

Committee General Purposes	Date 15 February 06	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No.
Report of: Chief Executive Originating Officer(s) : Interim Head of Electoral Services		Title : Review of Polling Places Ward(s) Shadwell, Bow East and Whitechapel		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks the approval of the Members to the designation of a new polling place in Shadwell Ward (SH4) and some modifications to polling places in Bow East (E1) and Whitechapel (WH3)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to endorse the proposals to provide polling facilities at St. Katharine's Foundation as an alternative location to the Olgilvie Community Club and minor changes to two other polling places prior to the recommendation to Council for formal approval (para. 4 & 5).
- 2.2 The Committee is also asked to approve that a complete review of the Ward polling district boundaries be undertaken over the course of the next year, prior to the 2008 Mayor and Assembly elections, to ensure adequate and suitable voting facilities have been identified to deal with the increasing electorate in certain parts of the borough (para.7).

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Section 18(2) RPA 1983 imposes a duty on Local authorities to divide the borough area into polling districts for the purpose of conducting elections.
- 3.2 The Council must exercise the powers conferred by this section of the Act with a view to giving all electors within their area such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances and, in particular, they shall so far as is reasonable and practicable, designate as polling places only places which are accessible to electors who are disabled.

4. THE POLLING PLACE REVIEW

- 4.1 Initially the comments of all the Presiding Officers have been analysed to identify any polling place problems and any specific complaints that they handled during the course of Election Day in May 2005. In addition, an article in the Members' Bulletin advised that the review was being undertaken in preparation for the May elections in 2006 and invited views from Ward Members.
- 4.2 As a result of the above seven of the 64 polling places used last year have been visited to review complaints. Of the seven mentioned there were only, in fact, three that needed change or modification for the Local Elections due to be held on 4th May. The polling places concerned were:-

Ward	Polling District	Problem
Bow East	BE1	Portacabin was considered to be too small to deal with the numbers of people voting
Shadwell	SH4	Olgilvie Community Club site not satisfactory due to access problems
Whitechapel	WH3	Stepney Library now closed

5. PROPOSALS TO DEAL WITH THE ABOVE PROBLEMS

- 5.1 Bow East Ward (BE1) : It has not been possible to identify an alternative site within the polling district so it is proposed that the hire of a larger, two compartment, portacabin be arranged to ensure satisfactory voting arrangements for those electors registered to vote in the district.
- 5.2 Shadwell Ward (SH4) : Due to difficult access to the Olgilvie Community Club every effort has been made to identify an alternative site within the polling district. A visit has been made to the Royal Foundation of St. Katharines, Butcher Row, London E14 8DS who are prepared to allow a portacabin to be placed on their private access road. The building itself cannot be used as a Conference is being held there on 4th May . The arrangements for polling day would include the use of facilities within St. Katharines premises for the polling station staff and disabled parking space.
- 5.3 Whitechapel Ward (WH3) Stepney Library has now closed following the opening of the Ideas Store and the building is being used as a book store. Following a visit to site it has been established that sufficient space could be made available for polling provided book stacks are moved and the accommodation is properly cleaned. If subsequently the space proved to be insufficient it would be possible to locate a portacabin in the car park as there is more than sufficient space to accommodate this. The facilities would still be available within the library for polling staff to use.

6 ISSUES CONCERNING OTHER POLLING PLACES

- 6.1 Blackwall and Cubitt Town Ward (BCT1) : There was an issue raised concerning the difficulty during the General Election of finding the Local Labour In Construction Centre, 316 Poplar High Street. As this polling place is located in a relatively central position within the polling district and is very suitable in terms of facilities etc. it is suggested that extra signing be placed in Poplar High Street on polling day directing voters to the entrance in Ditchburn Street.
- 6.2 Weavers Ward (WE2) : Some concern was expressed about the location of Virginia Primary School and that some electors had to walk some distance to the polling place. However, it has not been possible to identify an alternative site at this stage and it is proposed that the matter be given further consideration as part of a wider review.

7. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

There is provision in the Electoral Administration Bill that is currently being debated in Parliament for authorities to establish a framework to review polling places regularly to ensure they provide proper access and facilities for people voting in person. It is, therefore recommended that a further review be undertaken after the local elections and this review

should deal with not only the polling places and their suitability for access but also the electoral numbers in each polling district. The electorate numbers in many of the polling districts have increased significantly since the new Wards were established in 2002 resulting in the need to create further districts within the Wards. Redrawing these polling district boundaries and creating further districts would offer the opportunity to designate additional polling places thus overcoming the type of issue raised in para. 6.1 and 6.2 above. Any such exercise is very time consuming as each ward has to be evaluated in terms of :-

- The current electorate figure
- The number and alignment of the current polling district boundaries;
- The impact of regeneration on developing areas;
- The existing natural boundaries e.g. major roads, water-ways etc.
- The potential to identify suitable additional polling places.

As there is unlikely to be a major election until 2008 it is proposed that this review be commenced as soon as possible after the Local Elections to allow sufficient time for consultation with all stakeholders prior to submission to General Purposes and then to full Council for final approval.

8. **CONSULTATION**

This report has been circulated to all Members of the Council on 27th January highlighting the minor issues that were identified during the General Election last year and explaining the need for a more radical review in terms of the polling district boundaries. In view of the limited timescale for consultation, any responses will be reported to Committee verbally.

9. **COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

Any additional costs incurred through the use of portacabins will be financed from the local elections budgets.

10. **CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Legal Services)**

10.1 Section 18 of Representation of the People Act 1983 places a duty on the Council to keep parliamentary polling districts and polling places under review and Section 31 provides a power to determine polling districts for local government elections.

10.2 This report is pursuant to those responsibilities and makes recommendations for the forthcoming Council Elections and for a more comprehensive review prior to the following major elections in 2008. The report demonstrates that the Council is fulfilling its legal obligations appropriately.

11. **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMENTS**

Access issues in relation to temporary buildings are dealt with as part of the portacabin installation ensuring that a temporary ramp is correctly fitted with the appropriate handrails.

12. **ANTI POVERTY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no implications in this report.

13. **SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT**

There are no implications in this report

14. RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk assessments for temporary polling places (portacabins) are carried out as part of installation especially in connection with the fitting of access ramps. In addition, the job activities of the staff involved in the election will be assessed for risk and the training programme covers both risk and health and safety as a core module.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97) LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of "background paper"

Name and telephone
number of and address where
open to inspection

**Pat Parker
020 7364 3778
5th floor, Town Hall,
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent E14 2BG**

