

Responses to Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2024

I was a candidate in the local elections last year and, subsequent to last year's local elections, also moved within the Borough into Canary Wharf ward.

I wanted to raise some concerns about the current polling places arrangements, specifically for residents, such as myself, who live within the southern half of the CW1 polling district. I've attached to this email a "dot map" to show electors who live within the CW1 polling district of Canary Wharf ward.

Though the Marriott hotel represents a convenient polling place for those in the north of the polling district (above the blue line in the picture attached), for those that live in the south of the polling district it actually represents a longer walk than both of the other Canary Wharf ward polling places of Arnhem Wharf Primary School or Seven Mills Primary School.

I've illustrated the walking time, based on Google Maps estimations below from various locations within the polling district to their existing polling place vs. an alternative of Seven Mills Primary School:

Houses on north side of Byng Street (e.g. 21 Byng Street) – to Marriott Hotel 18 mins / 0.8 miles vs Seven Mills Primary School 9 mins / 0.4 miles

Landmark West/East/Pinnacle development on Marsh Wall – to Marriott Hotel 15 mins / 0.7 miles vs Seven Mills Primary School 10 mins / 0.5 miles

South Quay Plaza development also on Marsh Wall – to Marriott Hotel: 17 mins / 0.8 miles vs Seven Mills Primary School 15 mins / 0.7 miles

As can be seen, the walk is double that if you are a resident of Byng Street compared to the walk to Seven Mills Primary School, and likely to be around 50% more if a resident of the western side of Marsh Wall.

I'd also add that, given how built up Canary Wharf is, it is often far easier/more familiar for residents to walk south within the Isle of Dogs than it is to walk north, through Canary Wharf (given you have to navigate around the docks and shopping centre).

I was therefore hoping some consideration could be given into whether the current arrangements are the most convenient for residents who live within CW1 polling district and who live on or south of Marsh Wall, specifically whether it would be more appropriate for their polling station to be located on the Isle of Dogs at one of the two other existing polling stations.

Olga Primary has been used as a polling station for a number of years. When this happens, the whole school needs to be closed to children. This is impacting on the offer we give our children and is difficult for parents to manage. Please could another location be considered.

I live in Miranda Close, E1, I have a polling station which is a 30 second walk from me. However, I have to walk to Exmouth Hall to vote. Previously I was able to vote at Stepney Park Primary School.

Looking at the map showing the SG2 area, the voting station is not centrally located for the people in that area. If you could please allow us to go to the closest polling station that would be greatly appreciated.

I can see from the map that John Smith polling station is in a different polling ward to mine, however, Stepney Park is within the same polling ward. Would it not be easier for people to have a choice as there are 3 polling stations in my ward?

I would like to highlight a problem I experienced when voting in the local elections on 2 May and in the General Election held last Thursday, 4 July.

I live at Wood Wharf, Canary Wharf and in order to vote, on both these occasions I had to make a 35 minute journey to my polling station, which was the Radisson Blu Edwardian Hotel, New Providence Wharf, 5 Fairmont Avenue, London, E14 9JB.

This involved walking from my flat in George Street to the Jubilee Line station in Canary Wharf, taking a train to Canning Town, changing on to the Docklands Light Railway, going one station to East India and then walking to the polling station which took about 9 minutes. As said, this took about 35 minutes in all and then it took about the same amount of time to come home.

I have lived in Tower Hamlets for nearly 40 years and until I moved to Canary Wharf in 2022, my polling station has never been more than a few streets away from my home.

I am a mobile 84 year old and managed this frustrating journey satisfactorily, but I am concerned that this may prove quite difficult for others as well as being incredibly time consuming.

To whomever it may concern, I saw that you were doing the above review and wanted to give my feedback about the polling station.

My son goes to Chisenhale school, and it has been closed multiple times since he joined three years ago. I really beg that you reconsider using schools as polling stations. we have had so many issues with schools closing due to Covid and strikes that this really did cause further disruption and impacted on my son's learning. He and many of his peers, particularly those were learning difficulties including things like autism or ADHD, really welcome routine and closing the school for a day is incredibly disruptive. On those days no provision for childcare is provided and so we have to book work days off to cover this rather than, using it for planned time to recharge and reconnect.

I write with regards to the use of Olga Primary School as a polling station.

Having a child attend the school, I believe that the sometimes frequent, whole day closures of the entire school have a detrimental effect on her education.

I would propose that the Ecology Pavilion, which is very nearby and has very easy, step free access, would be a far better alternative.

May I please ask a clarification about the subject, is this to change polling places?

Is the below polling place (Harbinger Primary School) potentially affected? It matches all criteria about location, size and suitability I think, so hopefully this will stay

I understand that the council is currently reviewing the location of polling stations.

I'd like to give my views.

Using schools is terrible. Not only is it disruptive to learning in the extreme, but it puts incredible pressure on parents who then need to find childcare, disrupting their working day as well. In many cases parents will need to take unpaid leave or use up valuable annual leave in order to look after their children.

There are a multitude of other options that should be considered instead:

Sports centres

Community centres

Council offices

In Tower Hamlets, buildings like the ecology pavilion

There has to be a better solution than closing schools.

There is so much pressure on parents to maintain attendance levels - following the decline after the COVID pandemic, and yet on the other hand the council is able to close schools whenever it deems necessary for voting, with no consideration whatsoever of other options

I hope you can take these views into account and change this archaic and unreasonably policy

I wanted to mention that the Polling Station at Bromley by Bow Community Centre is very accessible and always really well organised. Please don't change it.

Please stop using schools as polling stations; we can't afford to waste annual leave on a regular basis because our kids can no longer go to school that day.

Just wanted to add my thoughts to the Polling Station review I understand is being undertaken.

My kids school, Chisenhale, along with others in E3 are regularly used on polling days. It causes disruption for the kids learning and their families many of whom don't have capacity in annual leave to take mid-week days off.

There are in the immediate locale of Chisenhale Primary multiple other venues that could be utilised including St Barnabas Church, Victoria Park Road Baptist church, church halls, art gallery, Chisenhale studio education space, St Stephens adventure playground - the latter may be difficult later in the day. Any of these would make suitable alternatives without closing the school.

The suitability of the school is less than perfect because it is at the extreme north eastern edge of the polling district. This in itself seems likely to put off some voters, especially as some will pass a closer polling station (The Tramshed) on their route to it.

I dare say this is acceptable in the round, but it is made worse by the way the polling station is operated which is, in my opinion, at risk of having a material impact on people's propensity to vote.

The school has two gates – one on the western side of the playground facing the direction most voters are coming from, and one on the eastern side facing into the next polling district. Arriving at the western gate requires a walk all the way round the perimeter of the school site to get to the door which is visibly just a few metres away.

A behavioural scientist will tell you that this kind of apparently perverse, user-unfriendly set up is bound to have some kind of disincentive effect on people voting. I have anecdotal evidence that this is the case: a neighbour once told me they went to vote but, pressed for time, gave up when they saw that the gate was locked, and they had to walk all the way round.

The distance to walk round isn't actually great – just over 220m - but the differential over the route through the western gate is huge. The attached Google map screen shots show it is roughly 14 times further.

To repeat: that kind of user-unfriendly imposition feels perverse and is bound to have some effect, however small, on propensity to vote. It seems to have very little justification beyond the custom and practice of the school staff managing the site.

Please open the western gate of the school for voting.

- sorry if my response looks cranky and over the top, but every time I go to vote it drives me mad that I'm being made to walk miles out of my way just because no-one can be bothered to unlock a gate they usually keep shut, so when the email landed in my inbox I couldn't help myself!

I am happy with the polling arrangements as they stand

SG2, Exmouth Hall is no longer available since Swan Housing Association allowed it to fall into disrepair.

I agree with the ARO Response letter and would ask that current polling stations, especially Harry Gosling School, remain as polling stations to provide continuity and ease of access to voting in the borough

I am XXXX and my younger daughter XXXX. We are living Shadwell area. We want polling station Bigland Green Primary School.SH1

I am a resident of Forge Square, located within the IG2 polling district, and have voted on several occasions since moving here, each time at Harbinger Primary School. This venue is convenient and accessible to me, and I have experienced no issues with it, although I can recall only once voting at a busy period I do not recall any problems that occurred that or any other time.

It is my opinion that this venue is a suitable and appropriate place for a polling station, and I am not aware of any other venue within the polling district that would be better for this purpose.

The polling cards in Tower Hamlets for the last two elections included maps whose usefulness was essentially zero. In my case the polling station had changed, and I had to locate it by its name and address rather than following visual indications from the map. The place names were in astonishingly small print; roads were indicated by very narrow white lines against a background of extremely pale grey. The map also has slightly more visible shaded areas which roughly correspond to unnamed buildings and playgrounds. Lastly there are a few spidery black lines which appear to be pedestrian rights of way other than pavements along roads.

I attach an example, in which the shades actually stand out a little better than on the original printed sheet.

I am raising this with you because of your criteria about locations of polling places being changed and being accessible. Accessibility in terms of physical barriers only becomes an issue at all if electors are able to find out where to go in the first place.

For the previous elections there had indeed been a change in the location of the polling station for my polling district. Since the map conveyed no useable information to the naked eye, I went to the longstanding location of our former polling station at Burcham Street, and finding it closed, had to work

out from the address where to go instead. I was appalled to receive an identical unreadable map for the July 2024 election also.

Please would you ensure that Electoral Services include maps on polling cards which are capable of actually being read and understood by electors in future?

Dear Robert, I am aware of the law. However, there are alternatives, and the school does not have to be chosen as a polling station. I would like my point to continue to be taken forward please. There are national statistics about the real issues with the level of school attendance. There are various studies about the impacts covid, and the strikes have had on children's learning. Not to mention parents are being really penalised if they take their children out of school for holidays. This absolutely flies in the face of all that and whether there is a law that forces schools to do it or not, I urge the council to stop mandating their use.

Would you please consider changing the polling station for the WE3 (Weavers) area. It is currently Brick Lane School which is a specialist autism school, and the autistic children are very distressed and disturbed when their school is closed and used as a polling station. The school has changed from being a mainstream primary to a specialist autism school, so it's widely felt that the location is no longer suitable amongst the parents, teachers and local residents which puts people off voting.

This also has a very detrimental effect on the students when they are forced to have an unexpected day off school due to it being used. There is an alternative school just minutes up the road (William Davis) that I feel is more suitable". Please consider this representation.

My polling place at the Exmouth Community Hub is excellent, as are you.

I'm responding to the current polling review. I believe that schools should not be used as polling stations. Both the council and schools themselves rightly emphasise the importance of school attendance. Children have already missed an enormous amount of school during the COVID era. I cannot understand why it is somehow acceptable for thousands of children across the borough to miss school for the sake of polling day. I urge you to replace schools with alternative polling stations. Libraries, church halls - there are plenty currently not used.

Thank you very much for your prompt reply and I appreciate you will add my comments to support the continued use of Harbinger School as a polling place within Tower Hamlets.

I would like to offer my perspective as a resident of the BGE1 Polling District that the current Polling Place of 'St. James the Less Church Hall' is well-located, accessible and suitable to continue as a polling place.

Can the polling station move back to Mile End Road – Gateway Building?

It was there before, and it was easier for residents to cast their votes.

I am glad for the opportunity to express a view that the polling stations should NOT include schools.

I am a GP working in the area. I have four children. On polling days, the primary is closed for polling. This is extremely disruptive and often leaves me with little choice but to cancel and rearrange clinics and other duties. Not only this, but over half of my colleagues who also have primary school aged children in Tower Hamlets schools are doing exactly the same juggle, so there is a major impact on our delivery of patient care and running of the service.

I would love to see better use of public spaces such as idea stores / church buildings / community centres / children's centres or similar, being used for this purpose, allowing the children to get on with learning, and avoiding this type of Thursday disruption.

I would like to provide my comments to the current review of polling districts and polling places in the borough.

In particular, I am very keen that the Cruising Association remains a polling place within the Limehouse ward as it is a central location within the ward. It is also an accessible place to act as a polling station. Please can you record my comment on this within the review.

I'm writing to provide my views on the location of the polling station location in Blackwall and Cubitt town region.

As a constituent who lives in Blackwall and Cubitt Town in the Virginia Quay development, my local polling station is Virginia Quay Community Centre. In my opinion this is a significantly worse location for the polling station compared to its previous location which used to be a temporary hut on Blackwall Way right next to East India DLR station.

The new location of polling station is in a more inconvenient location, at the end of a one way road which does not join with Blackwall Way. The polling station is not visible on a day of the election and is not on a route with common footfall, unlike the previous location. I suspect turnout would be higher if the polling station was moved back onto Blackwall Way, thereby catching people as they travel through the DLR station or visit the local NISA.

In response to your email regarding the polling review, as the representative for an organisation for Deaf women in the London boroughs and nationally. I have not received comments from our members directly, however I would like to make the following points:

- The consultation process is not accessible to Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) and therefore it is difficult for those with minority languages to participate in this review. I think it would be ideal to have a face-to-face session for the deaf community with a staff member and a BSL interpreter to go through the information included in the email and get the views from the deaf community.
- Information about the location of polling venues and how to vote should be made accessible in BSL for the Deaf community and plain English/Easy Read versions should also be made available. This should be made available online in BSL. I find that deaf people are unable to access information about not only the voting process and also the people that are standing for election - the campaign materials should also be made available in BSL.
- It would be helpful for the staff working in the polling stations to have Deaf awareness including knowledge of basic BSL so that they can welcome deaf people.
- We would like to check if the criteria for venues to become a polling station include accessibility for people with wheelchairs.
- I am interested to know if you collect demographic information about those that have voted. Are deaf and disabled people attending polling venues and voting? This may give you a better understanding of the accessibility of the voting process.

I would like to know why voters need to use schools at school hours when there are lots of other suitable spaces like churches, community halls... that could be used not disturbing students & parents life every time that there are elections.

I would rather prefer this option rather than closing all primary schools around (Wellington, Malmesbury, Olga, Chisenhale...)

I am writing to express my opposition to St Peters London Docks School being used as a polling station within the SK2 area of Wapping. While I understand the importance of facilitating voter access, I believe that this decision is extremely disruptive to the educational environment and the daily activities of students, staff, and parents.

Using St Peters School as a polling station interferes with the school's ability to carry out full days of its educational curriculum for over 200 students. Last school year, we had two days of unforeseen closure leaving parents scrambling for childcare. School closures for elections have a huge impact for families in the school community.

As an alternative, Raines House ought to be considered as a polling location. It is an underutilized council property that offers ample, open space and is located in an accessible area, reducing the impact on the school community. Utilizing Raines House would allow the elections to proceed smoothly while maintaining the integrity of St Peter's School as an educational institution.

Thank you for considering my concerns. I hope the council will take this suggestion into account for the benefit of both the community and our schools.

Bonner School Mile End is currently a polling station.

As my children attend the school it is very inconvenient when the school is closed for the elections, local and national. I have to take either unpaid leave or annual leave to make sure I have childcare, and the closure is disruptive to their education.

Alternative Space

I have spoken to a representative at the ELT Baptist Church in Burdett Road E3 4TU and they are very keen to help. The church has space to be a polling station in Mile End and this would mean that the children at Bonner school Mile End don't miss out on their education, particularly as they have missed school due to the closures during the pandemic.

Here is the link to the Church <https://www.eltbaptistchurch.org>

There is one area on which I would like to comment. Since moving to Wapping in 2009 I have voted on many occasions, and until recently I voted at the local Primary School, about a 100 yard walk from where I live in New Crane Wharf. But fairly recently we have been required to vote at St. Paul's Church Shadwell on the Highway. I see no point in requiring us to flog up there when the school continues to operate as a voting station. Fortunately, my wife and I are fit and able to walk to the church and back, but the extra distance would be a significant hurdle if that were not the case. Why would the returning officer, or whoever sets the places where we are required to vote, decide to make it harder for us to get to the voting station with no apparent benefit from the move? It does seem somewhat perverse.

I am writing in response to the Review of Polling Districts.

I reside at the Orchard Wharf building in polling zone PO2.

As this is a new development, the recent general election was the first instance I had to go to the polling station assigned.

Based on the criteria listed on the review website, I find the polling station unsuitable as the location does not meet the criteria as one must cross multiple major roads and is simply a far distance and unsafe.

My recommendation would be the development captured by E14 OUP (and anything bound by Leamouth Road/A1020 on the west and Silvocea Way on the east) be moved to the BC1 polling zones.

We, Local Councillors for the Canary Wharf ward, are submitting a proposal for a comprehensive review of Polling District CW1. Our objective is to enhance the voting experience, ensure accessibility, and improve overall electoral efficiency within the district.

Rationale and Objectives:

1. Increased Voter Participation:

Relocating the polling station to a more central and accessible location will encourage higher voter turnout. A convenient polling station is essential for ensuring that all residents can participate in the electoral process.

2. Adapting to Community Changes:

With significant development and the construction of new social housing in the area, many new residents have moved in, particularly on the Marsh wall side. By the 2026 election, even more new homes are expected to be built, further increasing the population in this area. The current polling station near the Marriott Hotel is not suitable and accessible for these residents.

3. Majority Support for Relocation:

We have received verbal feedback from the majority of residents expressing the need for a change in the polling station location. This overwhelming community sentiment reinforces the necessity of this proposal.

4. Enhanced Accessibility:

We propose moving the polling station to a more central location near Marsh wall, such as the Hilton Hotel, Novotel, or Britannia Hotel side. This change will ensure that the polling station is easily accessible for all residents, including those with mobility challenges, families, and individuals living in new housing developments.

Expected Outcomes:

- A polling station that is conveniently located to meet the needs of the growing population in Canary Wharf.
- Improved voter participation as a result of a more accessible location.
- Enhanced electoral efficiency, ensuring that all residents can exercise their right to vote without barriers.

In conclusion, relocating the polling station to a more central location near Marsh wall is a crucial step to accommodate the evolving needs of our community, especially with the anticipated increase in residents by the 2026 local election and the strong support from the community for this change.

We appreciate your consideration of this proposal and look forward to your support in implementing these necessary changes.
