Borough Council - 27 November 2007

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Report by: The Electoral Registration Officer (Director of Legal Services)

Summary
The law requires the Council to carry out a review of the Borough’s polling districts and polling places and to agree any changes before 31 December 2007. This report considers the outcome of the recent review and recommends some changes to polling districts and places for Borough Council’s approval.

1.0 RECOMMENDATION

1.1 To note the outcome of the review and the consultations undertaken;

1.2 To merge polling districts F and FC in the Cranford Ward to form one polling district and to designate Beavers Nursery School, Beavers Lane, Hounslow as the polling place; and

1.3 To designate the following locations as new polling places:
   - The Creche Room, Belvedere House, Lemon Grove, Feltham for polling district DC in the Feltham West Ward
   - The Methodist Church Hall (now known as The Tatta Yoga Church Centre) for polling district IB1 and IB2 in the Heston East Ward
   - The Scout Hut, 100A Lampton Road, Hounslow for polling district IC in the Heston East Ward
   - Grove Road Primary School, Cromwell Road, Hounslow for the polling district NA in the Hounslow Heath Ward
   - The caravan at Hounslow Avenue (outside 94 Whitton Road), Hounslow for the polling district QA in the Hounslow South Ward
   - The caravan at land outside 28 Worple Avenue, Isleworth for the polling district SC in the Isleworth ward
   - Clayponds Community Centre, Clayponds Gardens, Ealing for the polling district TC in the Brentford ward

1.4 To advise all affected residents of these changes as soon as possible.

1.5 To erect additional signage at future elections to advise electors of changes to polling places.

1.6 To keep all polling districts and polling places under regular review to take into account new residential development proposals and/or alternative polling place locations identified in the future.
2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006 requires Councils to carry out a review of polling districts and polling places on a 4 yearly cycles although earlier reviews are permissible. The first such review must be completed by 31 December 2007.

2.2 In undertaking a review the Council must:
   a) Publish notice of the holding of a review;
   b) Consult the Returning Officer for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area;
   c) Enable any such Returning Officer to make representations to the authority and publish them in a prescribed manner;
   d) Seek representations from such persons that it thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability;
   e) Allow any elector in the authority's area to make representations which could include proposals for alternative polling places.

2.3 On completion of a review the authority must give reasons for its decisions in the review and publish such other information as is prescribed.

2.4 Details of existing polling district boundaries, polling places and respective electorates (as at 1 June 2007) are set out in Annex 1.

2.5 Councils are required to divide their area into polling districts for the purposes of parliamentary elections and to designate polling places for these polling districts, and to keep these under review. In effect a Polling District is a sub division of an Electoral Ward. When designating polling districts Council's must ensure that all the electors in the area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances. The responsibility for determining polling district boundaries lies with Borough Council.

2.6 Borough Council must also designate polling places. In determining where polling places should be located the Council must seek to ensure that all the electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practical in the circumstances and that, so far as is reasonable and practical, polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled. Polling places must normally be within the area of the polling district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate a location either wholly or partially outside.

2.7 The last review of polling districts and places was carried out 2001/2002. In addition a further review of mobile polling places was carried out at the beginning of 2006 and Council approved two alternative locations in March 2006.
3.0 INSPECTION OF POLLING PLACES/STATIONS

3.1 During August and the beginning of September the majority of polling places were visited and thoroughly inspected, and a review of each polling district area conducted to try and identify more suitable polling places where the existing places were thought to be less than ideal. As part of the inspection some of the issues considered by the inspectors were:

- Location of building;
- Access;
- Parking facilities;
- Disabled access;
- Lighting; and
- Facilities for staff.

3.2 As a result of the inspections several alternative locations were recommended for future use.

4.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS

4.1 Informal consultation commenced at the end of January 2007. Councillors, Members of Parliament, political party election agents, and SCOPE were all asked for early comments and suggestions for change. The formal consultation period ran from 2 July to 31 July 2007. Public notice and full details of the review were given on Council notice boards and the website.

4.2 In addition, the following were formally consulted directly by way of letter:
   a) All Councillors
   b) Local Members of Parliament
   c) Local Political Party Election Agents from previous elections
   d) Scope
   e) RNIB
   f) 60 voluntary organisations listed in the Hounslow Voluntary Directory Index for Disability Groups

4.3 Also, a press release was issued and notices displayed in local libraries.

4.4 The Returning Officer’s recommendations were received and a formal notice published on 26 September 2007 giving details of those recommendations and asking for comments by no later than 29 October 2007. All of the above mentioned consultees were directly consulted on the RO’s recommendations as well as public notice of them being displayed and a press release being issued.

4.5 A cross party working group of members met on 7 November 2007 to consider the final proposals and comments received during the consultation period. The Working Group agreed to the proposals outlined in the RO’s Recommendations as set out in Annex2 and recommended the following actions be implemented as a result:

- Merging of polling districts F and FC - a letter be sent to each elector in polling district F advising them that a caravan will not be provided at Clements Court as at past elections and that their polling station has moved to Beavers Nursery School, Beavers Lane, Hounslow for future elections. A postal vote application form to be enclosed with the letter.
• A similar letter to be sent to all electors advising them of the change in location of polling stations, together with a postal vote application form, in the following polling districts: DC, IB1, IB2, IC, NA, and TC.

• A further reminder letter to be sent to electors in polling districts F, DC, IB1, IB2, IC, NA, and TC prior to the elections in May 2008, in addition to the statutory polling card.

• Extra signage to be positioned at the old polling places advising electors of the new locations for the elections in May 2008.

• Hounslow Homes to be asked to relax their car parking restrictions outside Belvedere House, Lemon Grove, Feltham (polling district DC, Feltham West Ward) on election day.

• Polling districts, places and stations to be kept under constant review especially following the completion of large new residential developments. Particular mention was made to polling district TB in the Brentford ward.

4.6 All the working party’s recommendations have been incorporated in paragraph 1.

5.0 FURTHER ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

5.1 During the initial formal consultations (2 July and 31 July 2007) six representations were received and are summarised below:

5.2 General comments received were that the majority of polling stations were well placed and polling districts well drawn. Efforts to ensure all polling stations were accessible for disabled voters, and guidance notes on accessibility, were welcomed. A determined effort was called for to reduce the number of caravans used to provide better facilities for electors and election staff and reduce expense.

5.3 Specific comments made in relation to polling places were:

• Brentford Ward – Clayponds Estate Community Hall should be considered as an alternative location for the polling station at Lionel Road School, if not in addition to it.
• Heston West Ward – endorsed the retention of the additional polling stations of Caravans at Kings Arbour on The Ringway Estate, and Norman Crescent, which had been a considerable improvement.
• Heston East Ward - Heston Community School no longer available with new building work and the Methodist Church Hall (The Tatta Yoga Church Centre) or Old Fire Station were suggested alternatives.

5.4 Ward and Parliamentary boundary issues were also raised which are outside the remit of this review.

5.5 No representations were received during the Returning Officer’s recommendations consultation period (26 September and 19 October 2007).
6.0 POPULATION/ELECTORATE PROJECTIONS

6.1 Any potential growth in the electorate is a factor which might impact on the size of a polling district and/or the optimum location of polling stations. The latest (2006) mid year population estimates give the Borough's population as 218,600, an increase of some 6,300 residents (not all of whom will be eligible to be electors) since the low count in 2004 of 212,300.

6.2. Set out at Annex 3 is a table which gives information of the potential impact of new residential developments within the Borough. The information, which is broken down to polling district level, is based on:
- Number of properties under construction; and
- Number of properties with planning permission.

6.3. The information given in the table is based on the number of residential units, with no differentiation as to their size. To obtain an estimate of the potential number of electors the existing ratio of electors per property for the Borough (1.7) has been applied, giving the figures shown in brackets in the table.

6.4 So far as the impact of development sites under construction is concerned the projected increase in electors is (2466) across the Borough as a whole, with the largest increases being in polling district OC in Osterley and Spring Grove Ward (547), and in polling districts A (455) and AA (398) both in the Bedfont Ward. These figures would not suggest there is a need to adjust polling district boundaries or change polling places at the present time as the polling district boundaries and polling places are well located at present. However, this should be kept under constant review.

7.0 CHANGES CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED

7.1 All polling districts where caravans are used as the polling place were looked at with a view to finding suitable alternative premises. The polling places mentioned below are those where possible alternatives were identified but were either not available for use or were unsuitable.

7.2 Polling Place for Polling District C
A caravan is located adjacent to Clifton Parade, Fernside Avenue, Feltham as the polling place. A possible alternative location was identified at Rectory Court. However, there are security issues for residents of Rectory Court and it was therefore found to be an unsuitable alternative.

7.3 Polling Place for Polling District FD
A Caravan at the junction of Windsor Road/Aston Green, Cranford is used as the polling place. Other alternative locations were identified but either they were not available or were out of the polling district boundary.

7.4 Polling Place for Polling District G
A caravan at Kings Arbour, Southall is used as the polling place. Other locations were identified but were outside the polling district boundary.

7.5 Polling Place for Polling District GB
A caravan at Burns Way, Heston is used as the polling place. Other locations were identified but no response was received from the private owners of possible alternative premises.
7.6 **Polling Place for Polling District JB**
A caravan at Sutton Square, Hounslow is used as the polling place. An alternative location was identified but it was outside the polling district boundary.

7.7 **Polling Place for Polling District X**
A caravan is located outside St Michael's and All Angels Parish Hall, Priory Avenue, Chiswick but there is a church hall adjacent. At present the church hall is hired out to two schools. Unfortunately, the church hall is not available as they have a signed contract with two schools for continuous use during term time. Three other alternative locations were identified but no response was received from the owners.

8.0 **PROPOSED CHANGES TO POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES**
The proposed changes set out below are identified on the plans annexed to this report.

8.1 **Polling Districts F and FC in the Cranford Ward**
At present polling districts F and FC have split polling places. There are only 164 electors currently registered (of which 10 currently have postal votes) in polling district F who may vote at a caravan at Clements Court. There are 3067 electors in polling district FC who vote at Beavers Nursery School, Beavers Lane.

**Proposal**
At the May 2006 local elections, only 73 electors voted in district F. In view of the small number of electors eligible to vote in district F, it is proposed to merge this polling district with FC with all electors voting at Beavers Nursery School, Beavers Lane, thereby eliminating the need for a caravan. While alternative locations to Beavers Nursery School were considered it is recommended that no change be made as Beavers Nursery School is central to the polling district.

8.2 **Polling Place for Polling District DC in the Feltham West Ward**
At present the Meeting Room at Hunter House, Hazel Grove is used as the polling place and a more suitable location has been identified at the Creche Room, Belverdere House, Lemon Grove.

**Proposal**
It is proposed that the polling place change to the Creche Room, Belverdere House, Lemon Grove, Feltham.

**NB** Hounslow Homes are to be requested to suspend parking restrictions outside Belverdere House on election day.

8.3 **Polling Place for Polling District EA in the Hanworth Ward**
At present the Youth Centre, Hounslow Road, Hanworth is used as the polling place for this polling district, however their hire charges are extremely high. An alternative location has been identified at Oriel School where the polling place could be located in the nursery behind the Youth Centre. Negotiations with regard to fees are continuing with the Youth Centre and, if the fees are not reduced significantly, the working group recommended that the polling station to be relocated at the Oriel School Nursery. However, the governing body of the school have advised that they oppose the use of the nursery as a polling station as it would mean closing the nursery for election day. The Returning Officer does have statutory powers to requisition the use of the Nursery but is reluctant to do so unless the negotiations with the Youth Centre fails to produce a sensible reduction in their proposed fee.

**Proposal**
To continue to use the Youth Centre as the polling place for this polling district providing an acceptable fee can be negotiated.
8.4 **Polling Place for Polling District IB1 and IB2 in the Heston East Ward**
Heston Community School is currently identified as the polling place for this district. However due to redevelopment the school will no longer be available for future use.

Proposal
To change the polling place to the Methodist Church Hall, Heston Road, which is now known as “The Tatta Yoga Church Centre”.

8.5 **Polling Place for Polling District IC in the Heston East Ward**
At present a caravan at Lampton School is used as the polling place and a more suitable location has been identified at the Scout Hut on Lampton Road.

Proposal
To change the polling place for this district to the Scout Hut, 100A Lampton Road, Hounslow.

8.6 **Polling Place for Polling District NA in the Hounslow Heath Ward**
At present the HFTRA Information and Training Centre, Benson Close is used as the polling place. At the last elections some concerns were expressed about the safety of this location. Grove Road Primary School, Cromwell Road, Hounslow has been identified as an alternative location.

Proposal
To change the polling place for this district to the Grove Road Primary School, Cromwell Road, Hounslow.

8.7 **Polling Place for Polling District QA in the Hounslow South Ward**
At present a caravan at Maswell Park Road, Hounslow is used as a polling place. An alternative location for the caravan has been identified on Hounslow Avenue which has a wider pathway, easier access and would be highly visible on a corner plot with CCTV coverage.

Proposal
To change the polling place for this district to a caravan located on Hounslow Avenue (outside 94 Whitton Road) Hounslow.

8.8 **Polling Place for Polling District SC in the Isleworth Ward**
At present a caravan placed at Northcote Avenue/Worple Avenue, Isleworth is used as a polling place. A more suitable alternative location has been identified on land outside 28 Worple Avenue. The land is owned by the Council.

Proposal
To change the location of the caravan 28 Worple Avenue, Isleworth.

8.9 **Polling Place for Polling District TC in the Brentford Ward**
At present Lionel Road School is used as a polling place. A more suitable location has been identified at Claypools Community Centre, Claypools Gardens.

Proposal
To change the polling place for this district to Claypools Community Centre, Claypools Gardens.
9.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

9.1 The only equality issue to be addressed in relation to this report is that of disabled access. The majority of polling places have disabled access and those without disabled access will be fitted with a temporary ramp.

10.0 ACTING DIRECTOR OF FINANCE COMMENTS

10.1 The cost of hiring locations for polling stations needs to be met from the revenue budget provision made for holding elections. This provision will vary year on year depending on the nature and level of election held. The cost of non local elections is substantially recoverable from the Ministry of Justice or the Greater London Authority.

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<td>Review of Mobile Polling Stations reported to Borough Council on 7 March 2006</td>
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<td>Local Government Electoral Wards – Amendment to Polling Districts and Polling Stations reported to Borough Council 17 February 2004</td>
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