

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: Constitutional and Nomination Committee – 12 July 2023

Subject: Future activity of the Electoral Services Unit

Report of: The Chief Executive

Summary

To inform the Committee of plans for conducting a future compulsory review of polling districts and polling places within the city. The review needs to take account of new Parliamentary Boundary changes that will come into effect for the next UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE). The report also informs the committee of plans to support the annual canvass for updating the electoral register and plans to promote and implement existing Tranche 1 and new Tranche 2 duties of the Elections Act 2022.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the need for, and issues with, a compulsory review of polling districts and polling places.
 2. Note the changes to parliamentary boundaries that have been submitted by the Boundary Commission of England to the Speaker of the House of Commons and which will come into effect at the next UK Parliamentary General Election.
 3. Note and support plans for the Annual Canvass of Electors, including ways the Electoral Services Unit, other sections of the Council and external stakeholders can encourage dissemination and engagement with a range of communities across the city of material and core messages to promote increased electoral registration.
 4. Note the timeline for the next tranche of duties from the Elections Act 2022 and that officers will consider ways to promote these duties in a similar manner to the annual canvass.
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Wards Affected: All

Alignment to the Our Manchester Strategy Outcomes (if applicable)

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
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A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The Our Manchester Strategy sets out the vision for the city to 2025. The Council's scheme of polling districts and polling places operates for parliamentary, local elections and other polls (such as the GMCA Mayoral election). It is therefore a key part of the city's governance arrangements. The annual canvass also seeks to increase the number of registered electors in the city that are eligible to vote. Local elections provide the opportunity for eligible Manchester residents to elect Councillors to represent them and therefore to influence how the Our Manchester strategy is delivered.
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

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

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial consequences - Revenue

The costs of conducting the Compulsory Polling District and Polling Place 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 / relevant legislation:

Representation of the People Act 1983

The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986

The Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections)
Regulations 2006

The Electoral Administration and Registration Act 2013

The Elections Act 2022

1. Background and context

- 1.1 As required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, compulsory reviews of parliamentary polling districts and polling places must take place during a compulsory review period that recurs every 5 years.
- 1.2 The Council undertook its last compulsory review, which was combined with a review of local election arrangements, in the summer of 2019, coming into effect in February 2020. The Council is required to undertake the next compulsory review within the 16 month period beginning on 1 October 2023 and concluding by 31 January 2025 (that is during the period that is 5 years on from the last compulsory review period), although it is open to the Council to also undertake interim reviews outside of that period.
- 1.3 The Council's duty under the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide constituencies into polling districts is distinct from its power to divide wards into polling districts at local elections. However, 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 districts and places should be conducted simultaneously with a review of local government arrangements, and of arrangements for any other type of election for which provision is made for the designation of polling districts and/or polling places (for example Combined Authority Mayoral elections).
- 1.4 It is to be noted that the Boundary Commission for England ('BCE') has undertaken a review of parliamentary constituencies and has delivered its final recommendations to the Speaker of the House of Commons (who will in turn lay them before Parliament). The final recommendations are available on the BCE's website, here: <https://boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/2023-review/>. The UK Government has four months to place an Order before the Privy Council for giving effect to the changes. While the Order will come into effect on a date specified within the Order itself (anticipated to be in the end of October / early November 2023), the new constituencies will only be effective for parliamentary elections held at the next UKPGE and thereafter (any parliamentary by-elections held before parliament is dissolved will be carried out on the old constituency boundaries). A UKPGE is possible at any time up to January 2025, and it could take place before, on the same day, or after the Local and Combined Authority Mayoral Elections scheduled for 2 May 2024. Initial consideration was given to holding an interim review of polling districts, beginning in mid-July this year and ending in late November with any changes being incorporated into the republished 1 December 2023 electoral register, but this option no longer appears viable due to the complexity of undertaking such a review when amended parliamentary boundaries have not been implemented by way of the Order mentioned above.
- 1.5 After receiving information relating to this matter from the Electoral Commission, and in seeking further guidance from the Council's Legal Services it has become apparent that unless the Order implementing the

boundary changes comes into force before an interim polling district review was due to officially start it would not be practical or sensible to start such a review. This is because, in such circumstances, an interim review will have been initiated based on constituencies that currently exist and consultation undertaken on that basis, only for there to be a significant risk that the Order implementing the new boundaries will come into effect part-way through the review process. Our current understanding is that this would make any 'in-progress' interim review null and void, thereby requiring the review process to begin afresh based upon the new parliamentary constituency boundaries.

- 1.6 It is to be noted that, even if a review could be initiated and completed on the originally proposed timescales referred to in paragraph 1.4 above, this would (due to the proposed start date) constitute an interim review and it would therefore still be necessary to hold a further "compulsory" review relatively shortly thereafter. It is also to be noted that any review undertaken before the next UKPGE would need to result in a polling district scheme that would enable both parliamentary by-elections to be run on the existing constituency boundaries and a UKPGE to be run on the new boundaries.
- 1.7 On the basis of the above, it is considered that the most appropriate course of action, that carries the least risk to the Council, is to delay the undertaking of a polling district and polling place review until after the Order implementing the new parliamentary boundaries is in force. However, based on the current understanding of when this is likely to happen, there would not be enough time left afterwards to initiate and complete a review ahead of publication of the revised register on 1 December 2023. Furthermore, undertaking a review early next year would risk compromising the effective delivery of the May 2024 elections, due to the impact that changes to polling districts and places would have on administrative activity that needs to be undertaken ahead of those elections.
- 1.8 Therefore, it is proposed that the next polling district and polling place review is a compulsory review beginning in July 2024. It is to be noted that if any urgent changes to polling places are needed before the completion of that review (e.g. due to existing premises closing or otherwise becoming unavailable), and if it is not possible for the Committee to meet in time to approve any changes that may be needed, authority is delegated to the Chief Executive to make, where necessary, alterations to the designation of any polling place in such circumstances, in consultation with group leaders, ward Councillors and the Chair of the Committee.
- 1.9 The timing of the next UKPGE and of the next polling district and place review will determine which polling districts and places are used at that election and what will be required as part of the overall polling district and polling place review work programme. The three possible scenarios are:
 - a) A UKPGE is called before the Order giving effect to the new Parliamentary boundaries comes into force and before any polling district and place review is completed. In this scenario the UKPGE would be run on the

existing parliamentary constituency boundaries and using the existing scheme of polling districts and polling places.

- b) A UKPGE is called after the Order giving effect to the new Parliamentary boundaries comes into force, but before any polling district and place review is completed. In this scenario the UKPGE would be run on the new parliamentary constituency boundaries and using the existing scheme of polling districts and polling places. When a polling district and place review is subsequently completed, it will be able to put in place a scheme that is fully focussed on the needs of the new constituencies, as there will be no requirement for the scheme to also accommodate potential parliamentary by-elections held on the former constituency boundaries.
- c) A UKPGE is called after the Order giving effect to the new Parliamentary boundaries comes into force and after a polling district and place review has been completed. In this scenario the UKPGE would be run on the new parliamentary constituency boundaries, using a new scheme of polling districts and polling places produced by the review. However, that scheme would not be fully optimised to the new parliamentary constituency boundaries, as certain “sub-optimal” arrangements will have had to have been retained to accommodate potential parliamentary by-elections held on the former boundaries (see further discussion of this at paragraph 2.2 below) and there would therefore need to be further work, via a further polling district and place review in 2025, to fully optimise the scheme.

The above scenarios have been taken into account when proposing that the next polling district and place review be undertaken in July 2024.

- 1.10 It is to be noted that the changes to parliamentary constituencies will also require the Electoral Services Unit to actively engage on the practicalities of cross-boundary changes with colleagues in Rochdale, Oldham, Tameside and Trafford councils in respect of the next UKPGE.

2. Preparations for the compulsory polling district and polling place review

- 2.1 The proposals for parliamentary constituency boundaries have now been finalised by the Boundary Commission for England and delivered to the Speaker of the House of Commons. The proposals recommend the following parliamentary constituencies which fall wholly or partly in the Manchester district:

- ***Blackley and Middleton South*** (taking in the existing Manchester wards of Charlestown, Crumpsall, Harpurhey, Higher Blackley and Moston, as well as the Rochdale Council wards of East Middleton and South Middleton).
- ***Gorton and Denton*** (taking in the existing Manchester wards of Burnage, Gorton & Abbey Hey, Levenshulme and Longsight, as well as the Tameside Council wards of Denton North East, Denton South and Denton West).

- **Manchester Central** (taking in the existing Manchester wards of Ancoats & Beswick, Cheetham, Clayton & Openshaw, Deansgate, Miles Platting & Newton Heath and Piccadilly, as well as the Oldham Council wards of Failsworth East and Failsworth West).
- **Manchester Rusholme** (taking in the existing Manchester wards of Ardwick, Fallowfield, Hulme, Moss Side, Rusholme and Whalley Range).
- **Manchester Withington** (taking in the existing Manchester wards of Chorlton, Chorlton Park, Didsbury East, Didsbury West, Old Moat and Withington).
- **Wythenshawe and Sale East** (taking in the existing Manchester wards of Baguley, Brooklands (Manchester), Northenden, Sharston and Woodhouse Park, as well as the Trafford Council wards of Brooklands (Trafford), Priory and Sale Moor).

2.2 In order to ensure that both parliamentary and local elections (standalone or combined) can be delivered using the same scheme and also that any parliamentary by-election can be run on existing boundaries, there are a small number of polling districts (with accompanying polling places) where the boundaries cannot be changed ahead of the UKPGE as these polling districts are currently 'cross-constituency' (i.e., these polling districts fall within a different parliamentary constituency to the other polling districts within the same local authority ward). These occur in the following wards:

- Charlestown ward, mainly within the existing Blackley and Broughton constituency: polling districts 2CNH and 2 CNJ fall within the existing Manchester Central Constituency.
- Deansgate ward, mainly within the existing Manchester Central constituency: polling district 1DGA fall within the existing Blackley and Broughton constituency.
- Moss Side ward, mainly within the existing Manchester Central constituency: polling district 3MSG fall within the existing Manchester Gorton constituency.
- Moston ward, mainly within the existing Manchester Central constituency: polling districts 1MOK and 1MOL fall within the existing Blackley and Broughton constituency.
- Fallowfield ward, mainly within the existing Manchester Gorton constituency: polling district 2FAF falls within the existing Manchester Central constituency.
- Whalley Range ward, mainly within the existing Manchester Gorton constituency: polling districts 2WRF, 2WRG, 2WRH and 2WRJ falls within the existing Manchester Central constituency.
- Burnage ward, mainly within the existing Manchester Withington constituency: polling districts 3BUE and 3BUF falls within the existing Manchester Gorton constituency.
- Chorlton ward, mainly within the existing Manchester Withington constituency: polling districts 3CLG and 3CLH falls within the existing Manchester Gorton constituency.

- Chorlton Park ward, mainly within the existing Manchester Withington constituency: polling district 3CPF and 3CPG falls within the existing Manchester Gorton constituency.

The recently recommended Parliamentary boundary changes would resolve the issues above by constituting the new constituencies using entire wards, but as detailed above resultant changes to 'cross-constituency' polling districts cannot be made until after the UKPGE has taken place.

- 2.4 The Electoral Commission and The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) are continuing to look into these issues and further information and guidance is expected over the coming weeks detailing the different scenarios of when a UKPGE may occur, taking into consideration the position in the Elections calendar and the legislation relating to the Parliamentary Boundary Changes, Annual Canvass and Tranche 2 of Elections Act 2022 changes at that time.
- 2.5 Following the significant number of changes from the Elections Act implemented in the 2023 local elections, with additional duties to follow later this year and in early 2024, officers in the Electoral Services Unit have been actively monitoring the effectiveness of the current arrangements. This includes considering the number of electors and overall turnout at different polls, with the best interests of the elector in mind. In addition, an ongoing record has been kept of any comments received to date from stakeholders, including previous representations made by elected representatives, council officers and premises holders, for consideration once the review of polling districts and places is formally underway. This will remain an active and ongoing process up to the compulsory review starting, it is proposed, in July 2024.

3. Annual Canvass 2023

- 3.1 The Electoral Services Unit plans to commence the Annual Canvass to encourage increased electoral registration at the end of July 2023. Decisions as to how the canvass should be undertaken and managed over the summer period taking into account the proposed tranche 2 duties noted in section 4 below, is already in discussion. The canvass will continue until the end of November in readiness for the new Electoral Register to be published on the 1 December 2023.
- 3.2 The Annual Canvass also provides an opportunity to publicise the ongoing need to promote existing Elections Act duties for example encouraging the take up of Voter Authority Certificates (VACs) for new voters who do not possess the necessary photo ID, as well as encouraging feedback on the accessibility of existing polling stations.
- 3.3 Elections Officers are engaging with Council staff and external stakeholders to publicise electoral registration across the city and to particular parts of the community including through:

- Community networks through Neighbourhood Teams, MACC and the Our Manchester VSCE scheme.
- Disabled groups through Breakthrough UK, the Manchester Disabled People Forum and internal staff networks.
- Older voters through Age Friendly Manchester.
- Younger voters through established networks that the Council's Youth Services connects with, as well as in interacting with the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester College and other relevant institutions.
- Relevant equalities networks as advised by the Council's Equalities and Diversity Unit.
- Homelessness support networks as advised by the Council's Homelessness Advisory Service.
- Care sector networks as advised by the Council's Adult Social Services and Children's & Education Services Directorates.
- Veterans' groups such as the Royal British Legion and SSAFA.

3.4 Discussions have commenced with these groups as to the type of information that needs to be disseminated, and the type of networks / forum meetings that relevant officers could attend to support this process.

4. Elections Act Tranche 2 duties

4.1 A second tranche of legislation arising out of the Elections Act will start to come into effect over the next 12 months, and they will impact on the Local and Combined Authority Mayoral Elections in May 2024, and the next UKPGE. The Council's Elections Team are closely engaging with the GM Strategic Lead for Elections to be fully prepared for these changes and in directly engaging with the Government.

4.2 These changes include:

- A gradual move to online postal voting applications, which will require elector ID checks at the point of application, similar to the process in applying for Voter ID. This process will initially start with new voters. A portal is currently being developed by DLUHC and the Council is engaging closely with the government on these changes (coming into place in October 2023).
- Changes to postal vote handling and secrecy rules and proxy limits (coming into force for any polls from May 2024).
- Changes to restrictions on overseas voters allowing them to participate in UK Parliamentary General Elections beyond the former 15 year time limit (coming into place in January 2024).

4.3 DLUHC, the Electoral Commission and local authority Electoral Service Units are aware that the existing duties and implementation of new duties in the Elections Act, coupled to the number of elections likely in the next 12-18 months (in Greater Manchester there will be Local and Combined Authority Mayoral Elections as well as a UKPGE), and the requirement for a compulsory review of polling districts and polling places, puts a considerable burden on all Councils. Considerable discussion is taking place to use the

next few months to prepare for extensive change. Officers will engage with the Council's Elections Steering Group and the Elections Member Working Group to look at ways to prioritise these changes and achieve them through existing staffing and expenditure.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations to the Committee appear at the front of this report.