



City of Westminster

# Committee Report

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**Title:** Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

**Report of:** Head of Legal and Democratic Services

**Financial Summary:**

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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places. The previous City of Westminster review took place in 2011. The 2013 Act requires that a compulsory review be completed by 31 January 2015.
- 1.2 Subsequent compulsory reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.
- 1.3 A public consultation was commenced on 1 September inviting views on the current pattern of polling districts and polling places and the attached report addresses the issues raised in the responses made and sets out recommendations for change by officers.
- 1.4 The principles underlying the approach to establishing polling districts and polling places in the review have been:
  - a) To retain the current network of polling places and polling districts. As far as possible to minimise disruption to voters;
  - b) To try and identify new polling places in areas where the existing provision is inadequate;
  - c) To aim, but only as a guideline, to have an average of three polling places per ward wherever practicable;

- d) To ensure, as far as practicable, that any new polling places are accessible to people with disabilities;
  - e) To try and minimise disruption to schools.
- 1.5 The initial Returning Officer's proposals sought views on whether any polling places, those for CHB, KBC, LGA, MHA, SJB, TBC, WAA, WEB polling districts being most prominent, should be re-designated and whether any polling districts should be changed or new polling districts created.
- 2. Recommendation**
- 2.1 That the Committee approve the following proposed changes in polling places for the reasons given (to be effective from the publication of the new electoral register on 1 December 2014):
- a) CHA( Churchill) from Churchill Gardens Youth Club, Churchill Gardens Estate to Churchill Gardens Residents Hall, Churchill Gardens Estate (the Residents Hall is more accessible than the Youth Club as it is closer to main roads and bus stops.)
  - b) MVA ( Maida Vale ) from the Maida Centre, 221 Lanark Road to St George's School, Lanark Road (The Maida Centre is being redeveloped and cannot be used as a polling place at the next General Election. Although we have sought to move away from using schools, St George's School is the best replacement for the Maida Centre and has been used before as a polling place).
  - c) WBA ( Westbourne) arising out of the polling district boundary changes detailed below, from Warwick Community Centre, 300 Harrow Road to Our Lady of Lourdes & St Vincent de Paul Church Hall, 337 Harrow Road ( with officers looking again at the Westminster Adult Education Centre in Amberley Road when building works are completed there in early 2015).
  - d) WBC ( Westbourne) arising out of the polling district boundary changes detailed below, from Stowe Centre, 258 Harrow Road to Warwick Community Centre, 300 Harrow Road.
- 2.2 That the Committee agree to a small change being made to the polling district boundary between the WBA and WBC polling districts in Westbourne Ward in order that there is a more even distribution of registered electors across each of the three polling districts within the ward and in order that voters on the Warwick and Brindley Estates vote at the same polling place. The change recommended is shown on a map as Appendix E, and in terms of properties/ electors affected as Appendix E plus addendum, and unites the whole of the Warwick and Brindley Estates with the Grand Union Canal as the northern boundary.

2.3 That the Committee note that the Chief Executive has delegated powers to designate alternative polling places in the event of any polling place not being available at any election or better provision being identified , following consultation with the Party Whips and respective ward councillors.

### **3. Background**

3.1 This paper sets out the current pattern of polling districts and polling places within the City of Westminster and details officer findings on all the suggestions received at consultation and presents officer recommendations for change.

3.2 The current pattern of electoral wards within Westminster was determined by the Government on the recommendation of the (then) Local Government Commission.

3.3 The existing Westminster ward boundaries are set and are not part of this review.

3.4 The two parliamentary constituencies covering the City of Westminster are made up of the following City of Westminster wards:

#### **(a) Cities of London and Westminster constituency:**

Bryanston & Dorset Square  
Churchill  
Hyde Park  
Knightsbridge & Belgravia  
Marylebone High Street  
St James's  
Tachbrook  
Vincent Square  
Warwick  
West End  
and the City of London

#### **(b) Westminster North constituency:**

Abbey Road  
Bayswater  
Church Street  
Harrow Road  
Lancaster Gate  
Little Venice  
Maida Vale  
Queen's Park  
Regent's Park  
Westbourne

- 3.5 Attached is a map, Appendix A, showing the existing ward boundaries. This map shows the polling district boundaries and polling places used at the combined elections which took place on 22 May 2014. The polling places used at the elections on 22 May 2014 are the currently designated polling places and formed the starting point for this review.
- 3.6 A ward is the basic building block on which parliamentary constituencies are put together. The wards, polling districts and polling places are the same in Westminster for both local government and parliamentary elections
- 3.7 Attached as Appendix B is an alphabetical listing by ward of the current polling places and their electorates as at 1 July 2014. The number of polling stations at each polling place will be determined by the Returning Officer in advance of any election and will vary according to the size of the eligible electorate at that election and the likely turnout. A “polling station” is a desk in the polling place/ building at which ballot papers are issued – there may be up to 3 such “stations” or desks in a polling place. Polling districts such as HPB have relatively high electorates and may be assigned more polling stations than polling places with smaller electorates such as KBA and WEC,
- 3.8 The map and Appendix also identify those polling places that currently have inadequate disability access ( door chimes are used at all polling places where there is inadequate disability access).
- 3.9 The current pattern of polling district boundaries within wards and the location of polling places was comprehensively reviewed during 2000 and 2001 and again in 2007 and 2011. This new pattern first came into effect at the City Council elections in May 2002.
- 3.10 The opportunity has been taken since May 2002 to change polling places where more convenient or better polling places have been identified or where a change had to be made because the existing polling place was no longer available for whatever reason.
- 3.11 The principles underlying the City Council’s approach to polling districts and polling places in the 2000, 2001, 2007 and 2011 reviews were:
- a) To retain the current network of polling places and polling districts. As far as possible to minimise disruption to voters;
  - b) To try and identify new polling places in areas where the existing provision is inadequate;
  - c) To aim, but only as a guideline, to have an average of three polling places per ward wherever practicable;
  - d) To ensure, as far as practicable, that any new polling places are accessible to people with disabilities;
  - e) To try and minimise disruption to schools.

- 3.12 The pattern of provision will never be ideal or suit all electors, but the current boundaries and places were drawn to try and maximise convenience to electors by using the best locations available.
- 3.13 Council officers continue to look for possible alternative locations, particularly where disability access is currently inadequate or the existing polling place location could be improved. The number of inaccessible polling places has gradually been declining as building owners have sought to improve access or alternative places are used instead.
- 3.14 At the combined elections on 22 May 2014 all Senior Presiding Officers at polling places were required to complete and return a polling place review evaluation of their polling place - attached as Appendix C. This is a document produced by the Electoral Commission which is designed to identify any issues pertaining to a polling place. Senior Presiding Officers were also required to complete and return a log book- attached as Appendix D. The log book included specific questions pertaining to a polling place review i.e. whether any voters had difficulty in finding a polling place; were unhappy about the location of a polling place; or were unhappy with the access to their polling place. The two documents provided a wealth of information for the review and provided the means by which a detailed analysis could be made before the Returning Officer's initial proposals were presented.
- 3.15 Elections happen very infrequently and sometimes with very little notice, so the City Council is appreciative of the co-operation of polling places in providing their buildings for the day – often at considerable inconvenience including to parents of school children – so that local electors have a convenient place where they can go and vote.
- 3.16 Consultation proposals were issued by the Returning Officer on 1 September 2014 and comments on the current provision were invited. All suggestions made are addressed in this report.

## **2. POSSIBLE CHANGES**

1. At the start of this review there was no proposal to look into the creation of an additional polling district or polling place within any of the wards. The combined elections held on 22 May 2014 did not appear to present any significant issues which require that changes of this type be made in the run-up to the General Election on 7 May 2015. It may be the case that following the completion of the transition phase to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) ( the Government has legislated for existing electors who have not been matched to Department for Work and Pensions lists or other locally held records- and who have not made an IER application- to be finally deleted from the register of electors in either December 2015 or December 2016), that there may be a need to carry out a further more detailed analysis. At the polling district and polling place review in 2011 there was an initial proposal to look into the creation of an additional polling district/ place in the north part of Hyde Park ward as further residential developments had been completed post the previous 2007 review. Similarly in 2011 the possibility of the creation of an

additional polling district and polling place within the south-east part of Maida Vale ward was looked into. There was also a further proposal in 2011 to reconfigure the polling districts within Westbourne ward and create a fourth polling district. These proposals were not accepted by the General Purposes Committee at that time on the basis that the proposals could result in confusion and disruption to voters, may result in polling places having to be used which were not as suitable as those currently used, and would possibly also transfer the issue of having higher numbers of voters in one polling district to another polling district. In terms of Westbourne ward any issues appeared to arise out of the shape of the ward and the review could not make any changes to ward boundaries. At this review a suggestion was received that the boundary between the WBA and WBC polling districts be changed, for reasons detailed in other parts of this Report- but that the number of polling districts within the ward remain as three.

2. In terms of changes of polling place from those polling places used at the 22 May 2014 elections it was proposed at the start of the review, in the Returning Officer's initial proposals, that concerted efforts be made to find an alternative polling place in respect of SJB polling place ( Charing Cross Library) which has no disabled access and where on 22 May 2014 the Chief Presiding Officer raised concerns in respect of voters not having exclusive access to the library. It was however noted that although the polling place is on the margin of the polling district, it is nevertheless close to the main concentration of electors in the district, and so in this respect is well situated.
3. It was proposed that efforts be made to find alternative polling places in respect of the following polling districts. Matters for consideration are as shown;
4. CHB (St Barnabas School). Disability access into the school is currently limited.
5. KBC (St Peter's Church Hall). The Church Hall is on the very edge of the polling district so not ideally geographically located. It is however a well-known building. ( St Peter's School in Ebury Street was used at elections before the 2011 referendum)
6. LGA (St Mathew's Church ), LGB (St James & St John Primary School – previously St James & St Michael's School). The two polling places have inadequate disability access, but are currently the best locations that have been identified and are well-known buildings in the area.
7. MHA (St Vincent's School), MHB (Central Synagogue). St Vincent's School is on the edge and not central to the polling district. The Central Synagogue has steps and so has no disability access. Both polling places are well-known buildings in the area.

8. TBC ( Lillington Gardens Estate Hall). Although the Hall is well known and centrally located in terms of the main body of voters, there were problems with signage at the 22 May 2014 elections in terms of those electors who were unfamiliar with its location.
9. WAA (Holy Apostles Church Hall) and WAC (Victoria Library) are on the edge of their polling districts but are currently the best available locations within the districts and are well- known buildings in the area.
10. WEB polling place ( Dance Works) has no disabled access.
11. Officers have used the opportunity of this review to try and identify better alternative locations and to deal with those instances, where for building works or other reasons, a re-designation of polling place is required. Any new polling places will need to be booked in good time to be used at the General Election on 7 May 2015. The Returning Officer's initial proposals sought to keep any changes to a minimum. Over the 13 years that the current map of electoral wards has been in place voters have become used to the current and well-established network of polling places and polling districts. The overarching objective is therefore, wherever possible, to minimise confusion and disruption for voters in terms of their polling place provision, while ensuring, as far as practicable, that any new polling places are accessible to people with disabilities.

A brief rationale explaining the current provision, initial consultation proposals and comments and suggestions made at consultation, in each ward (listed alphabetically) is set out below:

### **1. Abbey Road Ward**

1. The most northerly of Westminster's wards is divided into three separate polling districts by two major roads running north/south. The three districts follow a historic pattern and so most long-standing electors in the ward are voting where they have voted for many years.
2. It has been suggested at previous polling district and polling place reviews that the ARA (St Mark's Church Hall) and ARB (St John's Wood Synagogue) polling districts could be realigned on an east/west axis. Although comments were invited on this proposal and any suggestions of a possible alternative polling place in the north of the ward were welcomed it is not proposed to make any changes of this type.
3. The third polling place for the ward is in the ARC Polling district (St John's Wood Library). It is geographically well located next to the St John's Wood underground station, but is small and cramped. Despite the drawback of its size, the location is good and it currently appears to be the best available option.

4. At consultation. General comments were received that it did not seem sensible to change or merge anything in any way in advance of the General Election next year on the basis that this would be confusing for the voters, all of whom know exactly where to go in order to cast their votes.

## **2. Bayswater**

5. The polling place for the BWA polling district is a well-known local landmark (Small Hall, Porchester Centre) and is geographically central. The polling place for the BWB polling district was changed prior to the elections on 22 May 2014. It moved from Bayswater Families Centre in Newton Road to St Paul's Bayswater United Reformed Church in Newton Road. ( Bayswater Families Centre had undergone building works and no longer had a space suitable for voting). Fortunately the new polling place is next door to the previously used polling place. The polling place for the BWC polling place ( St Stephen's School in Westbourne Park Road) is well established and has disabled access.
6. At consultation. A suggestion was received which supported the principle of not using schools, wherever this was possible, and also suggested that officers should look to minimise disruption caused by elections- perhaps by reconfiguring which rooms within a school are used. Officers will seek to apply this extension to the schools principle when considering which polling places should be used at future elections. In the context of the Bayswater ward review and the use of St Stephen's School in BWC polling district, officer notes indicated that it would be very difficult to set up any arrangement by which some school classes could take place on polling day due to issues surrounding the entrance to the building.
7. A suggestion was also received that in terms of BWA polling district the polling place could be moved from the Small Porchester Hall in Porchester Road to Westbourne Baptist Church Hall on the corner of Westbourne Park Villas and Porchester Road (entrance from Porchester Road). The existing place for the BWA polling district is a well-known local landmark, is geographically central, and no issues were reported from its previous use as a polling place. Officers visited the church and found that its hall is just 2 minutes walk from Small Porchester Hall. The Church Hall is a large hall with all the facilities needed and has good disabled access. There is no strong reason as to why the polling place should be changed from Small Porchester Hall to the Church Hall- but it is good to have the Church Hall in reserve should an issue be identified with Small Porchester Hall.
8. Officers looked for alternatives in BWC polling district to St Stephen's School. Officers visited the Brunel Family Centre on the Brunel Estate, Westbourne Park Road, and noted that the Centre did not meet the requirements for use as a polling place. A social worker at the Brunel Family Centre advised that the Centre was made up of small rooms used for counselling purposes-and that there were no rooms large enough for a polling place. A visit to St Mary of the Angels Catholic Church in Moorhouse Road found that there was a church studio and a church hall. There were however disability access issues.



The studio ( which is classroom size) is on the mezzanine floor and has 10 steps. The church hall which is on the first floor has 18 steps.

### **3. Bryanston & Dorset Square**

9. The BDA (West London Synagogue) and BDB (Seymour Leisure Centre) polling districts have well located polling places. At the polling district and polling place review in 2011 the polling place at BDC was moved from St Paul's Church in Rossmore Road to St Cyprian's Church in Glentworth Street ( to provide an improved location closer to the main concentration of residents.
10. Representation was made in 2011 that St Paul's Church was well away from the main concentration of residents and that elderly residents of Dorset Square and Glentworth Street had to take the bus to get to their polling place. St Cyprian's Church in Glentworth Street therefore became the designated polling place for BDC polling district.)

At consultation. No suggestions were received and the Returning Officer's initial proposals did not include any proposals for change.

### **4. Church Street**

11. The CSA (Gateway Academy- previously Gateway Primary School) is a well - established polling place. The CSB polling place was moved, prior to the 2011 Referendum on the UK Parliament voting system, from Christ Church Bentinck School to Church Street Library. Church Street Library is located on the boundary of CSA and CSB and it has been suggested at previous reviews that it can serve both CSA and CSB polling districts. The proposal is that CSA (Gateway Academy) and CSB ( Church Street Library) be retained as polling places for each of the two districts in order to minimise confusion for voters. The area within Church Street Library which can readily be used as a polling place is not large enough to house two polling stations and certainly not two polling districts. The Greenside Community Centre is a relatively new polling place and well located within the CSC polling district.

At consultation. No suggestions were received and the Returning Officer's initial proposals did not include any proposals for change.

### **5. Churchill**

12. The ward is geographically bisected by the main railway line into Victoria Station, which also forms the polling district boundary.
13. All electors in polling district CHA to the east vote in the Churchill Gardens Youth Club and to the west in CHB polling district at St Barnabas School. Disability access into the school is currently limited.
14. At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals included a proposal to look at the CHB polling district provision on the basis of St Barnabas School not providing disabled access. A suggestion was received that in respect of

CHA polling district, Churchill Gardens Residents Hall be used instead of Churchill Gardens Youth Club. Officers visited the area and found that the Residents Hall is closer to the main roads and bus stops than is the Youth Club. This closer proximity will make it easier for elderly and disabled voters to vote. Officers walked down Glasgow Terrace, just off 137 Lupus Street and where City West Homes South Area Service Centre is located, and found the Residents Hall straight ahead. The big hall in the building is perfectly sized-CHA has three polling stations/issuing tables. The only drawback being that there are 7 or so steps leading into the big hall. Although there is a wheelchair lift- officers are of the opinion that polling place staff do not need to make use of it- polling staff will immediately be aware of a wheelchair voter at the top of the stairs and will be able to take the ballot papers and ballot box to the voter.

15. The Residents Hall is only 3 or so minutes walk (for a non elderly voter), from the Youth Club and therefore most of the concerns in respect of not wishing to confuse voters through changing their polling place may not arise. It is recommended that the polling place for CHA polling district be re-designated as Churchill Gardens Residents Hall, Churchill Gardens Estate.
16. It was also suggested that, in terms of CHA polling district provision, officers look at the Thamesbank Centre, Turpentine Lane, SW1V 4BD. Officers visited the Centre and could not find any obvious benefits in using it which override those benefits provided through the Residents Hall being in such close proximity to the Youth Club. The Centre is also closer to the edge of the polling district and away from the main concentration of voters.
17. In terms of CHB, and the want of disabled access at St Barnabas School, a suggestion was received that officers look at using the small courtyard outside the side entrance to St Barnabas Church just for disabled voters who cannot gain entry to the main polling place – in order that they are not seen to be voting in public when the Presiding Officer takes the ballot boxes and ballot papers out to the voter. Officers have written to the school to find out if this is possible and the head teacher has advised that the courtyard does not belong to the school- officers will therefore liaise with the churchwardens. A better solution and one offered by the head teacher is that the school opens the playground gates. There is a ramp in the playground leading to a small lobby area that might be helpful in case of rain. The head teacher has advised that this area has been used in the past for disabled voters. As the playground door is right next to the main school door, it will probably be easier for the staff at the polling station to manage, rather than taking people along the road to the Church courtyard. Polling station staff will be instructed accordingly.

## **6. Harrow Road**

18. All three polling districts in the ward have clear boundaries and well located polling places – HRA (Emmanuel Church Hall), HRB (Methodist Church Hall, Fernhead Road ) and HRC (St Peter's Primary School).

19. At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals did not include any proposals for change. Suggestions were received that HRA polling place be changed from Emmanuel Church Hall to Queen Elizabeth School and that HRC polling place be changed from St Peter's Primary School on Elgin Avenue to St Peter's Church.
20. Representation was also received that the current polling places for HRA and HRC should be retained as Emmanuel Church (HRA) is prominently located on Harrow Road and both the HRA and HRC polling places are very well known buildings in their areas.
21. There was also a comment made in respect of HRA Emmanuel Church Hall being used and religious sensitivities attached to voting in churches or church halls- the comment being that voters did not appear to see this as an issue which would prevent them from voting in person at their designated polling place.
22. Officers visited Emmanuel Church Hall, 389E Harrow Road which is the designated polling place for HRA. Officers then visited Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School, Kennet Road to ascertain if the suggested alternative could be a viable replacement for Emmanuel Church Hall. The Church Hall is well positioned in the polling district as it is on Harrow Road which is a well known road in the area and the church hall also has good disability access.
23. Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee School is on Kennet Road which is behind Harrow Road and it is not clear where the entrance to the school is. This could cause access issues and confusion to electors who may not be aware of the school or its location. Using a school instead of a church hall would also cause disruption to parents and electors if the school were to close. It is recommended that Emmanuel Church Hall should remain the polling place for HRA.
24. In respect of HRC polling district St Peter's Primary School is currently used as the polling place. In order to reduce disruption to schools other locations were sought as alternatives. St Peter's Church on Elgin Avenue was suggested as a possible alternative. The church is geographically central to the polling district and offers disability access. Access could not be gained to the church hall as the vicar is currently away- so no firm conclusions could be drawn by the end date for this review. Officers will make arrangements to visit the church to carry out a site inspection.

## **7. Hyde Park**

25. The ward currently has two polling districts with long-established polling places – HPA (St James and St John School Nursery – previously St James and St Michael's School Nursery ) and HPB (St John's Parish Hall ). As more residential properties are being built in the northern part of the ward within the Paddington redevelopment and the electorate increases, there were discussions at previous polling district and polling place reviews as to whether a justification could be found for a third polling district and a new polling place

north of Praed Street. Comments and suggestions of possible polling places were invited although it is not proposed to make any changes at this review.

26. At consultation. No suggestions were received and the Returning Officer's initial proposals did not include any proposals for change

## **8. Knightsbridge & Belgravia**

27. The ward is well-served by three polling districts and polling places – KBA (St Paul's Hall), KBB (Royal Geographical Society) and KBC (St Peter's Church Hall). The Church Hall is on the very edge of the polling district so not ideally geographically located, but is a well-known building. St Peter's School in Ebury Street was used at elections before the 2011 Referendum.
28. At consultation. No suggestions were received. The Returning Officer's initial proposals included a proposal that KBC polling place provision be looked at on the basis that St Peter's Church Hall, 119 Eaton Square is on the edge of the polling district.

Officers visited the KBC polling district area and could not find a building better suited to being a polling place than the one currently in use.

## **9. Lancaster Gate**

29. The ward has three polling districts, with two of the three, LGA and LGB having long-standing polling places – LGA (St Mathew's Church ), LGB (St James & St John Primary School). LGC ( Hallfield Primary School, Hallfield Estate) replaced Pickering Hall, Hallfield Estate, at the 2011 review. The first two polling places have inadequate disability access, but are currently the best locations that have been identified. It is proposed that Hallfield School continue to be the polling place for LGC polling district.
30. At consultation. No suggestions for change were received. The Returning Officer's initial proposals included a proposal to look at polling place provision in LGA and LGB polling districts on the basis of want of disability access.
31. In respect of LGA polling district, officers visited St Sophia's Greek Cathedral in Moscow Road and found that there were 7/8 steps leading to a hall in the basement.
32. Officers also visited the currently designated polling place for LGA polling district, St Matthew's Church and spoke to the reverend. The reverend advised that the church would be getting 2 detachable disability ramps for their front steps by the end of 2014.
33. In respect of LGB polling district and the currently designated polling place – St James and St John Primary School, Craven Terrace- officers were advised that there will be development works. The school advised that they are envisaging two phases of development. The first phase to be completed by January 2015 – and which will involve one of the classrooms which is

normally used at elections. The second phase of development will involve the basement of the school and may impact on access arrangements. A start date for this second phase of phase is yet to be confirmed, but may be in spring 2015. As works may be in progress in May 2015, officers have looked into contingency planning for an alternative polling place.

34. One of the places visited for contingency planning purposes in LGB polling district was the York Hall, in the Lancaster Hall Hotel, 35 Craven Terrace, There is a main entrance and an emergency exit into/out of the York Hall. Both the access points have disability access and the hall has disabled toilets. Officers raised concerns as to how well known the Lancaster Hall Hotel is in the area and whether voters will have exclusive access to the polling place. Officers will make a provisional booking of York Hall for next year's General Election, which they can cancel nearer the time if the school is proven to be ready to house the poll.

## **10. Little Venice**

35. The ward and polling district boundaries were unchanged in 2002, so electors benefit from a long-established pattern of no change. The polling districts are LVA (St Joseph's School), LVB (St Saviour's School) and LVC (Paddington Green Primary School). Paddington Green Primary School has been used since the 2012 London Mayor and GLA election – prior to that St Mary's Church Hall was used. All three polling places have disability access.

At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals did not include any proposals for change.

36. A suggestion was received that the Catholic Apostolic Church, Maida Avenue be looked as a possible polling place for LVC polling district, instead of Paddington Green Primary School, on the basis of not using schools wherever possible and the long driveway to the school entrance.
37. Officers visited the Catholic Apostolic Church and found that the church is not too far from the current polling place- approximately a 3-5 minute walk. The church is set just back from the street so is clearly visible and has disabled access. Officers have spoken with a church representative and discussed availability and which areas of the church, if any, may be used. The church representative has agreed to discuss the matter at a meeting with church trustees, which is scheduled to take place in November. The church has listed status.

## **11. Maida Vale**

38. The ward and polling district boundaries were similarly unchanged in 2002. The polling districts are MVA (Maida Centre) and MVB (Essendine Primary School). It has been stated at previous polling district and polling place reviews that the ward may benefit from a third polling district and polling place if a suitable location could be identified in the south-east part of the ward below Elgin Avenue. It is not currently proposed that such a change be made.

39. At consultation. A suggestion was received that, as the Maida Centre (MVA) is being redeveloped, consideration should be given to using St George's School in Lanark Road or St Augustine's Primary School or the Children's Centre next door.
40. In respect of MVB a suggestion was made that the City of Westminster College on Elgin Avenue could be used if building works were completed and the College reopened well in advance of the General Election.
41. A further suggestion was received that an extra polling district be created with a new polling place, the Portuguese Synagogue on the corner of Ashworth Road and Lauderdale Road, being designated.
42. As part of two separate proposals suggestions were also made that the Paddington Sports Club on Castellain Road would make a good polling place.
43. In respect of MVA polling district, officers visited the area to ascertain if there was a suitable replacement for the Maida Centre.
44. Officers visited the Training House Gym, Westminster Education Support Centre and Paddington Youth Club which are next to the Maida Centre. All three sites were contained within the same building with various entrances which could prove to be confusing to electors even with appropriate signage. As such the sites are not suitable to house a polling place.
45. Officers then visited St George's School, Lanark Road as was suggested in a few of the consultation responses. St George's School has been used in previous years and would be a suitable replacement for the Maida Centre due to its location and history as a polling place.
46. St Augustine's Primary which was also suggested as a possible replacement for the Maida Centre is not ideally situated. St Augustine's Primary is at the northern most point of the polling district and would be very inconvenient for electors who reside in the south of the polling district.
47. In respect of MVB polling district, officers visited a number of locations to see if an alternative polling place could be found. Paddington Sports Club on Castellain Road was visited and although in very many respects it provides an alternative to using Essendine School there are a number of significant disbenefits to its use. Despite its central location within the polling district, the entrance to Paddington Sports Club off the street is slightly secluded and may cause difficulties for electors. The reception itself is quite a long way from the street entrance. Electors would need to pass tennis courts to access the polling place and the reception itself is not immediately visible. There is a fear that the sports club would be difficult to access for residents.
48. Officers also visited the Portuguese Synagogue on Lauderdale Road. The Portuguese Synagogue is currently in MVA, and borders the polling district MVB and would therefore be inconvenient for electors due to its location. It is

not proposed to make any changes to polling district boundaries to accommodate the synagogue's use as a polling place.

49. Officers also visited the Westminster College on Elgin Avenue. Although the site is ideally located it is currently a guardianship and there are no clear indications when the College will be ready to be inspected by officers.

## **12. Marylebone High Street**

50. The polling places within the ward are not ideal. MHA (St Vincent's School) is on the edge and not central to the polling district. MHB's polling place (Central Synagogue) has steps and so has no disability access. MHC ( The Hellenic Centre ) replaced St Marylebone School as the polling place for this polling district at the combined elections on 6 May 2010. It has been suggested at a previous review that the Hellenic Centre also be used as the polling place for MHA on cost grounds as it is big enough. It is though proposed that separate polling places be retained for MHA and MHC so as to minimise disruption and confusion for voters.

At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals included proposals to look at the provision provided in MHA and MHB polling districts on the basis of location in the polling district and disability access reasons respectively.

51. A suggestion was received that MHA and MHC could be served from just one polling place, at the Hellenic Centre.
52. A further suggestion was received that All Souls Club House could serve as the polling place for MHB, albeit that it is on the edge of the ward.
53. In respect of the MHA polling district, officers visited a number of sites- The Wigmore Hall (although there are currently no events listed for 7 May 2015 this may not be the case if a check is made closer to polling day), The Holiday Inn in Welbeck Street( exclusivity of access and 6 steps leading into the premises), the School of Economic Science at 11 Mandeville Place ( steps and not well enough known and students arriving for classes), and the Methodist Church in Hinde Street (7 steps)- none of which were deemed suitable for the reasons shown.
54. In respect of the MHB polling district, officers visited the Hallam Conference Centre, 44 Hallam Street and found there to be 3 large steps leading into the building. The Synagogue is relatively better located being closer to the main road and closer to bus stops. All Souls Clubhouse, 141 Cleveland Street has good disabled access but is situated at the edge of the polling district on the border with LB Camden and its use may therefore cause a great deal of confusion amongst voters.

### **13. Queen's Park**

55. This ward benefits from having four polling districts with four relatively newly identified and well appointed polling places so no changes were contemplated - QPA (St Jude's Church Hall), QPB ( Beethoven Centre), QPC (New Avenues Youth Project) and QPD (St Luke's Church Hall). A suggestion has been made at previous reviews that QPD could go to/merge into QPB if numbers of polling places are to be reduced. This was not recommended as a change of this type would prompt redrawing of all polling district boundaries within this ward.

At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals did not include any proposals for change.

56. A suggestion was received that the number of polling districts in Queen's Park be reduced from four to three. As part of this suggestion it was mooted that in QPB polling district the Dorothy Gardner Nursery could be used instead of the Beethoven Centre and that in QPC, New Avenues Youth Project in Third Avenue could remain as the polling place for the polling district
57. A consultation response was received which expressed a view that the current four polling stations in the ward work well and should not be changed and that reducing the number of polling places could make it more difficult for some people to vote which would be a backward step-and that the four polling places in the ward reflect the geography of the ward..
58. Officers also noted that any changes made to polling districts will also impact on arrangements in place for the Queen's Park Community Council. Elections to the Queen's Park Community Council on 22 May 2014 were held on the basis of three Community Councillors being elected to represent each of four Community Council wards- the areas of the Community Council wards being the same as the Queen's Park ward polling districts.

### **14. Regent's Park**

59. No change was contemplated for this ward's three polling districts in terms of the polling places used at the 22 May 2014 elections – RPA (Village Club, Allitsen Road), RPB (Rudolf Steiner House) or RPC (Liberal Jewish Synagogue). Although Rudolf Steiner House is on the edge of the polling district it is geographically well located for the bulk of electors within the district. The space used as a polling place at Rudolf Steiner House is not ideal and as part of this review electoral services staff will seek to identify whether an area on the ground floor of Rudolf Steiner can be used in future. (NB The Royal College of Gynaecologists has been used as an RPB polling place at an election before 2010).

At Consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals did not include any proposals for change.



60. A suggestion was received that in RPA polling district there should be a change to polling place made from The Village Club in Allitsen Road to Barrow Hill School on visibility and access grounds.
61. Officers visited the RPA district designated polling place at the Village Club, (Behind Swallow House) in Allitsen Road, NW8 7BD and found there to be no real issues in terms of visibility and access. The Village Club is immediately visible as you enter through an archway on Allitsen Road- with a nursery to the left and the Village Club to the right. Although the name plaque on the Village Club front wall is somewhat indistinct there will be a polling place sign supplied for polling station staff to put up. Further thought needs to be given as to where a sign is put up in Allitsen Road. Officers would not wish to use a school where a suitable good alternative exists-as it does here.

### **15. St James's**

62. This ward has a wide geographical spread so has 4 rather than the average 3 polling districts to improve accessibility to electors, The polling places for SJA (St Clement Danes School) and SJD (Abbey Centre) polling districts are geographically centrally located. The polling places for SJB (Charing Cross Library) and SJC (Methodist Central Hall) are on the margin of their polling districts, but nevertheless are close to the main concentration of electors in both districts. Charing Cross Library has no disabled access and elections staff have been advised of other issues, including issues attached to exclusivity of access.
63. At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals included a strong proposal to seek to identify whether an alternative polling place could be found to Charing Cross Library in SJB polling district, for disability access and exclusivity of access reasons. No suggestions were received at consultation.
64. Officers visited the SJB polling district to look for alternatives to Charing Cross Library. Officers walked the area but were not able to find a suitable alternative. As was the case at the 2011 polling district and polling place review only St Martin's Crypt ( St Martin- in -the- Fields ), Trafalgar Square offered any polling place possibilities. Access via a long spiral staircase would in all likelihood dissuade disabled voters from voting and would not permit elections staff to put in place alternative arrangements for the assistance of voters with disabilities i.e. through the use of door chimes. Other issues would include signage, where tellers should sit, and security issues attached to non voter visitors. The recommendation is therefore to retain Charing Cross Library as the polling place for SJB polling district and to tighten up the access arrangements to the library while the poll is in progress.

## **16. Tachbrook**

65. All three polling places in the ward are long-standing and centrally located within their polling districts – TBA (St Saviour’s Church ); TBB (Westminster Cathedral School) and TBC (Lillington Gardens Estate Hall). The Estate Hall is located in the middle of the Estate so requires more directional signage for residents unfamiliar with its location.

At consultation. The Returning Officer’s initial proposals included a proposal to look at whether better polling place provision could be found in TBC polling district- where Lillington Gardens Estate Hall is used and where signage has been an issue at previous elections.

66. Officers visited the area and found that there are many official estate signs pointing in the general direction of the Hall and which can all be seen from all entrances into the estate (Entrances are on Moreton Street, Tachbrook Street and Charlwood Street). Although there are signs on the periphery of the estate once you walk into the estate, there are many open areas and no further signs pointing to the Hall. There is a complex set of walkways and open areas that lead from one block of flats to another and it is hard to find the Community Hall as it is underneath Morgan House. It is advised that officers look into how the signage to the polling place can be improved upon prior to the General Election taking place.
67. As alternatives to the current provision in TBC polling district officers visited a number of sites. Principal among them was St James the Less Church in Moreton Street. Officers spoke to the reverend. The church has 2 halls, one on the ground floor and one on the first floor. Both are currently under renovation so officers were not able to gain access but were advised that each hall holds a capacity of 80 people. The ground floor hall has disabled access. Officers were advised that building works would be completed by the General Election but there is obviously a concern that if the building works take longer than expected that this will present a real problem in respect of election administration and conveying clear messages to voters before the election. It is recommended therefore that officers look at this Church again as a possible polling place for TBC polling district for elections after the General Election.

## **17. Vincent Square**

68. All three polling places are reasonably well located within each of the polling districts – VSA (Millbank Academy); VSB (Hide Tower Hall) and VSC (Hinsley Room, Morpeth Terrace).

At consultation. The Returning Officer’s initial proposals did not include any proposals for change. No suggestions were received at consultation.

## **18. Warwick**

69. The polling place for WAB (Dryburgh Hall) is well located. The other two polling places for WAA (Holy Apostles Church Hall) and WAC (Victoria Library) are on the edge of their polling districts but are the best available locations within the districts.

At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals included a proposal to look at the polling place provision for WAA and WAC polling districts on the basis that the polling places were on the edge of their respective polling districts.

No other suggestions were received.

70. Officers visited the WAA polling district and could not find any suitable alternative locations, especially given that the WAA polling place will need enough space to house 3 polling stations. Officers also visited the WAC polling district and could not find any suitable alternative locations, especially given how well known Victoria Library is by residents living in that area. Both buildings have very good disabled access

## **19. West End**

71. This ward is geographically large and so is well served with four polling places. WEA (St Anne's Church Hall) and WEC (Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street) are adequate. WEB (Dance Works, Balderton Street) has inadequate disabled access. At the polling district and polling place review in 2011 the WED polling place was changed from All Souls School in Foley Street to the Fitzrovia Community Centre in Foley Street (to avoid closure of the school on polling day and to provide disabled access).

At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals included a proposal to look at whether better polling place provision can be found for WEB polling district, partly on the basis that Dance Works in Balderton Street does not provide disability access.

72. A consultation response was received that the polling place provision in WEB polling district was less than satisfactory and that not only is there the issue of disabled access which is non-existent but also the fact that there is a sharing of the facility with dance classes throughout the day, entered by the same entrances. A suggestion was received that officers should consider the following sites - The Ukrainian Cathedral; The Territorial Army building in Davies Street; and whether a room in the new Beaumont Hotel on the ground floor would be suitable. A further suggestion was made that there may be an opportunity to amalgamate north and south Mayfair into a single venue in or around Grosvenor Square.
73. Officers visited the area. The Ukrainian Cathedral has 8 large steps. Disabled access was also identified as an issue in respect of the Cathedral at previous polling district and polling place reviews.

74. In respect of The Territorial Army building in Davies Street it was found that the entrance to numbers 52-54 Davies Street has no indication of what the building is used for- there is a flag attached to the front of the building but this is not sufficient for identification purposes. Number 56 has the inscription 'Queen Victoria's Rifles'. There are steps leading into both entrances-five steps into numbers 52-54 and three steps into number 56.
75. In respect of the Beaumont Hotel, officers found that there was no ground floor room available. The only room available was the 'Lotus Room' which was accessed down a flight of stairs. Those voters not able to use the stairs would be required to get to the Lotus room by lift. Voters would have to walk through the hotel reception to get to the stairs leading to the Lotus Room which could cause confusion as to who were hotel guests and who were voters. Also in the basement there is a hotel gym which could cause issues in terms of security. Polling station staff based in the Lotus Room would not be able to see voters entering the hotel and would not be in a position to ensure that voters were not wandering about into other parts of the hotel. The hotel also had no name visible from the street and therefore officers were only able to identify the hotel by asking the concierge outside the hotel if they were at the correct address. Claridges Hotel, Davies Street was deemed to be too expensive and there were all sorts of other considerations around security and exclusivity of access.
76. Officers were of the opinion that although Dance Works in Balderton Street is not ideal that it should continue to be used as a polling place on the basis that voters have voted there at recent elections and are used to the arrangements. If better provision can be found between now and the General Election then officers will make the necessary changes.

## **20. Westbourne**

77. This ward was described in the Returning Officer's initial proposals as being relatively well served with its three polling places – WBA (Warwick Community Centre), WBB (Bayswater Childrens Centre) and WBC (The Stowe Centre). The Stowe Centre was briefly replaced at a previous election, while undergoing refurbishment, by Edward Wilson School. Suggestions have been made at previous polling district and polling place reviews that the Westbourne Ward is of a size and shape which does not lend itself to having three polling districts and that it should have four polling districts. This has raised attendant issues as to where the existing three polling places should best be placed within the ward. It is proposed that a fourth polling district should not be created as the solution appears to lie in changing ward boundaries at the next review of ward boundaries.

At consultation. The Returning Officer's initial proposals did not include any proposals for change.

78. At consultation a suggestion was received that the WBA polling place be changed to Maida Vale library, Sutherland Avenue and that the WBC polling place be changed to St Mary Magdalene's Church, Rowington Close (currently located in WBA)
79. A further suggestion was received that the boundary between the WBA and WBC polling districts be changed but in so doing that the WBB polling district boundaries ( and polling place) should remain as they are. As part of this suggestion it was suggested that the polling place for WBC polling district should become the Warwick Community Centre (which is the currently designated polling place for WBA) and that the WAES Amberly Road building should become the polling place for WBA polling district. The benefits of the change would include voters on the Brindley and Warwick Estates voting at the same polling place- with the Grand Union Canal as the northern boundary- and a more even distribution of registered electors across each of the three polling districts within the ward.
80. This suggestion to change the WBA and WBC polling district boundaries was strongly supported by others. The suggestions made by others also included a polling place change proposal for WBA polling place to be the Westminster Adult Education Centre, with our Lady of Lourdes & St Vincent de Paul as a reserve option –and the WBC polling place to be the Warwick Community Centre ( thus changing that Centre from a WBA to WBC polling place).
81. As part of the WBA and WBC polling district change suggestions other comments were received in terms of the suitability of other buildings as polling places-, Our Lady of Lourdes & St Vincent de Paul on Harrow Road , and Maida Vale Library for WBA polling district and St Mary Magdalene's Church for WBC polling district

Officers made the following site inspections in respect of a polling place for WBA polling district:

82. Maida Vale Library- The building is geographically located in the north east corner of the polling district. The main entrance has a large flight of stairs although disabled access (a lift to the upper floor) is available through another entrance on Shirland Avenue. On taking a look inside there is no clearly defined area which could be used for polling. Almost all the book shelves are bolted to the ground and the surrounding space is too small. Officers did not deem the library suitable to be used for voting purposes.
83. Our Lady of Lourdes & St Vincent de Paul Church Hall-The church is situated in the very northwest corner of the polling district currently, a 10/12 minute walk from Warwick Community Centre. The postal address is 337 Harrow Road W9 3RB and the church can be approached from East Gate Western Road junction, near Westbourne Park tube station. The hall is on the right hand side as the church grounds are entered- the church is straight ahead. There is good access into the hall-with just a very small ridge evident upon entering the hall. If deemed necessary-although officers believe it will not be

necessary- wheelchair users can be directed to the main entrance to the church and then right and right again into the voting area. The hall appears large enough to accommodate three polling stations. The hall was also suggested at the 2011 review as an alternative to the community centre.

84. Westminster Adult Education Service-Currently located in a temporary building in Lord Hills Road, the site manager stated that the main building is being refurbished and this work will not be completed until January 2015 at the earliest. Another visit would need to be arranged to assess suitability. Although the site manager was confident that the place would meet all polling place requirements and is keen for officers to visit and inspect next year, it was not considered proper to make a firm commitment and designate the building as the polling place without first inspecting it after all works are complete. The WAES building is about a two/three minute walk from the Harrow Road and clearly visible from the street. It has the potential to be a good alternative for the Warwick Community Centre.

WBC polling district

85. St Mary Magdalene Church-The church is located on the south east side of WBA polling district, on the outer edge of a housing estate. If the boundary between the two polling districts were changed it would fall within WBC. However it is not a suitable replacement as it has a set of large steps leading into the entrance with no other disabled access.
86. As part of a more detailed analysis of WBA and WBC polling place provision at the elections on 22 May 2014, attached as Appendix F and Appendix G, are the polling place reports completed by Presiding Officers on polling day. The polling places used on 22 May 2014 were deemed to provide good provision by those who worked there.

## **21. A whole of Westminster response**

87. A response was received expressing the view that it appears that it is considerably easier for some voters to reach their polling places than others with many places positioned on the edge of polling districts and that this has a direct impact on demographic fairness. The response further suggested that the decision to locate polling places should be based on the distance that each elector needs to travel to, rather than population density, as the number of electors in an area can be dealt with by the number of booths and personnel in the place- ease of voting being a significant contributor to turnout.
88. The Returning Officer's initial proposals did seek to identify those polling places which are close to the edge of a boundary and make alternative provision if more suitable polling places could be found. It was however decided that a discrete piece of work should be commissioned to look at this suggestion in more detail as the suggestion was an interesting and important one which was applicable across all wards.

89. This work is presented as Appendix H. The work involved applying an average walking speed analysis for those voters over the age of 65 to the current polling district and polling place provision. There were a number of layers to the work which also included incorporating an analysis of % of population over the age of 65 from the 2011 census. In order to arrive at a starting point officers took the view that not more than 10 minutes walking time to get to a polling place was 'reasonable'( for clarity we have presented an over 15 minute analysis.)
90. From the work it is evident that there are very few pockets around which voters aged over 65 will need to walk more than 15 minutes to get to their polling place. These pockets are around St. James's, Knightsbridge & Belgravia and the St John's Wood area in the far north of the Borough.
91. As a result of this work officers are better placed to understand what provision may need to be made in future and will be better able to incorporate an extra layer of consideration into any future review. Using the current analysis- where medium and, in Knightsbridge and Belgravia's case, high levels of persons aged over 65 live- who are over 15 minutes walk from a polling place- it could therefore be argued at future reviews that these are the areas where a strong case can be made for a change of polling place. A further step to this analysis could be to produce a map of the area's best locations to locate a new polling place. Priority could be given to council owned properties to keep down costs.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 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.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1 These are set out in the body of the report.

#### **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 There is an opportunity to review polling district and place provision for electors in advance of the General Election on 7 May next year, and the Committee is asked to consider the recommendations made in the report.

**If you have any questions about this report, or wish to inspect one of the background papers, please contact:  
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