



# City of Westminster

## POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACE REVIEW

### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This paper sets out the current pattern of polling districts and polling places within the City of Westminster and outlines some proposals for change.
- 1.2 The current pattern of electoral wards within Westminster was determined by the Government on the recommendation of the (then) Local Government Commission.
- 1.3 The existing Westminster ward boundaries are set and are not part of this review.
- 1.4 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.

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.

- 1.5 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

- 1.6 A map showing the existing ward boundaries is available on the City Council's website: [www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk). 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 form the starting point for this review.
- 1.7 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
- 1.8 Attached as an appendix is an alphabetical listing by ward of the current polling places and their electorates. This appendix is also available on the City Council's website: [www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk). 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.
- 1.9 The map and appendix also identifies those polling places that currently have inadequate disability access.
- 1.10 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.
- 1.11 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.
- 1.12 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.
- 1.13 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.
- 1.14 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.
- 1.15 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.
- 1.16 Although this paper sets out a comprehensive set of proposals for polling districts and polling places for the whole area of the City of Westminster, it is hoped the consultation will prompt other suggestions.

## **2. POSSIBLE CHANGES**

- 2.1 At the start of this review there is 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 revisit this. At the 2011 review 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. 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.

In terms of changes of polling place from those polling places used at the 22 May 2014 combined elections it is proposed that concerted efforts be made to find an alternative polling place in respect of the following polling district;

SJB polling place ( Charing Cross Library) – which has no disabled access and where on 22 May 2014 the Chief Presiding Officer raised concerns over the fact that members of the public, not there to vote, had easy access from Charing Cross Road into the library and that unauthorised filming from Charing Cross Road into the library had been attempted on more than one occasion. There is however a caveat which needs to be attached when seeking to replace this polling place, in 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.

It is proposed that efforts be made to find alternative polling places in respect of the following polling districts. Matters for consideration are as shown;

CHB (St Barnabas School). Disability access into the school is currently limited.

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)

LGA (St Mathew's Church ), LGB (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.

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.

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.

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.

WEB polling place (Dance Works) has no disabled access.

The aim of this review will be to identify where better provision can be made and new polling places can be booked in good time to be used at the General Election on 7 May 2015. It is proposed in this review that any changes be kept 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.

- 2.2 A brief rationale explaining the current provision in each ward (listed alphabetically) is set out below:

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

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 It has been suggested at previous 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 are invited on this proposal and any suggestions of a possible alternative polling place in the north of the ward are welcomed it is not proposed to make any changes of this type.
- 2.5 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.

### **2. Bayswater**

- 2.6 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 old

one. The polling place for the BWC polling place ( St Stephen's School in Westbourne Park Road) is well established and has disabled access.

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

- 2.7 The BDA (West London Synagogue) and BDB (Seymour Leisure Centre) polling districts have well located polling places. At the 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 ).

(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.)

### **4. Church Street**

- 2.8 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 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.

### **5. Churchill**

- 2.9 The ward is geographically bisected by the main railway line into Victoria Station, which also forms the polling district boundary.
- 2.10 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.

### **6. Harrow Road**

- 2.11 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).

## **7. Hyde Park**

- 2.12 The ward currently has two polling districts with long-established polling places – HPA (St James’s 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 may be a justification for a third polling district and a new polling place north of Praed Street. Comments and suggestions of possible polling places are invited although it is not proposed to make any changes at this review.

## **8. Knightsbridge & Belgravia**

- 2.13 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.

## **9. Lancaster Gate**

- 2.14 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 Michael’s 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

## **10. Little Venice**

- 2.15 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.

## **11. Maida Vale**

- 2.16 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 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.

## **12. Marylebone High Street**

- 2.17 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.

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

- 2.18 This ward benefits from having four polling districts with four relatively newly identified and well appointed polling places so no changes are 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 is not recommended as a change of this type would prompt redrawing of all polling district boundaries within this ward.

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

- 2.19 No change is 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).

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

- 2.20 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 needing to maintain the secrecy and security of the ballot.

## **16. Tachbrook**

- 2.21 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.

## **17. Vincent Square**

- 2.22 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).

## **18. Warwick**

- 2.23 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.

## **19. West End**

- 2.24 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 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).

## **20. Westbourne**

- 2.25 This ward is 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 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.

## **3. CONCLUSION**

- 3.1 This review attempts to outline some of the key issues in the current pattern of polling districts and polling places.

- 3.2 Priority is being given to identify ways in which disability access can be improved; particularly where at present there are physical barriers that prevent level access into the polling place.
- 3.3 Although it can only be a temporary measure until adequate access is established, where any polling place is currently inaccessible (for example) to wheelchair users, temporary bells/ door chimes are positioned outside the building. Any elector can then use these to call for a member of the polling station staff to come out to them and if necessary for the polling station staff then to take the ballot box and ballot paper(s) to the voter.
- 3.4 Any proposals for changing polling district boundaries or polling places will be considered by the City Council's General Purposes Committee on 5 November 2014 and a copy of that report will be available on the City Council's website – [www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk)

#### **4. SUBMISSION OF COMMENTS**

Comments are invited as part of this review and should be submitted by no later than Wednesday 1 October 2014 to:

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