

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Constitutional and Nomination Committee – 4 October 2017

**Subject:** Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

**Report of:** The Chief Executive

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**Summary**

To seek the Committee's approval for the initiation of an interim Review ('the Review') of polling districts and polling places within the city.

**Recommendations**

1. To note the background to the Review and the proposed timetable/process including the consultation arrangements.
  2. To authorise the initiation of a Review of the parliamentary polling districts and polling places within the Council's area and that this be combined with a review of local government elections polling districts and polling places within the Council's area beginning on 9 October 2017.
  3. To note the establishment of a Member Working Group to assist the (Acting) Returning Officer to develop her detailed proposals for the location of polling stations which will be submitted and published during the Review's consultation period.
  4. To delegate authority for undertaking the Review to the Chief Executive.
  5. To request that the Chief Executive reports back to the Committee upon completion of the Review, so that the Committee can make final recommendations on polling districts and places to the City Council.
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**Wards Affected:**

All

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Community Strategy Spine	Summary of the contribution to the strategy
Performance of the economy of the region and sub region	Ensuring the Council's scheme of polling districts and polling places reflects the new ward boundaries is a key part of the city's governance arrangements, which must be in place in advance of the local elections which will take place on 3 May 2018.
Reaching full potential in education and employment	
Individual and collective self esteem – mutual respect	
Neighbourhoods of Choice	

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**Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:**

- Equal Opportunities Policy
  - Risk Management
  - Legal Considerations
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**Financial consequences - Revenue**

The costs of conducting the Review will be in the region of £5,000 to include the cost of publishing statutory notices, polling place visits and consultation activity. This will be funded from within the existing Electoral Services budget.

**Financial consequences - Capital**

None

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**Background documents:**

Representation of the People Act 1983  
The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006  
The Electoral Administration and Registration Act 2013  
The Manchester (Electoral Changes) Order 2017 (draft legislation). Order laid but not yet made as a UK Statutory Instrument.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Following the conclusion of the Electoral Review of Manchester undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) during 2016, new ward boundaries for the city will come into effect at the local elections on 3 May 2018. Whilst this Electoral Review concluded that the Council should continue to be represented by 96 councillors in 32 wards, in practice there will be extensive changes to existing boundaries and name changes to a number of wards.
- 1.2 In order to deliver elections, wards are sub divided into the polling districts and suitable polling places identified within them, in which electors can cast their vote. As required by the Electoral Administration and Registration Act 2013, compulsory reviews of parliamentary polling districts and polling places must take place every 5 years, reflecting the Fixed Term Parliament Act 2011. The Council undertook its last compulsory review, which was combined with a review of local election arrangements, in the autumn of 2013. The Council will therefore be conducting its next compulsory review of parliamentary and local polling districts and polling places, in the autumn of 2018. See under 3.2 for more details.
- 1.3 In addition to the five yearly cycle of compulsory reviews, the Council has discretion to undertake interim reviews of polling districts and polling places at any time as necessary. An interim Review is needed this autumn, due to the amount of changes arising as a direct result of the LGBCE's Electoral Review of Manchester and the impact on ward boundaries in the city.
- 1.4 For reasons of clarity and transparency this interim Review will follow the same steps as a compulsory review, as set out under Section 5 of the report.
- 1.5 The Electoral Services Unit has already had to start informal work in preparation for the new ward boundaries, in order to understand the scale and detail of the work required. This has established that as a result of the new ward boundaries, changes will be required to an estimated 53 polling districts, and in some of these there will also be an impact on the polling place arrangements. All these changes will need to be addressed as part of the Review. Where existing arrangements do continue to work effectively in the remaining polling districts, these will be retained for the benefit of electors, subject to consideration of submissions received during the consultation process.
- 1.6 The outcomes of the Review will ensure a scheme is in place for the forthcoming local elections on 3 May 2018, which recognises and reflects the new ward boundaries. The compulsory review which will be undertaken in autumn 2018 will then be able to take into account learning from the delivery of these polls.

## **2 Proposed timing of the interim Review**

- 2.1 Taking into account the preparatory work the Electoral Services Unit has undertaken, it is proposed that the Review takes place between 9 October 2017 and 25 January 2018. During this time period, it is expected that the draft legislation putting in place the new ward boundaries will have concluded its passage through parliament to become law. Following the conclusion of the Review, and in order to complete the complex technical work required, the Electoral Registration Officer will publish a revised Electoral Register on 1 February 2018. This will reflect both the new ward boundaries and the polling district arrangements agreed as a result of the Review. A timetable for the Review process is found in Appendix 1.

## **2. Responsibilities and the scope of the interim Review**

- 3.1 The Review can only consider the internal boundaries of polling districts within wards. Ward boundaries are the responsibility of the LGBCE, as already referred to under point 1.1 of this report. Parliamentary constituency boundaries are the responsibility of the Boundary Commission for England and are subject to a separate review process and timetable, but currently remain unchanged.
- 3.2 The designation of the City's polling districts and polling places is the responsibility of the Council and the relevant functions are delegated to the Constitutional and Nomination Committee, including the Council's duties under the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide constituencies into polling districts and the power to divide wards into polling districts at local government elections. 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 will be adopted on this occasion, especially given that this Review is driven by the changes relating to local government election arrangements.
- 3.3 The allocation of polling stations within polling places is not a Council function and is the responsibility of the Returning Officer.
- 3.4 Although the legislation would seem to suggest the adoption of a top down approach to the Review, with polling districts being determined before polling places, in practice a bottom up approach is usually adopted. The reality is that, where good quality polling station sites are identified, it is sensible to build polling places and districts around them and this is recognised by the Electoral Commission.
- 3.5 The (Acting) Returning Officer for parliamentary elections has established a Member Working Group (Councillors Fender, Leese, Sue Murphy and Bernard Priest) to work with elections staff to review current polling arrangements and to identify any suitable alternative polling stations, where appropriate, taking into account the particular requirements arising out of the

ward boundary changes. This work will inform the (Acting) Returning Officer's response to the Review consultation (see section 5 of this Report).

- 3.6 Further details regarding the terminology used in this report can be found in Appendix 2.

### **3. Aim of the proposed Review**

- 4.1 In designating polling places, the Council has an obligation that it will:

- (a) seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances;
- (b) seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places it is responsible for are accessible to all electors who are disabled;
- (c) have regard to the accessibility of disabled persons to potential polling stations in the polling place;
- (d) other than in special circumstances, locate the polling place in the polling district it serves; and
- (e) ensure the polling place is small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the polling district how they will be able to reach the polling station.

- 4.2 The focus of the Review will be to identify wherever possible polling places which meet set criteria, relating to:

- Location
- Facilities
- Accessibility to/and within the polling place/station
- Health and safety, and
- Space

- 4.3 Whilst ideally the Council would have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for the electors in the area, this is not always the case and there may be little choice available. Ensuring the continuing accessibility of buildings and the location of polling places will be a key factor in developing the final proposals. Where it is not possible to identify polling places which meet the specification exactly, particularly around accessibility, every reasonable adjustment will be undertaken to provide access for all electors. Draft specifications for polling places/stations can be found in Appendix 3.

## **5. The proposed review process**

- 5.1 The proposed approach to the Review comprises the same three stages as required in the compulsory review process: the formal notification of the Review, the consultation process and the conclusion of the Review.

- 5.2 Stage 1: Formal notification of the Review

5.2.1 Formal notification of the review process is when the Council publishes a notice of the Review, which will be displayed in each parliamentary constituency and be published on the Council's website. Subject to the Committee's approval, this notice would be published on 9 October 2017 and will set out:

- that the Council is conducting a Review of polling districts and polling places
- that the (Acting) Returning Officer will make comment on proposed polling stations, and an indication of when and where the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations will be made available
- that electors within the authority or within a UK parliamentary constituency which has any part in the authority may make a representation
- that the Council would welcome the views of all residents, particularly disabled residents, on the authority's proposals, the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations or any other matters
- that the authority would welcome any person or body with expertise in access for persons with any type of disability to comment on the authority's proposals, the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations or any other matters
- that persons or bodies making representations should, if possible, give alternative places that may be used as polling places
- the postal address, e-mail address and website address at which documents can be inspected and representations made
- the timetable of the Review and a deadline for representations

5.2.2 As part of the review process, officers will collate information from a variety of sources to inform the development of proposals of a new scheme. This includes future plans for development activity, the new ward boundaries, the availability and accessibility of polling places, previous representations made by candidates, agents and polling station staff as well as turnout at previous elections.

### 5.3 Stage 2: Consultation

5.3.1 The consultation stage is for representations and comments to be made on the existing and proposed arrangements for polling districts and polling places. There are two aspects of this stage:

- A submission from the (Acting) Returning Officer of the UK parliamentary constituency or constituencies, which must then be

- published by the Council which must include information regarding the location of polling stations within polling places (current or proposed). The Council will publish the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations during the week commencing 16 October 2017. Any persons involved in the consultation have the right to comment on the (Acting) Returning Officer's submission.
- Submissions from electors and other interested persons and bodies, including elected representatives and those with expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people.

5.3.2 Any elector for a UK parliamentary constituency either wholly within or partly within the Manchester City Council area may comment on any of the recommendations within the whole local authority area.

5.3.3 By law representations must be sought from such persons as the Council considers as having particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must also have an opportunity to make representations and comment on the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations.

5.3.4 It is important that any person or body that makes a comment has the opportunity to suggest alternative polling districts/polling places and where possible to give a reason for the alternative proposal so that it may be given appropriate consideration.

5.3.5 A short consultation questionnaire is being developed to enable consultees to provide as much information as possible about their thoughts on current and future polling arrangements, including alternatives.

5.3.6 The consultation period will run from 9 October until 8 December 2017. A communications strategy has been developed for the Review to ensure that interested parties are aware that it is taking place and have the opportunity to respond to the consultation. This will include:

- notification of the Review, the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations
- and invitations to comment to Councillors, MPs, candidates, agents, political
- parties and those with expertise relating to access for disabled people
- a dedicated page on the Council's Consultation section of the website
- including the questionnaire (linked to from the elections pages)
- raising awareness of the consultation via social media and the e bulletin
- press releases

5.3.7 Hard copies of questionnaires and documentation will be available for inspection in each of the five parliamentary constituencies (at a number of public libraries) which are wholly or partly within the city's boundaries.

- 5.3.8 Concurrently, the (Acting) Returning Officer will work with the Member Working Group to gather intelligence from local members, key stakeholders and officers to establish suitable locations for polling stations. The (Acting) Returning Officer's proposals will then be published as part of the Review's formal consultation process.

#### 5.4 Stage 3: Concluding the Review

- 5.4.1 Final draft proposals for polling districts and polling places will be prepared by officers for submission to the Committee in January 2018, in advance of the publication of the revised Electoral Register on 1 February 2018. The proposals will take into account information listed under point 5.2.2, the statutory considerations and any representations made as part of the consultation process.
- 5.4.2 Once the final proposals are approved by the Constitutional and Nomination Committee and a decision made by the Council, the reasons for the decision must be published, along with the following documentation:
- (a) all correspondence sent to an (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the Review;
  - (b) all correspondence sent to any person whom the authority thinks has particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability;
  - (c) all representations made by any person in connection with the Review;
  - (d) the minutes of any meeting held by the authority to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the Review;
  - (e) details of the designation of polling districts or polling places within its areas of as a result of the Review; and
  - (f) details of the places where the results of the Review have been published.

- 5.5 As already set out, given this is an interim Review, a further compulsory review must take place in the autumn of 2018, which will provide the opportunity to look again at the scheme and take into account any learning from the delivery of the local elections in May 2018.

## 6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Recommendations to the Committee appear at the front of this report.



## **Appendix 1**

### **Interim Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2017/18 timetable**

<b>Week beginning</b>	<b>Activity</b>
4 October 2017	Meeting of Constitutional and Nomination Committee
9 October 2017	Notification of Review Start of the consultation
16 October 2017	Publication of the (Acting) Returning Officer's representations
4 December 2017	Consultation ends 8 December 2017
8 January 2018	Special meeting of Constitutional and Nomination Committee
25 January 2018	25 January Full Council – recommendations to Full Council
1 February 2018	ERO will publish revised Electoral Register

## Appendix 2

### Terminology used in the Report

**Ward:** the 32 wards into which the Manchester City Council area is sub divided.

**Polling district:** the area created by the division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts, within which a polling place can be determined, which is convenient to electors. In Manchester, each ward is divided into a number of polling districts which currently each have a three letter code starting with the ward e.g. CRA, CRB etc. It should be noted that Ringway Parish must have its own polling district currently WPF.

**Polling place:** is the building or area in which the polling station(s) will be sited by the Returning Officer.

**Polling station:** the room where the poll takes place (e.g. community room), which must be located within the polling place. The polling station is chosen by the Returning Officer.

Where possible, every polling district should have its own dedicated polling place and all electors in that polling district are assigned to vote at the polling station located in that place. However, it is possible to have a polling place based in an adjacent polling district where circumstances determine this is the best option.

It should be noted that the terms 'polling place' and 'polling station' are often used interchangeably and most people consider the polling place (such as a community centre) to be the polling station. However, it is possible to have a double polling station in a polling place (e.g. two sets of staff, two ballot boxes, and two electors' registers). Double stations exist where electors may be coming from two different polling districts/wards, or in polling districts where there are a large number of electors in person or there is high turnout expected. For example in the Greater Manchester Mayoral election in May 2017, there were 191 polling places in the city and 233 polling stations.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Specification for polling places/stations**

A polling place is the geographical area within which polling stations are sited. It is normally a building or group of buildings or in the case of a temporary polling station the area of land on which the temporary station would be sited. The polling station is the actual area where the poll takes place and it must be within the polling place. In order to establish the suitability of a polling place/polling station consideration should be given to the following:

#### **1. Location of the building**

Is it located close to where most of the electors in the polling district live?

Is it located at the top/bottom of a steep hill?

Does it have suitable access from a road?

If there is a pavement does it have a dropped kerb close by?

Are there convenient public transport links?

Is it safe and well lit?

Are there facilities such as toilets and a kitchen area for polling station staff to use?

#### **2. Parking facilities/pathways**

Are there adequate parking facilities close to the entrance of the building

Are there designated disabled parking spaces?

Is there a dropped kerb from the parking area to the polling station?

Is the approach from the road/car parking suitable e.g.

- are there steps?
- is the surface suitable particularly for wheelchair users?
- is it well lit?
- are there any severe gradients?

#### **3. Main Entrance to the building**

Does the building have a level entrance?

Are there steps to the entrance of the building?

Is there a hand rail by the steps?

Is a permanent ramp provided?

If not could a temporary ramp with a suitable gradient be provided safely, or is there another entrance that disabled people or other electors could use?

Is the door wide enough for a wheelchair user to gain access?

How heavy are the doors to open?

#### **4. Inside the building**

Are there any internal steps or barriers for electors to negotiate?

Are there any trip hazards e.g. uneven door mats?

Are the floor coverings suitable e.g. would they become slippery when wet?

Are there any corridors which may be difficult to negotiate for any electors using

wheel chairs or those who find walking difficult?  
Are there any security issues inside the building?  
Is the route from the entrance to the polling station room straightforward?

## **5. Polling station room**

Is there enough space in the polling station room for staff, polling equipment and a number of electors, including wheelchair users?  
Is there enough space in the room to have two polling stations (a double station) if necessary?  
Is the lighting in the polling station room adequate?  
Is the heating in the polling station room adequate?