



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

MINUTES

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE – TUESDAY 18 OCTOBER 2011

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **General Purposes Committee** held at 6.30pm on Tuesday 18 October 2011 at Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP

Members Present: Councillors Melvyn Caplan (Chairman), Ian Adams, David Boothroyd, Robert Davis, Tony Devenish and Alastair Moss

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Tim Mitchell

1. MEMBERSHIP

- 1.1 There were no changes.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 2.1 Councillor David Boothroyd declared a personal interest in Item 4 in that he had made representations regarding the Polling Districts in Westbourne Ward.

3. MINUTES

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2011 be approved for signature by the Chairman as a true and correct record of the proceedings subject to the correction of the spelling of Bob Neill's surname.

4. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES (see report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services)

- 4.1 Martin Pyroyiannos introduced the report. He outlined the work undertaken as part of the review but also the continuous work undertaken to ensure polling places remained suitable and in particular accessible, particularly for voters with disabilities. He explained that data had been collected over a number of years as part of the process of achieving ongoing improvements. At the referendum for example photos had been taken of the internal layout of all polling places and Presiding Officers had been tasked with completing polling place review templates and logbooks of issues identified by voters. He advised that over the years attempts had been made to move away from the use of schools particularly where this had led to the school having to close in accordance with the view taken at the last review in 2007.

- 4.2 Councillor David Boothroyd explained the rationale behind his proposed change as set out in the report. He saw no reason to reject his proposals which would also resolve the potential for long queues developing particularly in the evening.
- 4.3 Councillor Robert Davis asked officers to investigate the possibility of moving from Pickering Hall to the site used previously, the Hallfield school hall for polling district LGC.
- 4.4 Councillor Ian Adams asked for a reassurance of the arrangements made for disabled access at those 6 polling stations which did not have disabled access and also how voters impacted by the change were notified of a change of polling station.
- 4.5 The Committee asked for details of the use of polling stations by voters in need of assistance. Martin Pyroyiannos advised that he would obtain this information from the log books completed by Presiding Officers and circulate it to Members.
- 4.6 Martin Pyroyiannos responded to the matters raised.. In respect of Westbourne ward he explained that the issues raised had been considered as part of the 2007 review. He sympathised with the issues raised but felt that these could only be addressed when a review of the ward boundaries was next undertaken. He added that the issue had been discussed on previous occasions and at this review with the Westminster North constituency Labour Party who had indicated that they understood that the issues discussed arose out of the shape of the ward, He confirmed his advice as set out in the report- that Councillor David Boothroyd's proposals would cause confusion and disruption to voters, would result in polling places having to be used which are not as suitable as those currently used, and would transfer the issue of having higher numbers of voters in one polling district to another polling district .
- 4.7 In respect of the compliance of Disability Discrimination Act he advised that polling station staff were given very detailed advice on how to deal with voters with disabilities. Polling stations were provided with ramps to make them accessible where possible. He reminded the committee of the door chimes system used when no access was available. He also explained the facility for all voters to apply for a postal vote. There were now approximately 16,000 voters registered for a postal vote. He undertook to circulate details of the schools used and details of the disabled use. He added that all voters impacted by a change in polling station were written to with details of the new venue and if possible a sign located on the previous venue giving details of the new venue in addition to the poll card. He further undertook to investigate the possibility of reverting to Hallfield School for polling district LGC.

Resolved:

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):

- (a) 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)
 - (b) 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. 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).
- 3. That consideration of the polling district boundaries within Westbourne ward be deferred for further review by officers and submission of a further report at a meeting of the General Purposes Urgency Sub-Committee to include the siting of the Polling Station for polling district LGC.
- 4. 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 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.
- 5. 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.

5. REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES BY THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND (see report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services)

- 5.1 Martin Pyroyiannos introduced the report. He outlined the detailed consultation exercise being undertaken, the first stage of which concluded on 5 December 2011.
- 5.2 Members indicated a strong preference to maintain the constituency link with the city and to also retain two MPs for Westminster and the wish to make representations which as far as possible maintained the existing position.

Resolved: That officers report back in detail to a meeting of the General Purposes Urgency Sub-Committee with proposed representations based on the principles set out above.

6. PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2012/13 (see report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services)

- 6.1 Mick Steward introduced the report. He drew particular attention to the proposed change in dates for the weekly planning applications meetings from Thursdays to Tuesdays and reported the views of the Minority Party Chief Whip.
- 6.2 Councillor Robert Davis explained the rationale for proposing the change was in particular to allow Members to prepare for the meeting over the previous weekend. He confirmed that he had spoken to Councillor McKie to explain the reasons for suggesting the change.
- 6.3 Councillor David Boothroyd said that there had been no consultation with the Members involved and asked that a decision be deferred to allow for further discussion with the relevant Members.

6.4 Resolved:

- (i) That the Council be recommended to approve the programme for Council Meetings for the 2012/13 Municipal Year, as follows:

16 May 2012 (Annual); 11 July 2012; 14 November 2012; 23 January 2013; 6 March 2013 (Council Tax); 1 May 2013; 15 May 2013 (Annual)

- (ii) That the Programme of Meetings in respect of Committees/Sub-Committees set out in Appendix A be approved.

- (iii) That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised in consultation with the relevant Committee Chairmen and Whips to amend the programme of Committee/Sub-Committee meetings.

Councillor David Boothroyd asked that his formal dissent be recorded.

7. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 6.51pm

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____