

LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

COUNCIL

DATE: 1 NOVEMBER 2011

**REPORT OF: WORKING PARTY RECOMMENDATIONS
ON THE REVIEW OF POLLING
DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES**

LEAD OFFICER: Acting Electoral Services Manager

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

WARDS: ALL

KEY DECISION: NO

IF YES, IN FORWARD PLAN: NO

For general release

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To outline the recommendations of the Councillors' cross-party Working Group established to review the current borough Polling Districts and Polling Place arrangements and to inform the Council of the responses received from the recent consultation exercise.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.2 The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006 require the authority to review all its polling districts and polling places every four years to ensure that all electors have 'reasonable and accessible facilities for voting as are practicable'.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Council make no change to the current Polling Districts and continue to designate the polling district as the polling place and assess suitability of venue at every election.
- 2.2 That with regard to the two venues listed below, continued attempts be made to secure the premises or suitable alternatives within close proximity for future elections:
- Hampton North Ward – continue to use Hampton Academy as the designated Polling Station for KB Polling District if possible, but if unavailable, use the Council's Newhouse Centre in Buckingham Road.
 - South Twickenham Ward –return to St James Hall if possible for future elections in EA Polling District or identify an alternative venue other than that of St Catherine's used for the 2011 Referendum.

3. DETAILS

- 3.1 Under Section 18A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) the Council is required to divide each parliamentary constituency in the area into polling districts, to designate polling places for those polling districts, and to keep these under review. Electors must be given “such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances”.
- 3.2 A ‘polling district’ is a geographical area which is a sub-division of a ward or constituency, and for each polling district there must be designated a ‘polling place’. This term is not defined in the legislation, but could for example be a public building. The responsibility to designate a polling place is a matter for the council. If no polling place is designated the polling district becomes the polling place, and it has been the Council’s approach for the polling district to be designated as the polling place. Decisions about ‘polling stations’, on the other hand, are for the returning officer to make: the report provides details of these for ease of reference (although for availability reasons this could vary for a particular election).
- 3.3 It has always been the policy to minimise disruption if education premises are used for elections and schools are never requested to close as a result.
- 3.4 It is sometimes necessary to designate the use of temporary polling venues if no suitable permanent polling place can be identified. The number of these has been reduced in recent years to the current four portacabins.
- 3.5 Polling districts and polling places are kept under regular review to ensure they are suitable for use and accessible for voters. As much as is possible, they should be convenient within the polling district concerned and located close to where the majority of the electors in the polling district live. Consideration is also given with regard to electorate allocation and the effect on the rising number of electors who choose to vote by post.
- 3.6 Comments were received from electors on Referendum polling day about disability access at Ham Christian Centre (Ham, Petersham & Richmond Ward - NC) and St Lukes House (Kew Ward – QB) and the general access at St Marks small hall (Hampton Wick Ward -IC). Although no specific action can be taken in these instances, particularly as many venues are not suitable for large motorised mobility vehicles, Poll Staff will continue to be briefed on giving assistance if required by residents with special requirements.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Review Public Consultation from 1 July - 12 August was widely publicised across the Borough, including information materials sent to all libraries and community notice boards. Details were published in the local press and on the Council’s website with the availability to comment on line. Information was available in the Electoral Services Office, Civic Centre and York House and sent to all Councillors, Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Community and Disability groups and included in the LBRUT Senior Manager’s Briefing.
- 4.2 There were five changes to polling stations necessary for the Referendum in May 2011 and 1092 elector voter surveys were received. Results showed 97% agreed / agreed strongly that their polling Station was in a suitable venue. The majority of ‘disagree / strongly disagree’ were due to the temporary change to Scout Hall forced by building work at Waldegrave School (West Twickenham – CC)

5 RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Comments were received from the Richmond Park Labour Party and a local Conservative Ward Chairman. 40 residents responded directly, the majority of whom agreed that their current polling arrangements were satisfactory. Responses were received from community groups and relevant council departments, none of which highlighted any problems or recommended any changes to existing arrangements.
- 5.2 A cross party working group was set up, and met on the 3 August and 7 September 2011 to discuss the Review. Members agreed that the focus of the review should be to maintain existing routines for voters unless a clear, much improved proposal could be made for a particular polling place or district.
- 5.3 After consultation with all interested parties it is recommended that the polling districts and polling places remain unchanged.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Minimal if no changes agreed. Extra publicity and new maps will be needed if changes to polling station venues are required at future elections, but these will as usual be met from within existing budgets.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 This process has followed the Council's policy objective to increase community consultation, participation and democratic accountability.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 New Polling Station venues are selected based on their accessibility and a complete risk assessment of the premises to be used must be carried out. Every Presiding Officer is required to complete a risk assessment and record suggestions and complaints from voters in their log book. These are independently verified by Polling Station Inspectors on the day of use.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT/CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 At each election during the last 8 years, informal surveys of the conditions of all polling stations and access to them have been undertaken and a valuable record base has now been created. These records have been a useful tool in undertaking this latest review. The surveys have principally been used for improving access, but also to identify other issues – the general adequacy of space and the best layout of polling stations, special health and safety checks to be conducted at the premises by the Presiding Officer and personally verified by the Polling Station Inspector.
- 9.2 The Building Maintenance Team supply special signage, auxiliary heating or improved lighting as necessary and also provide furniture or floor covering requirements to improve facilities, special parking or traffic control coning off requirements relating to one off requirements relating to individual polling places.
- 9.3 All Polling Stations must be Disability Discrimination Act compliant. Both the Operations Manager of Richmond Aid and Corporate Equalities and Diversity Manager responded to the consultation and confirmed that they have not received any queries regarding access to polling stations this year or recently.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 No legal implications but review required under Section 18A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended)

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

11.1 N/A

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Polling Places Review Consultation Information Pack
The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary) Regulations 2006
(Statutory Instruments 2006 No 2965)
Referendum Survey May 2011
Cross-party Members' working group minutes August and September
Consultation responses

13. CONTACTS

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