

Special General Purposes Committee

Date:	25 November 2014
Classification:	For General Release
Title:	Outstanding issues arising out of the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places report at the General Purposes Committee on 5 November 2014
Report of:	Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Management of the Council
Financial Summary:	The cost of using polling places is met from the Government grant in respect of UK and European Parliamentary elections and referendums, from the GLA in respect of London Mayor and GLA elections and by the City Council for its own elections
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires that a compulsory review of polling districts and polling places be completed by 31 January 2015. The previous City of Westminster review took place in 2011. Review proposals and recommendations were presented at the General Purposes Committee on 5 November 2014. The following matters remained outstanding and were referred to this General Purposes Special Committee.
 - a) Officers were asked to carry out some further investigation in respect of the recommendation made in the 5 November Committee Report to change the CHA (Churchill) polling place from Churchill Gardens Youth Club, Churchill Gardens Estate to Churchill Gardens Residents Hall, Churchill Gardens Estate on the basis that the Residents Hall is more accessible than the Youth Club as it is closer to main roads and

bus stops. Churchill Ward Councillors were notified on 2 October 2014 that there was a proposal in place to move from the Youth Club to the Residents Hall. Churchill Ward Councillors made representation on 4 November 2014 that they preferred that the polling place remain at the Youth Club on the basis that 'residents know the location of the Youth Club as the polling station and this is very well established within the area. It also offers greater disabled access as it is all on one level with ramp access'. Ward Councillors were contacted on the day following the General Purposes Committee on 5 November to ask whether they wished to make further representation. To-date no further representation has been made.

- b) Officers were asked to investigate whether the polling district boundaries within three wards, Maida Vale, Hyde Park, and Knightsbridge and Belgravia, can be redrawn to provide better provision for voters and to effect a more even distribution of voters across individual polling districts. Maida Vale and Hyde Park wards each have two polling districts and Knightsbridge and Belgravia has three polling districts. The options for change are presented as maps in Appendix A, B, and C. Appendix D shows the possible polling places for the polling districts affected. Appendix E, F, G show the electorates and street changes to be made. Appendix H, I, J show the current polling district boundaries of the three wards under review.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the polling place for CHA (Churchill) place be re-designated from Churchill Gardens Youth Club, Churchill Gardens Estate, to Churchill Gardens Residents Hall, Churchill Gardens Estate for the reasons set out in the 5 November Committee Report and in this Report
- 2.2 That the Committee consider the options for change presented in respect of the polling district boundaries of the Hyde Park, Maida Vale and Knightsbridge and Belgravia wards. That the polling district boundaries for Churchill and Lancaster Gate wards also be looked into.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 In respect of the re-designation of the CHA (Churchill) polling place from Churchill Gardens Youth Club to Churchill Gardens Residents Hall. Officers are of the opinion that the Residents Hall provides a better provision for voters across the polling district as a whole. There is a real concern that voters, especially elderly or disabled voters, not living on the estate, are dissuaded from voting because of the distance they need to travel from main roads and bus stops to the Youth Club. Officers were advised that there are no parking facilities for disabled voters on the estate, other than for those disabled voters living on the estate. The Presiding Officer at the Youth Club on 22 May 2014 noted that 13 voters in wheelchairs voted at the polling place- although we do not know how many of those voters live on the estate. 8 voters also complained about signage and the maps provided to find the Youth Club- this

is a high number of such complaints as compared to complaints of this type received at other polling places. Although the Youth Club is well known by voters it is difficult to see how those voters living on the estate will be inconvenienced or confused by the change proposed and one would have thought that those voters living elsewhere in the CHA polling district will, in large part, welcome the change proposed. Signage will be placed at the Youth Club to alert voters to the change in polling place.

- 3.2 In respect of the options presented for change to polling district boundaries within Hyde Park, Knightsbridge and Belgravia and Maida Vale wards. In the period between the first Committee meeting on 5 November and this report, officers have in large part arrived at workable options for change. There are however some issues still outstanding and some process steps which need to be taken which make effecting any changes before publication of the register on 1 December extremely problematic and open to risk. In Hyde Park ward a new polling place will need to be identified for a newly created HPC polling district. It is expected that new developments in this area will provide a solution. In Knightsbridge and Belgravia officers will need to carry out some further work on boundary definition and seek to find out whether there are better polling places than those currently earmarked as fitting into any newly created polling districts. In Maida Vale there will need to be some further work on boundary definition and clarity on which polling places should be designated (the preferred option for a newly created MVC polling district is the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Lauderdale Road. Discussions with the Synagogue are ongoing. Although the map attached as Appendix C shows the Paddington Sports Club, Castellain Road, as being within an MVB polling district- this is the street path access point- the polling place itself being within a newly created as presented MVC polling district. The Paddington Sports Club presents an alternative to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue as an MVC polling place but the Synagogue is much preferred if elders agree to its use and if it is found to meet all the requirements of good polling place provision)

Publication of the register of electors can only be delayed beyond 1 December 2014 owing to an election taking place during the canvass period. This is the only reason permitted by law for a delay. If any further work on polling districts was required post 1 December the register would need to be re-published at which point the review would be complete, The Electoral Registration Act 2013 requires the current round of compulsory reviews to be complete by 31 January 2015. With the general election not far off, the Electoral Commission guidance is that Electoral Registration Officers need to have their registers finalised as early as possible – for a variety of reasons but also including the need to distribute those registers to the political parties. Political parties will want registers as early as possible for their work on the election. It is not advised that poll numbers issued to electors upon register publication are subsequently changed- for reasons of polling district change and register re-publication.

- 3.3 In respect of newly designated polling places arising out of any changes made to polling districts (see Appendix D). Designation of polling places is the responsibility of the Council and this must be done as part of the review. Were the polling districts to change, officers will not have been able to carry out a robust and proper exercise to determine which polling places within the Hyde Park, Knightsbridge and Belgravia and Maida Vale Wards can and should be used. Where potential polling places have been identified, officers have found disadvantages to the use of some of them or been met with requests for further discussion on the part of some property owners. A polling place is yet to be identified for a new HPC polling district. Section 18B(4)(e) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 states that ‘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’. The Electoral Commission’s view is that polling places should be defined more specifically than simply the polling district. We cannot therefore designate the entire polling district as the polling place and then look to find a polling place at a later stage.
- 3.4 Voters will need to be notified of any changes made to polling districts and polling places. At the date of this Report only a part of the electorate in Westbourne Ward will need to be written to. There is a risk that changes made to polling districts on a larger scale to that made in Westbourne Ward will result in confusion for voters- especially at a time when Individual Electoral Registration and general election write-outs are taking place.

4. Other Implications

These remain as set out in the report to the General Purposes Committee on 5 November, listed as a background document.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact:
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. General Purposes Committee Report 5 November 2014
2. Appendix A re Hyde Park revised polling district boundaries
3. Appendix B re Knightsbridge and Belgravia revised polling district boundaries
4. Appendix C re Maida Vale revised polling district boundaries
5. Appendix D Polling Places for reconstituted polling districts
6. Appendix E- Hyde Park –electorate and street changes
7. Appendix F- Knightsbridge and Belgravia- electorate and street changes
8. Appendix G- Maida Vale- electorate and street changes
9. Appendix H- Hyde Park- current boundaries
10. Appendix I- Knightsbridge and Belgravia- current boundaries
11. Appendix J- Maida Vale- current boundaries.