

<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARDS:</b> All
<b>REPORT TITLE</b> Polling District Review and Update on the Elections Act 2022	
<b>REPORT OF</b> Borough Solicitor	
<b>FOR SUBMISSION TO</b> Audit and Corporate Governance Committee	<b>DATE</b> 17 November 2022
<p><b>SUMMARY OF REPORT</b></p> <p>The report invites the Committee to comment on the proposed changes to some polling places (Polling Stations) in the Borough after feedback from the last local elections, noting that the final decision on polling places is delegated to the Returning Officer Jenny Rowlands. In addition, the report seeks to update members on the main provisions of the Elections Act 2022.</p> <p><b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 – ACCESS TO INFORMATION</b> No documents were used in this report that are required to be listed.</p> <p><b>CONTACT OFFICER</b> Andrew Maughan Borough Solicitor Law and Governance 5 Pancras Square London, N1C 4AG Telephone: 020 7974 5656 Email: <a href="mailto:andrew.maughan@camden.gov.uk">andrew.maughan@camden.gov.uk</a></p>	
<p><b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p> <p>Audit and Corporate Governance Committee is asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Comment on the proposed changes to the polling places outlined in the report; and</li> <li>ii) Note and comment on the changes contained within the Elections Act 2022.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Signed:</b></p>  <p>Borough Solicitor</p> <p><b>Date:</b> 8<sup>th</sup> November 2022</p>	

## 1. Introduction

In January 2022, the new Ward Boundary arrangements came into force and the new wards and polling districts were used for the Local Council elections held on 5 May 2022. After these elections officers reviewed all the changes and, using elector, polling staff and Councillor feedback / consultation, assessed whether they were satisfactory or not. There were four Polling Districts where feedback suggested that improvements could be made to make the voting experience better for our electors. Below are the areas that were identified, details of the consultation and the subsequent proposals for change.

## 2. Proposed changes to Polling Places in the Borough

### 2.1 Hampstead Town: AA, AB, AC

There have been two elections this year in the Hampstead Town Ward, on 5 May and 7 July, and the statistics show that the new smaller Polling District AB only had a turnout of 177 and 135 electors respectively. The Polling Station is at Fitzjohn's Primary School, which has to be closed on polling day or measures put in place to secure the area during school hours. Given the number of in person voters going to the station we have assessed its performance and, after consultation with the local Councillors, have decided that this is no longer a viable Polling Station.

**Proposal:** move electors in current AB into AA to vote at Burgh House.

**Councillors for the Ward were consulted and agreed with the proposal**

### 2.2 West Hampstead EA, EB, EC

In the recent Ward changes, it was agreed that old Polling Districts EC and ED would be amalgamated back into one Polling District (2014 arrangement). This proved not to be a satisfactory arrangement for electors due to the location of available Polling Stations.

**Proposal:** to revert to the 2019 Review arrangement, cutting EC polling district along the line of the Railway Line.

Using Brondesbury Christian Centre for Polling District EC and St James's Church Hall for Polling District ED.

**Councillors for the Ward were consulted and agreed with the proposal**

### 2.3 Camden Square SA, SB,

We are aware that in Camden Square the arrangements for SB ward were challenging, with the Polling Station in May being Agar Grove TRA room, which worked well for the Agar Grove residents, but not for the Maiden Lane Residents. Although signposts were put out, that is not suitable for each

election due to the distance being covered between the stations and the risk of signs being removed overnight.

**Proposal:** to split Polling District SB into two Polling districts SB and SC along the railway line. This will make two smaller Polling Districts around the two estates.

**Councillors for the Ward were consulted and agreed with the proposal**

## **2.4 Kings Cross PA, PB, PC, PD**

We are aware that in Kings Cross the area that is now PD and contains Barker Drive & Camley Street area does not have its own Polling Station. In the May elections, electors had to go to the N1C Centre, Handyside Street and it has been suggested that this was inconvenient for Electors.

**Proposal:** After extensive investigation and visiting the area, the proposed solution is that a Porta Cabin / temporary polling Station is located in the area. Two potential areas are big enough and easy to find

- a. Located on the Camley Street itself, between Weavers Way entrance and Barker Drive entrance. The pavement there is wide enough to have the Porta Cabin open onto the pavement. There are some logistical issues in terms of permission to park there and electricity.
- b. To put a Porta Cabin with disabled access in the car park of Camden Garden Centre, just on the right hand side of the car park. This would be subject to the agreement of the Garden Centre – hire of that space and running of an electricity cable from the Garden Centre.

**Option b Agreed by Councillors for the Ward**

## **3. Election Act 2022 changes.**

### **Main provisions**

3.1 The Elections Act 2022, which received Royal Assent in April 2022, makes a range of changes, which will impact on electoral administrators, campaigners and voters in 2023. Whilst the detail relating to the implementation of the measures in the Act, including the content of the secondary legislation, is still to be confirmed, officers wanted to provide some information on what changes will be in force for any elections in May 2023.

3.1.1 In relation to disabled voters:-

- a. Disabled voters can choose anyone who is over 18 to accompany them in the polling station, to help them to vote
- b. Requirement for Returning Officers to take all reasonable steps to provide equipment to support disabled voters to vote independently and in secret at the polling station, and in doing so to have regard to any relevant guidance issued by the Electoral Commission

- 3.1.2 New requirement for voters at polling stations to show photographic identification before they receive their ballot paper. Anyone who does not have one of the required forms of photographic identification will be able to apply for a photographic electoral identity document, to be issued free of charge by their local Electoral Registration Officer.
- 3.1.3 Change to the voting system for mayoral elections (Greater London Authority Elections in 2024) from supplementary vote to First Past the Post. i.e. single vote for one candidate instead of a first and second choice.

## **3.2 Initial Planning**

- 3.2.1 We already supply Enlarged Ballot Papers and Tactile Voting Devices, and allow companions to assist disabled voters to vote, as well as Presiding Officers assisting electors in our Polling Stations. We will continue to supply these items and use the processes we have in place. Any additional guidance and recommendations resulting from the Election Act we also be implemented at our Polling Stations.
- 3.2.2 Our understanding in relation to Voter ID is that there will be a list of acceptable photo Identification e.g. Passport, Drivers licences, Government issued Residency permit, Transport for London bus passes. This information has already been posted on the Council's Election webpage.
- 3.2.3 If an elector does not have any acceptable photo ID they will be able to apply via a portal for a Voter ID Certificate, and will have to upload a photograph as part of the process. They will be able to request a Voter ID Certificate up to 6 days before an election. These will be actioned by the Electoral Services Team then, once validated, produced by a third Party company and sent out from them via Royal Mail. The Voter Certificate will be an A4 document printed on special paper and will be valid for ten years and will remain valid even if an elector moves house or out of the Borough.
- 3.2.4 Initial discussions and sight of the new portal has shown that this will increase the work of the Electoral Services Team as all applications will have to be verified by the Team and, if rejected, additional documentary evidence will be requested.
- 3.2.5 Within a Polling Station, staff will have to check the voter ID, and record anyone who comes to vote without ID or refuses to provide ID. In addition, a separate area will be required for electors who require privacy to have their ID checked. To deal with this extra work and avoid delays and queues, an additional Poll Clerk will be required in each station to deal with checking Voter ID. Extra staff were provided at the 2021 Elections to cope with additional measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic, and so we are confident that this model will work and is achievable.

- 3.2.6 The Electoral Services Office will be able to produce temporary Voter ID Certificates up to 5pm on Polling Day in cases where ID has been lost or does not arrive.
- 3.2.7 Previously at the Greater London Authority (GLA) elections the Mayor of London has been elected via a supplementary vote system, i.e. a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> choice vote. In 2021, it is suggested this caused confusion as the list of candidates meant there had to be two columns of names. The Mayor of London Ballot for 2024 will now be a 'First past the post' ballot which means that each elector has just one vote.
- 3.2.8 For all of the above changes we will be undertaking a Borough wide engagement and communications plan from January 2023, using all channels of media and communication so that electors are aware of the changes and have sufficient time to apply for a Voter Certificate if required.

### **3.3 Future Changes post May 2023**

- 3.3.1 Within the Elections Act, there are further changes that will come into effect after the May 2023 Polls. They are:
- Abolition of the 15 year rule for overseas voters. This is the length of time they can register as an overseas elector after they have left the UK. There will no longer be time limit.
  - Absent Votes to be refreshed every 3 years, which is a change from the current 5 years.
  - Absent vote applications to be able to be made via an online portal
  - Limit on the number of postal votes a person can hand in at a Polling Station.
  - It will become an offence for Political Parties to handle completed postal vote packs unless they are those of their own or a family member.
  - Change in the number of electors an elector can be proxy for.
- 3.3.2 As previously mentioned we are still awaiting secondary legislation and details on all of these changes. Currently the London Borough of Camden does not have any scheduled elections in 2023, the next scheduled election being the GLA election in May 2024 and a Parliamentary Election in 2024 (unless called before then).

## **4. Environmental Implications**

- 4.1 The usage of buildings as polling stations within the report are for one day only. The environmental impacts are therefore minimal.
- 4.2 The changes brought forward by the Elections Act are not matters over which the Council has influence but it will seek as far as possible to ensure that the processes introduced are paper free.

## **5. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor**

This is the report of the Borough Solicitor and therefore legal comments are contained within the report.

## **6. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services**

- 6.1 It is likely, albeit subject to final negotiation, that the cost of the suggested new polling stations will be similar to that currently incurred. In any event, and while we should seek value for money, the costs of general elections are covered by grants from the Government. Local election costs are met from the Council's own general fund resources.
- 6.2 It appears inevitable that there will be further costs as a result of the changes in the Elections Act, although further detail by way of regulations will be required for these to be costed. The Government has already sent out letters to The Electoral Registration Officer stating that new burdens will be funded by Government Grants for 2023 and 2024, the amount of these will be published by December 2022.

## **7. Appendices**

- Appendix 1 Map of Hampstead Town Ward
- Appendix 2 Map of West Hampstead Ward
- Appendix 3 Map of Camden Square Ward

**REPORT ENDS**