



City of Westminster

POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACE REVIEW

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This paper sets out the current pattern of polling districts and polling places within the City of Westminster and outlines some 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.
- 1.4 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 where it is feasible to do so and that it would then divide the ward into polling districts for mapping purposes should whole wards not provide a total constituency electorate that is within 5% of the 'UK electoral quota' of 76,641 electors.
- 1.5 The two parliamentary constituencies covering the City of Westminster are currently 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 A map showing the existing ward boundaries is available on the City Council's website: www.westminster.gov.uk. This map shows the polling district boundaries and polling places used at the referendum on the voting system for United Kingdom parliamentary elections on 5 May 2011, which is 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 an Appendix is an alphabetical listing by ward of the current polling places and their electorates. This appendix is also available on the City Council's website: www.westminster.gov.uk. 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 polling place/ 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 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.
- 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 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.

- 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 sought to improve 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.
- 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 – often at considerable inconvenience including to parents of school children – so that local electors have a convenient place where they can go and vote.
- 1.16 Although this paper sets out a comprehensive set of proposals for polling districts and polling places for the whole area of the City of Westminster, it is hoped the consultation will prompt other suggestions.

2. POSSIBLE CHANGES

- 2.1 At the start of this review and the consultation, there is a proposal 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 also needs to be looked into. In terms of changes of polling place from those polling places used at the 2011 referendum it is 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). The aim of this review will be to identify where better provision can be made and new polling places can be booked in good time to be used at the London Mayor and GLA Elections on 3 May 2012. At the 2007 review there were no

proposals made to change polling district boundaries. In the 2007 review, nine permanent and one temporary re-designation of polling place were proposed. Five of the re-designation proposals made were in respect of moving out of schools. It is proposed in this review that any changes be kept to a minimum. Over the 10 years that the current map of electoral wards has been in place voters have become used to the current and well-established network of polling places and polling districts. The overarching objective is therefore, wherever possible, to minimise confusion and disruption for voters in terms of their polling place provision, while ensuring, as far as practicable, that any new polling places are accessible to people with disabilities.

- 2.2 A brief rationale explaining the current 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. Comments are invited on this proposal and any suggestions of a possible alternative polling place in the north of the ward would be welcome.
- 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. At the present time there are no planned changes to the library as part of the review of library services.

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 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 before this before its demolition). It is proposed that Bayswater Families Centre continue to be used and that it be designated as the polling place for BWB polling district.

3. Bryanston & Dorset Square

- 2.7 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). 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. However representation was made post the 2011 referendum that the location of the BDC 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. St Cyprian's Church in Glentworth Street has been suggested as a more conveniently located venue. The electoral services team will visit St Cyprian's as part of this review and alternative suggestions are welcomed.

4. Church Street

- 2.8 The CSA (Gateway Primary School) is a well -established polling place. 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 has been suggested that it can serve both CSA and CSB polling districts. The proposal is that (CSA) Gateway Primary School and CSB (Church Street Library) be retained as polling places for each of the two districts in order to minimise confusion for voters. The area within Church Street Library which can readily be used as a polling place is not large enough to house two polling stations and certainly not two polling districts. At the present time there are no planned changes to the library as part of the review of library services. The Greenside Community Centre is a relatively new polling place and well located within the CSC polling district.

5. Churchill

- 2.9 The ward is geographically bisected by the main railway line into Victoria Station, which also forms the polling district boundary.
- 2.10 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

- 2.11 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).

7. Hyde Park

- 2.12 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 are being built in the northern part of the ward within the Paddington redevelopment and the electorate increases there will be a justification for a third polling district and a new polling place north of Praed Street. Comments and suggestions of possible polling places are invited.

8. Knightsbridge & Belgravia

- 2.13 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 is a well-known building. St Peter's School in Ebury Street was used at elections before this year's referendum.

9. Lancaster Gate

- 2.14 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. It is proposed that Pickering Hall continue to be the polling place for LGC polling district

10. Little Venice

- 2.15 The ward and polling district boundaries were unchanged in 2002, so electors benefit from a long-established pattern of no change. The polling districts are LVA (St Joseph's School), LVB (St Saviour's School) and LVC (St Mary's Church Hall). All three polling places have disability access.

11. Maida Vale

- 2.16 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 in the south-east part of the ward below Elgin Avenue.

12. Marylebone High Street

- 2.17 The polling places within the ward are not ideal. MHA (St Vincent's School) is on the edge and not central to the polling district. MHB's polling place (Central Synagogue) has steps and so has no disability access. 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 has been suggested that the Hellenic Centre also be used as the polling place for MHA on cost grounds as it is big enough. It is though proposed that separate polling places be retained for MHA and MHC so as to minimise disruption and confusion for voters.

13. Queen's Park

- 2.18 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.

14. Regent's Park

- 2.19 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) or 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 used as a polling place at Rudolf Steiner House is not ideal and as part of this review electoral services staff will seek to identify whether an area on the ground floor of Rudolf Steiner can be used in future. (NB The Royal College of Gynaecologists has been used as an RPB polling place at an election before 2010).

15. St James's

- 2.20 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.

16. Tachbrook

- 2.21 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

- 2.22 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).

18. Warwick

- 2.23 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 within the districts. At the present time there are no planned changes to the library as part of the review of library services.

19. West End

- 2.24 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 is the top priority in requiring improved disability access provision. In addition there are obvious issues involved in All Souls School having to close on polling day. A suggestion has been made that Fitzrovia Community Centre in Foley Street be designated as the polling place for WED polling district. Electoral services staff will visit the Fitzrovia Community Centre as part of this review and suggestions are welcomed as to alternative polling places which may be used.

20. Westbourne

- 2.25 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 briefly replaced at a previous election, while undergoing refurbishment, by Edward Wilson School. Suggestions have been made 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.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 This review attempts to outline some of the key issues in the current pattern

of polling districts and polling places.

- 3.2 Priority is being given to identify ways in which disability access can be improved; particularly where at present there are physical barriers that prevent level access into the polling place.
- 3.3 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 bells/ door chimes 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.
- 3.4 Any proposals for changing polling district boundaries or polling places will be considered by the City Council's General Purposes Committee on 18 October, 2011 and a copy of that report will be available on the City Council's website – www.westminster.gov.uk

4. SUBMISSION OF COMMENTS

Comments are invited as part of this review and should be submitted by no later than Friday 30 September, 2011 to:

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