

Committee General Purposes Committee	Date 17th June 2013	Classification Unrestricted	Report No.	Agenda Item No. 5.3
Report of: Electoral Registration Officer/ Returning Officer Originating Officer(s): John Williams, Service Head, Democratic Services		Title: Ward boundary changes and polling district/polling place review - update Ward(s) affected: All		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides a further progress update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) for changes to the ward boundaries and related arrangements in Tower Hamlets following the recent Local Electoral Review.
- 1.2 The report also proposes arrangements for the review of polling districts and polling places to be undertaken alongside the implementation of the new ward pattern.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee note the information in the report and agree the proposed process and timetable for the review of polling districts and polling places as set out at section 6 of this report.
- 2.2 That members be invited to submit any initial comments on proposed new polling districts and polling places to the Electoral Services Manager by 12th July 2013.

3. BACKGROUND – LOCAL ELECTORAL REVIEW

- 3.1 The Committee has previously been informed of the recommendations made by the LGBCE for changes to council size and ward arrangements in Tower Hamlets, arising from the recent Local Electoral Review. The review was undertaken because over time the representation of electors in our current wards had become unequal due to population changes, housing development etc. The aim of a Local Electoral Review is to establish the most suitable number of councillors for the authority; and within this to propose the number and boundaries of wards to:-

- Deliver electoral equality for voters.

- Reflect local community interests and identities; and
- Promote effective and convenient local government.

3.2 The Tower Hamlets review commenced on 29th November 2011 when representatives of the LGBCE addressed the Mayor and Councillors prior to the full Council meeting. Following the review process, which included a series of public consultations on various aspects of the electoral arrangements, the LGBCE issued its final recommendations on 25th March 2013

3.3 As reported to the Committee on 27th March, the Commission's final recommendations incorporated a small number of changes to the draft recommendations based on the evidence received during consultation. The Commission's final proposals can be summarised as follows:-

Council Size: The Commission confirmed the proposed reduction from 51 to 45 councillors

Ward Boundaries: The Commission confirmed its draft proposal for an increase in the number of wards from 17 to 20. There will be:

- 2 single-member wards;
- 11 two-member wards; and
- 7 three-member wards

The final recommendations included just three minor changes from the ward boundaries previously proposed by the Commission in November 2012:-

- The boundary between the proposed Millwall (now Island Gardens) and Blackwall & Cubitt Town wards will run along Pier Street instead of Seyssel Street;
- The western boundary of the proposed Limehouse ward will now run along the western edge of Keeper Wharf; and
- Victoria Park will remain split between Bow East and Bow West wards rather than all included in Bow East as previously proposed.

Ward Names: The Commission made a number of changes to its draft recommendations. In response to the consultation, the LGBCE changed the names of seven of the proposed wards as below, including the restoration of current names including Banglatown, St Dunstan's and Lansbury. The seven previously proposed names changed are:-

- Stepney East to St Dunstan's
- Stepney West to Stepney Green
- Poplar North to Lansbury
- Poplar South to Poplar
- Millwall to Island Gardens
- West India to Canary Wharf; and
- Spitalfields to Spitalfields & Banglatown

- 3.4 Full details of the electoral review report, consultation undertaken and proposals may be viewed on the Commission's website at www.lgbce.org.uk and detailed plans are available on the Commission's consultation portal at: <http://consultation.lgbce.org.uk>, where users are able to compare the recommendations with the existing wards.
- 3.5 Maps of each of the proposed new wards will be circulated to members at the meeting.

4. THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The LGBCE has confirmed that on 4th June 2013 the Tower Hamlets (Electoral Changes) Order 2013 was laid in draft in Parliament. The draft order, if made will give effect to the final recommendations of the electoral review as published on 25th March and described above.
- 4.2 The draft order may be viewed at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk>. The draft order refers to a map which comprises the following sheet: [Sheet 1 - Overview \(PDF\)](#)
- 4.3 The draft order will be laid in Parliament for a period of 40 sitting days. If accepted, the new electoral arrangements will come into force at the next scheduled elections for Tower Hamlets in 2014.
- 4.4 Subject to Government confirmation, the Mayoral and Council elections are likely to be combined with the European Parliamentary Elections on 22nd May 2014.
- 4.5 The revised Register of Electors 2014 will be amended to reflect the new wards and polling districts (see below) following the annual canvass in 2013/14. As part of a package of measures associated with the forthcoming introduction (after the 2014 elections) of Individual Electoral Registration, the Government has amended the timing of the canvass in 2013/14, which will run from the beginning of October to mid February. This means that the first register based on the revised electoral arrangements will be published on **17th February 2014**.

5. POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACE REVIEW

- 5.1 The LGBCE does not base its recommendations on, or take into account, the current location of polling places. The Commission recognises that an authority will normally wish to conduct a polling district review after any changes to the number or pattern of wards in the area.
- 5.2 The Council is required by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act') to undertake a polling district and polling place review at least once every four years, and in accordance with this requirement reviews have taken place in 2007 and 2011, with a supplementary review in 2009.

- 5.3 At the 2011 review, the Committee agreed that polling districts should remain unchanged pending the Electoral Review to be conducted by the LGBCE. Now that the Commission's recommendations are known, a review of polling districts and polling places be carried out.

Definitions

- 5.4 Section 16 of the 2006 Act introduced a number of changes in respect of the way in which the review of polling districts and polling places must be undertaken. Polling districts, polling places and polling stations are defined as follows:-

polling district - the area created by the division of a constituency, ward or division into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined which is convenient to electors.

polling place - the building(s) or area(s) within each polling district in which polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.

polling station - the actual room or building chosen by the Returning Officer, within the polling place, where the process of voting takes place at an election.

- 5.5 The Electoral Commission has issued guidance on the practical procedures involved in conducting a review of polling districts and polling places, including measures to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act. In determining polling places, an authority must:

(a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances; and

(b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places they are responsible for are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled, and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons

- 5.6 Over the past two years Electoral Services have conducted a number of reviews. In 2008, all the premises used as polling stations were visited with a particular emphasis on access and the requirements of the DDA.

Process for the review

- 5.7 Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 sets out the steps that authorities must follow in undertaking any review of polling districts and/or polling places. The authority must:-

- Publish notice of the holding of the review
- Consult the Returning Officer for every parliamentary election held in a constituency that is wholly or partly within its area. The Returning

Officer must make representations which must include information as to the location of polling stations (both existing and proposed) within polling places (both existing and proposed).

- Within thirty calendar days of their receipt, the relevant authority is required to publish the Returning Officer's representations
- Actively seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to: access to premises; or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability

- 5.8 In formulating his proposals, the Returning Officer will take into account matters including a guideline of approximately 1,500 electors per polling station; any anticipated growth in the electorate; known changes to the availability of current venues; alternatives to current venues where there is a better alternative; and views put forward previously and by ward councillors.
- 5.9 In addition, any elector in a constituency may make representations on the designation of polling places to the relevant authority. Although not specifically provided for in the review rules, the Council will wish to actively encourage representations from local constituency political parties and independent candidates in order to give key stakeholders in the electoral process the opportunity to participate. GP Committee on 27 March 2013 endorsed this approach and agreed 'that Ward Member consultation/engagement in the forthcoming review of polling districts/polling places in Tower Hamlets be accommodated; and other specific suggestions to improve current arrangements be accommodated as far as reasonably possible'
- 5.10 It is important to note that representations made by any person in connection with the review of polling places may include proposals for alternative polling places, which must then be considered by the relevant authority.
- 5.11 On completion of a review, the authority is required to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of both polling districts and polling places. In addition, the authority must publish:
- all correspondence sent to a Returning Officer in connection with the review;
 - all correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability;
 - all representations made by any person in connection with the review;
 - the minutes of any meetings held by the authority where details of the review have been considered;
 - details of the actual designations of polling districts and polling places agreed as a result of the review; and
 - details of where the results of the review have been published.
- 5.12 Following the review, certain persons have a right to appeal to the Electoral Commission, namely:-

- An interested authority in England and Wales (namely a parish council or parish meeting in England, or a council of a community in Wales).
- not less than 30 electors in the constituency.
- a person (other than the Returning Officer) who has made representations under [Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983](#). Schedule A1 provides, among other things, that representations may be made by any elector in a constituency situated in whole or in part in the authority's area.
- a person who is not an elector in a constituency in the authority's area but who the Commission think has either sufficient interest in the accessibility of disabled persons to polling places in the area or has particular expertise in relation to the access to premises and facilities for disabled persons.

5.13 In addition, the Returning Officer may make observations on any representations made to the Electoral Commission. The Commission is required to consider any such representations and observations, and after doing so, may direct the authority to make any alterations it sees necessary to the polling places designated by the review.

5.14 Where an authority makes any alterations to the polling districts within its area, the Electoral Registration Officer must amend the register of electors accordingly. The Electoral Commission recommends that alterations to polling districts be timed to coincide with the annual revision of the register of electors in order to avoid confusion both for electoral professionals and other recipients of the register. As mentioned above, this will occur on 17th February 2014, after the annual canvass.

6. PROPOSED TIMETABLE FOR THE REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

6.1 The following process and timetable is proposed for the review:-

17 th June 2013:	Report to GP Committee
21 st June 2013:	Publish notice of review on Council website, in East End Life and Members' Bulletin and Town Hall noticeboard
12 th July 2013:	Deadline for initial comments from members to Returning Officer
9 th August 2013:	Returning Officer representations (proposals) to be published for consultation with the general public and specifically with ward councillors, local MPs and GLA member, political parties, election agents, the metropolitan police service, Education Services in relation to the use of schools, groups

representing people with disabilities and those with particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

13th September 2013: Close of consultation

25th September 2013: Report to General Purposes Committee including response to consultation and proposals

6.2 Before starting the formal review the Returning Officer will seek the initial views of Members on any particular issues and also review any reports from the presiding officers at recent elections. A schedule of polling stations used at the 2012 GLA elections will be circulated to members at the meeting.

7. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

7.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England is established by the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and the electoral review of Tower Hamlets was conducted in accordance with that legislation and associated regulations.

7.2 In carrying out a review of polling places, the Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires that each polling district must have sufficient and suitable designated polling places that provide 'such reasonable facilities for voting that are practicable in the circumstances' including accessibility for electors with disabilities. The Council is under a duty to promote equality for those with a disability and the recommendations of the review will be drafted with this duty in mind.

8. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

8.1 The reduction in the number of Councillors from 51 to 45 will result in a saving of approximately £60k per annum in the Members' Allowances budget with effect from 2014/15.

8.2 The report describes a review of polling districts and polling places in Tower Hamlets to be undertaken ahead of the 2014 elections. Any financial implications arising from changes to the polling districts or polling places are expected to be fully contained within existing budgets.

9. IMPLICATIONS FOR ONE TOWER HAMLETS

9.1 The aim of the electoral review is to secure appropriate and as far as possible equal representation for electors across all wards of the borough.

9.2 Disability issues will be taken fully into account in election matters particularly in the polling station review. All recommended polling places will as far as practicable be located centrally within the polling district and accessible for

people with disabilities.

10. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 10.1 Within the constraints of the suitability and availability of the accommodation, polling places are located so as to minimise the distance electors need to travel to cast their vote.

11. ANTI POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising directly from this report.

12. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The polling place review exercise is concerned with managing risk at all premises used as polling places

13. IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION

- 13.1 There are no crime and disorder reduction implications arising directly from this report.

APPENDICES (to be circulated at the meeting)

Appendix A: Ward Maps proposed by LGBCE

Appendix B: Schedule of existing polling districts and polling places.

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 holder and address where open to inspection
Correspondence from LGBCE	John Williams 020 7364 4204
Electoral Commission guidance on Polling Place review	John Williams 020 7364 4204