters are used to the current boundaries and know which polling district they are in and where they should go and vote.
- (c) The Polling place review evaluation checklists and the logbooks completed by Presiding Officers who worked at the 3 currently designated polling places within Westbourne Ward at the Referendum on 5 May 2011 were inspected by officers. The polling place review evaluation sheets were based on a template developed by the Electoral Commission and showed that all 3 polling places met a rigorous set of necessary minimum standards. In terms of the logbooks completed by Presiding Officers there was no indication that voters had complained about the polling places used. The only points to note from logbooks completed at the Referendum, and which are relevant in respect of this review, are as follows; WBA Polling Place- Street lighting was rather weak

in the area leading into the polling place. WBB Polling Place- one voter had advised that he/she had difficulty in finding the polling place WBC Polling Place- 2 voters advised that they had difficulty in finding the polling place and one voter had found access to the polling place difficult.

(d) 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. This was confirmed by the estate and facilities manager. In addition officers were advised that if the building was used as a polling place this would be a major inconvenience as the Centre ran classes throughout the day and in the evening.

(e) The Amberley Club Room, 10 Clearwell Drive, although newly refurbished is located off a main road and difficult to find for anyone not living in the immediate vicinity, particularly at night. Officers raised concerns that because the Club Room is situated in the middle of an estate, there would need to be very good signage from several directions to avoid any confusion. It was also noted that one path leading to the Club Room is via an alley and that this route does not appear to have adequate street lighting.

(f) The Harrow Road One Stop has not previously been considered as a possible polling place as it is not large enough to accommodate a polling place without closing completely as a One Stop to the general public for the day. This would have caused considerable inconvenience to a significant number of local residents. From 16 December 2011 the building will no longer be used as a One Stop or estate office and as the building's future use and layout is unclear it should not at this stage be considered as a possible polling place.

(g) Paddington Arts, 32 Woodfield Road, has adequate space, but is not on a main road and so is not easy to locate. Officers raised concerns as to the facilities offered. There is a main hall on the ground floor but officers were advised that classes are scheduled from Monday to Thursday and that the hall would not be made available as a polling place due to the disruption caused. There is another hall on the ground floor, the Green Room, but this was deemed to be too small. There is a dance studio on the 1st floor, which officers were advised could not be made available due to the classes scheduled. It was noted that the lift to the dance studio and to the top /second floor was out of order at the time of the visit. There was another much smaller room, the Pyramid Room, on the top/second floor which was only accessible via a staircase or the out of order lift.

(h) Our Lady of Lourdes and St Vincent de Paul Church Hall (on Woodfield Place).

Officers were advised that the person in charge is away for a number of weeks. The availability of the hall could not therefore be confirmed at that stage.

(i) Bayswater Childrens Centre (entrance on the corner of Westbourne Park Road)

Is the same as Bayswater Families Centre, which is currently used as the polling place for BWB polling district and would create confusion if it were also to be used as a polling place for WBB polling district.

(j) 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. 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.

5. Improving Disability Provision

- 5.1 Priority has been given in this review to identifying locations which provide improved disability access over the previous provision and to move out of schools where practicable.
- 5.2 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.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The City Council is currently required to conduct a review of its polling districts and polling places every four years. The previous review was held in 2007.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 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.

8. Ward Councillor Consultation

- 8.1 Ward councillors have been informed of these proposals and been invited to comment. Ward councillors have been kept informed throughout the review of the outcome of visits made to existing or suggested polling places within their wards.

Background Papers:

1. Polling District Review Proposals, 5 August 2011
2. Appendix A, polling places as at the referendum on the voting system for United Kingdom parliamentary elections on 5 May 2011, which was the starting point for this review.
3. Appendix B, listing by ward of the current polling places, any re-designations made at this review, the electorates per polling district and whether there is disabled access.

Background Information

**If you have any queries about this report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers, please contact
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