

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Council
Date: Wednesday 23rd November 2022
Report for: Decision
Report of: Sara Todd, Returning Officer

Report Title

Local Authority Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Summary

This report sets out the results of the Returning Officer's review of polling districts and polling places and sets out proposals regarding relocations of polling places and re-designation of polling districts.

The report provide details regarding ward boundaries changes recommended by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) following the completion of a review of Trafford's ward boundaries.

Recommendation(s)

The Council is recommended to: -

- (1) Note that the LGBCE ward boundary recommendations detailed in this report are subject to approval from Parliament;
- (2) Note the outcome of the Local Authority's review of its polling districts and polling places;
- (3) Agree the proposed relocations of polling places as detailed in the report and set out in Appendix A;
- (4) Agree the proposed re-designation of polling districts as detailed in the report and as set out in Appendix B; and
- (5) Delegate authority to the Returning Officer to:
 - 5.1 make further necessary changes to polling places/polling stations that may occur before the elections on 4 May 2023. This includes making changes to any polling place, should it become unavailable, prior to the election – thus allowing the polling place to be changed without full Council approval; and
 - 5.2 make further necessary changes to polling places/polling stations that may occur as a result of changes to the recommendations made by LGBCE and as directed and approved by Parliament.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Please see attached appendices:
Appendix A – Polling Districts and Polling Places Proposals
Appendix B – Maps of New Wards and Polling Districts
Appendix C – List of New Wards and Polling Districts
Appendix D – Consultation Results
- 1.2 Ward boundaries are the responsibility of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). Parliamentary constituency boundaries are the responsibility of the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) and are subject to a separate review process and timetable which is currently taking place. Local Authorities have a duty to complete a review of the boundaries of polling districts within wards every 5 years. The last review of polling districts/polling places undertaken by Trafford, took place in 2019.
- 1.3 Following a review of Trafford electoral arrangements, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) have now finalised recommendations for Trafford Council's electoral arrangements.
- 1.4 The LGBCE's recommendations will now be considered by Parliament. A draft Order (the legal document which brings into force the recommendations) will now be laid before Parliament in November 2022. Subject to parliamentary scrutiny and approval, the new electoral arrangements proposals will need to be implemented and in use for the local elections in May 2023.
- 1.5 Although the LGBCE's Electoral Review of Trafford concluded that the Council should continue to be represented by 63 Councillors in 21 wards, in practice there will be some extensive changes to existing boundaries along with the addition of ward name changes. In preparation for these new ward boundaries coming into effect, it has been necessary to undertake an interim review of the borough's polling districts and polling places to ensure adequate voting arrangements are in place.
- 1.6 All Wards across Trafford have been impacted by the review, apart from Brooklands, Bucklow St. Martins and Ashton Upon Mersey.

2.0 The LGBCE

- 2.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament. The LGBCE is not part of government or any political party. Their main role is to carry out electoral reviews of local authorities throughout England.
- 2.2 It is worth noting that when the LGBCE propose new ward boundaries they do not take into consideration current polling places or stations when carrying out an electoral review; the LGBCE has three main considerations:
 - Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
 - Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.

- Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.
- 2.3 The LGBCE concluded their review and published their final ward boundary recommendations for Trafford on 31st May 2022.
- 2.4 Subject to scrutiny and approval from Parliament, Trafford's ward boundaries will change in line with the LGBCE's recommendations and be in force at the election on 4th May 2023.

3.0 Local Authority Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

- 3.1 Ordinarily, Local Authorities have a duty to complete a review of their polling districts and polling places every 5 years. The last review of polling districts/polling places took place in 2019.
- 3.2 The Local Authority review can only consider the internal boundaries of polling districts within wards. The review is the responsibility of the Council as per the Council's duties under the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide constituencies into polling districts for parliamentary elections and the power to divide wards into polling districts at local government elections.
- 3.3 The Electoral Commission advises that polling districts for UK parliamentary and local government elections should always be the same. It therefore follows that any review of parliamentary polling arrangements should be conducted simultaneously with one of local government arrangements. This approach has been adopted on this occasion and it has been necessary to undertake an interim review of the polling districts across the borough, the sub-areas into which each ward is divided and also the polling places, which are the buildings in which polling stations are located in advance of the compulsory review timescales.
- 3.4 The Local Authority review was driven by the changes proposed by LGBCE to the borough's ward boundaries, on which local government elections in May 2023 are to be based. A key priority of the review, including accessibility of polling stations, was to ensure the boroughs polling districts, post review, are identifiable and understandable meaning they correspond correctly with their parliamentary constituency and correct ballot papers for the electorate.
- 3.5 By completing the review ahead of the mandatory review timetable, we are now in a position to be able to administratively support the alignment of polling districts with wards ahead of the Local Government Elections in May 2023.
- 3.6 As part of the Local Authority review, there was a period of public consultation which took place from the 11th July and ended on 11th August. A second stage consultation took place from 15th August and ended on 14th September. During this time, residents and Members, together with other interested persons and bodies, had the opportunity to make representations.
- 3.7 It is important to note that any work undertaken on existing polling districts had to be done in a manner which was 'mindful' to the current wards/constituencies' boundaries, which our current wards make up.

4.0 Summary of borough wide representations from public consultation

- 4.1 There were 20 respondents to the consultation.
- 4.2 10 respondents found their polling station accessible and suitable for use as a polling station.
- 4.3 Representations were also by to the Returning Officer and some ward Councillors.
- 4.4 A summary of the representations is provided at Appendix D.

Polling Stations: The use of schools

- 4.5 For the purpose of taking the poll in England and Wales, the (Acting) Returning Officer is entitled to use, free of charge, schools maintained or assisted by a local authority as well as those schools that received grants made out of monies provided by Parliament. This includes academies and free schools.
- 4.6 Although one of the aims of the review is to ensure accessible polling stations for the electorate, which most of the consultees confirmed, there was also many suggestions to move away from the use of schools.
- 4.7 Ideally, the council would have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for the electors in the area, however, this is not always the case and there are areas of the borough where schools are the only suitable premises which can accommodate voting.
- 4.8 Where a suitable alternative to a school can be found without disadvantage to the electorate, the (Acting) Returning Officer will, subject to the building being suitable, take steps to move away from using school premises.
- 4.9 Electoral Services Officers work with schools to find solutions to enable schools to remain open while being used as polling stations. In other cases, alternative premises have been explored and utilised where possible.
- 4.10 It should be noted that the use of private premises cannot be guaranteed, especially at unscheduled elections, and the cost of using private premises as opposed to schools is considerably higher.

Polling station changes to altered wards

- 4.11 Where an existing polling district has been split and subsequently that polling district will be in two different wards, the part which has been 'gained' or 'moved wards' proposes a decision to be made as to whether those voters can continue to vote at their currently assigned polling station.
- 4.12 There are instances where this can continue, however, this ultimately depends on the polling station and its suitability to host electors from two different wards with two different ballot papers.

- 4.13 As a general rule of thumb, given the all-out elections next May, we are attempting where possible to keep as much consistency to try and minimise voter confusion.
- 4.14 A communication plan/strategy will involve explaining and writing out to electors to notify them of the changes as well as informing them of changes under the Elections Act 2022 due to come into force.

5.0 Local Authority Review Proposals

- 5.1 After considering representations on the most appropriate polling districts and polling places, the Returning Officer's final proposals are detailed in this report for consideration and approval by Council.
- 5.2 Full details of the Returning Officer's proposals (all wards) with proposed changes can be found in Appendix A.
- 5.2 The maps illustrating the proposed changes can be found at Appendix B.
- 5.3 A key for the all-new wards and polling district references are shown in Appendix C.
- 5.4 In some areas of the borough polling places/districts needed to be changed to take account of the new ward boundaries.
- 5.5 It should be noted that there are no proposals of change in those areas of the borough which are not subject to recommended changes by the LGBCE and in those areas, the current arrangements will remain as is.
- 5.6 Should the Council agree the proposals, details of the new polling places will be made available to the public at Trafford Town Hall and on the Council's website.
- 5.7 The following will also be made available for inspection:
- All correspondence sent to the (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review;
 - All correspondence sent to any person whom the authority contacted because they had particular expertise in relation to access to remises or facilities for disabled people;
 - All representations made by any person in connection with the review;
 - The minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revisions to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review;
 - Details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within its area as a result of the review; and
 - Further information can be found at <https://www.trafford.gov.uk/about-your-council/elections/Polling-District-Review.aspx>