


<p style="text-align: center;">Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">General Purposes Committee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2 December 2024</p>	
<p>Report of: Robert Curtis - Head of Electoral Services</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Polling Places and Polling District Review 2024</p>	

Reasons for urgency

The initial review timetable was postponed because of the GLA polls held on Thursday 2nd May 2024 and the potential for a snap General Election eventually called to be held on Thursday 4th July 2024. The review recommencing on Friday 11th October 2024 for an additional 6 weeks for responses to be received.

This takes the last date for responses to be received to Friday 22nd November 2024 with the compilation of the report completed for circulation to legal and Finance from the week commencing Monday 25th November 2024 for clearance and then by the end of that week to members of the Committee.

It is important that the report is considered on Monday 2nd December 2024 because observations made will be required to be considered at full council on Wednesday 22 January 2025 to comply with the statutory review requirements.

Executive Summary

Following the conclusion of the Greater London Authority (GLA) polls held on Thursday 2 May 2024 and the snap General Election held on Thursday 4 July 2024, the review of polling districts and places used for parliamentary elections recommenced for an additional 6 weeks to ensure that those entitled to respond could do so and to complete the review by the end of January 2025.

The review conclusion does not mean that further enquiries cannot be undertaken after that date.

It is proposed, where considered necessary, if alternative polling places are required that these will be sought, and amendments brought to GPC in 2025 in time for the polls to be held in 2026.

This report details the current review process, responses received and officers' recommendations.

4 responses were initially received in the first phase and 37 have been received in the second phase with one of these withdrawn and these have been merged in the **Appendix B**.

Further review of existing polling districts and places will undoubtedly continue throughout 2025 before the polls scheduled for Thursday 7 May 2026, these subject to the same assessments

Recommendations

General Purpose Committee is recommended to

- note the responses received,
- consider officer recommendations

- amend as considered appropriate with the final report to be presented to Full Council on Wednesday 22 January 2025.

1. **Reasons for decisions**

- 1.1. Given the formal commencement timetable of the GLA polls on Thursday 2 May 2024 and the snap General Election called on Thursday 4 July 2024, it was considered necessary to suspend the initial stage of the review and, subject to the immediacy of these polls, that a small number of necessary changes be implemented and the status quo retained.
- 1.2. Polling places must be reviewed every 5 years with the deadline for this review to be completed no later than 31 January 2025

2. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 General Purpose Committee could recommend to council to
 - reject the proposals and maintain the status quo or
 - determine that changes are implemented
 - agree for further enquiries be made for alternative provision in certain places as detailed in the officer's recommendations

3. **DETAILS OF REPORT**

- 3.1 Polling District and Polling Place reviews are undertaken pursuant to Schedule 1A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) and require all local authorities to review their UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places at least once every five years.
- 3.2 A Polling District is a geographical area created by the sub-division of an electoral area i.e., a UK Parliamentary constituency, a European Parliamentary electoral region, a Ward, or an electoral division.
- 3.3 A Polling Place is a geographical area in which a polling station is located. There is no legal definition of what a Polling Place is; it could be defined as tightly as a particular building or as widely as the entire polling district.
- 3.4 A Polling Station is the actual area where the process of voting takes place and must be located within the Polling Place designated for the Polling District.
- 3.5 When undertaking a review, the following must be considered.
 - (a) The authority must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in its area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
 - (b) the authority must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled.
 - (c) the authority must have regard to the accessibility to disabled persons of potential polling stations in any place which it is considering designating as a polling place.
 - (d) the polling place for a polling district must be an area in the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate any area wholly or partly outside the district.
 - (e) the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station.
- 3.6 The Elections Act 2022 introduced provisions to assist blind, partially sighted and other disabled voters at polling stations. The Act creates a requirement for Returning Officers to

provide each polling station with such equipment as is reasonable to provide for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for, relevant persons to vote independently and in secret and also requires Returning Officers to have regard to the Electoral Commissions guidance on the equipment to provide at polling stations.

The Act also extends the rules on who can act as a companion to include anyone who is over the age of 18.

- 3.7 Detailed guidance on reviews can be found on the Electoral Commissions web site here <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/reviews-polling-districts-polling-places-and-polling-stations>
- 3.8 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places with compulsory reviews having to start and be completed within the period of 16 months starting on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013, so 1 October 2018, 1 October 2023, 1 October 2028 etc.
- 3.9 In accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 the next compulsory review has to be completed within the window of 1 October 2023 to 31 January 2025 (Inclusive).
- 3.10 Although the statutory requirement is to review the polling districts and places used at parliamentary elections, they will be used at Local Government elections and any future referendums.
- 3.11 Interim reviews can be undertaken but these tend to be for, but are not limited to, changes to boundaries, where premises become no longer available or following polls where facilities are not considered suitable for continued use.
- 3.12 Interim reviews tend to take place to identify and agree premises that sit within new boundary areas or replace premises that are no longer available.
- 3.13 There is also no provision in law to undertake a partial review with limited consultation and this review consisted of the following being undertaken initially and then revised when the review recommenced to the second stage.

4. **Stage 1**

- Notice of the Review published
- Terms of Reference published
- Digital maps of each borough ward made available on the council's web site with search and zoom facility
- A3 paper maps produced depicting the borough wards, polling districts and polling places made available for inspection in the Town Hall
- Articles placed in the household circular Our East End posted to every address in the Borough
- The councils web site updated with details of the review
- Social media posts made regularly by the council's communications team
- 80 disability organisations were identified and contacted (75 by email, 5 by letter. 13 emails bounced and were sent hard paper letters via Royal Mail. 14 emails were redirected)
- Local political party agents and representatives were contacted with details of the review and how to respond.
- A specific receipt email box was set up for any responses to be received.

- Details of the review was posted in the member's bulletin
- The Acting Returning Officer Abi Gbago for the new Parliamentary Constituency of Stratford & Bow (Newham) was contacted for comment following the adoption of three Tower Hamlets Borough Wards namely Bow East, Bow West, and Bromley North, into this new Parliamentary Constituency.
- The Acting Returning Officer Stephen Halsey for the Parliamentary Constituencies of Poplar & Limehouse and Bethnal Green & Stepney (Tower Hamlets) was contacted for comment.
- The responses from both Acting Returning Officers have been posted on the Councils web site and acknowledge the requirements placed on them by the Elections Act 2022 and the Electoral Commissions guidance.

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lqnl/council_and_democracy/elections_voting/view_of_polling_districts.aspx

4.1 The initial review began on Monday 2 October 2023 with observations invited for a period of eight weeks from that date until Friday 24 November 2023.

4.2 In the initial stage 4 responses were received with one a legacy request from the polls in May 2022, this withdrawn during the review period.

4.3 **Stage 2**

Following the polls in 2024 the second period was scheduled as follows

Publication of the revised notice and terms of reference (Start of the additional revised period)	Friday 11 October 2024
Additional revised review period	6 weeks
Close of review period	Friday 22 November 2024
Report to General Purposes Committee	Monday 2 December 2024
Report to Full Council	Wednesday 22 January 2025
Publication of Council decision and conclusion of the review	No later than Friday 31 January 2025
Publication of revised electoral register subject to any revised polling districts.	Monday 3 February 2025

- The Notice of the Review revised and published
- The Terms of Reference revised and published
- The digital maps of each borough ward/districts and polling places remained on the council's web site with search and zoom facility
- A3 paper maps remained available for inspection depicting the borough wards, polling districts and polling places in Room TH210 in the Town Hall
- Articles placed in the household circular Our East End posted to every address in the Borough
- The councils web site was updated with details of the extended review period
- Social media posts were made regularly as part of a communication and engagement plan by the council's communications team
- All 80 disability groups were contacted again for comment

- Local political party agents and representatives were again contacted with details of the revised review period and how to respond.
- The specific email receipt inbox remained in situ throughout both stages for any responses to be received.
- Details of the revised review period was posted in the member's bulletin
- The responses from both Acting Returning Officers remain on the web site.
- https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/council_and_democracy/elections_voting/review_of_polling_districts.aspx
- **156,929** emails were sent out to registered electors using data held by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). This was undertaken through the Governments secure NOTIFY portal detailing the revised period of the review and how to respond. (71.38% coverage of the electorate across the Borough)
- 2,616 emails (1.66%) were returned as undelivered
- Approximately 500 responded to unsubscribe from future email distributions.

4.4 Of the 75 polling places used in May 2022, the following were used for the first time or reintroduced for the GLA polls held on Thursday 2 May 2024.

- Unit G.02, Import Building, 2 Clove Crescent, E14 2BE (BC1)
- Portacabin, Lofthouse Square, Wyke Road, E3 2XD (BE2)
- Bow Baptist Church Hall, 1 Payne Road, E3 2SP (BE5)
- St Peters North Community Centre Nursery, 1 Marian Place, E2 9AX (BGW1)
- Epainos Ministries, Lichfield Road, E3 5AT (BW3)
- Brownfield Cabin, 82 St Leonards Road, E14 0QU (LA3)
- St Annes & Guardian Angels Catholic Primary School, Underwood Road (SB2)
- Brick Lane School, Bacon Street, E2 6DY (WE3)

4.5 Following the announcement of the General Election held on Thursday 4 July 2024 the following new polling places were used

- Virginia Quays Community Centre, 27-35 Sexton Court, Newport Avenue, E14 2DU (BC1)
- Studios 6 & 7, 121 Monier Road, E3 2PS (BE2) – Temporary provision
- All other polling places used at the General Election were the same as the GLA held in May

4.6 The details of changes to polling places/stations since 2022 is detailed in **Appendix A**

4.7 A summary of the responses received is detailed in **Appendix B** with officers recommendations and copies of the comments received attached at **Appendix C**

4.8 The personal and individuals details of those who have responded have been redacted in the Appendix but retained by the ERO with the exception of the elected members Cllr Asama Begum and Cllr M Talukdar.

5. **EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

There are none specific to this report.

6. **OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

5.2 There are no implications direct to this report

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 The cost of polling places are expected to be met from existing budgets and external grants.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1 Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires a local authority in Great Britain to undertake a review of polling districts and polling places in its area every five years. Schedule A1 of the same Act sets out how this review is to be done.

7.2 This report demonstrates the Council's compliance with the above requirements.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix A – Polling Districts and Polling Places (2022-2024)
- Appendix B – Summary of responses received with recommendations
- Appendix C – Extracts of responses received

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

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