Mr S Halsey

Electoral Services

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

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<http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/vote>

Acting Returning Officer

Bethnal Green & Stepney Parliamentary Constituency

Poplar & Limehouse Parliamentary Constituency

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

160 Whitechapel Road

London

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27 November 2023

Dear Mr Halsey,

# Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023

The council has started, as required by the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Administration Act 2006) to review its Parliamentary polling districts and polling places, an exercise that must be completed at least once every five years.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 also introduced a change that this review must commence no earlier than 1 October 2023 and conclude no later than 31 January 2025 (inclusive) and we have decided to undertake the review in line with the timescales below.

The [Notice of Review is available on the council’s website](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/council_and_democracy/elections__voting/review_of_polling_districts.aspx) along with the timetable and other documents detailing the review process.

As the Acting Returning Officer for two parliamentary constituencies wholly contained within the borough of Tower Hamlets, namely Bethnal Green & Stepney and Poplar & Limehouse, that will be in place at the next general election, we are required to seek any observations you may have and publish your response on the council’s web site.

Tower Hamlets has, and continues to change significantly in recent years, and there may be a need to create further polling, add additional polling places, merge smaller polling places, or retain the status quo in some or all of the polling districts.

Each polling district will be evaluated in terms of the current electorate figure, the alignment with the Borough Ward boundaries, the impact of regeneration on the area, existing natural boundaries (major roads and waterways) and if necessary to identify suitable additional polling places or alternative polling places.

It is important to note that this is not a review of the Borough Ward Boundaries but the polling districts that are the building blocks within each ward.

If you are minded to suggest a change to replace an existing polling place, it would be helpful to suggest where a new polling place should be located.

There are rules that apply to ensure that: -

1. All electors have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
2. As far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place must be accessible to electors who are disabled
3. The council has regard to the accessibility of potential and existing polling places to disabled persons
4. polling places must be in a polling district unless there are special circumstances
5. polling places must be small enough to indicate to electors how they will reach the polling station.

The Elections Act 2022 also imposes a duty on Returning Officers to provide each polling station with such equipment as it is reasonable to provide for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for, relevant persons to vote independently and in secret.

The current electorate totals for each polling district and polling places as published on the 1 October 2023 is attached and are available on the Council’s web site as well.

The next step, following the initial review period, is for officers to review responses received with an interim report prepared for General Purposes Committee to consider the initial proposals on 12 December 2023. This will then be followed with a report to full council on 24 January 2024 in time for the polling places to be established for the GLA (Greater London Authority) polls to be held on Thursday 2 May 2024 and to be in place for the next General Election whenever that may be.

Views on the current arrangements have been sought from Local Political Parties, electors within the new Parliamentary Constituencies of Bethnal Green & Stepney and Poplar & Limehouse drawing attention to the three Borough Wards that now fall into the constituency of Stratford & Bow namely Bow East, Bow West, and Bromley North.

The Acting Returning Officer for the newly created constituency Stratford & Bow has been written to for her views for the three adopted wards that are now part of that constituency which she is now responsible for.

Views have also been sought from persons and organisations who have a particular interest/expertise in relation to the various aspects of the polling places including location, accessibility to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

A letter has not been sent to every elector with a press release, social media, council circulars notably the household magazine Our East End, direct correspondence to organisations with expertise and the council’s internet the main avenues of communication.

Comprehensive guidance on polling places and districts reviews by the Electoral Commission can be accessed here and will guide the review to ensure the review complies with the legislative requirements.

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/reviews-polling-districts-polling-places-and-polling-stations>

Those making representations should bear in mind that, unless exceptional circumstances prevail, that there must be at least one polling station in each polling district. Therefore, it would be helpful if any proposal to no longer use a particular premise for polling was accompanied by a suggested alternative.

The consultation period for the review formally commences on Monday 2 October 2023 for a period of 8 weeks until Friday 24 November 2023.

Representations can be emailed to PDReview2023@towerhamlets.gov.uk or sent in writing to:

Polling Places and Districts Review 2023

Electoral Services

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If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the office

Yours faithfully



Robert Curtis

Head of Electoral Services

# Measures currently in place

* Every polling place is subject to suitability checks prior to booking with new polling places visited by the electoral services team who apply the Electoral Commission Guidance to assess suitability and premises formally approved by the council.
* Checks are undertaken on polling day by the Presiding Officer in charge of the polling place prior to opening utilising an accessibility check list produced by the Electoral Commission.
* Polling Inspectors visit every polling place on at least two occasions through the day to ensure that accessibility is not compromised
* All doors, especially those on designated disabled access routes are permanently propped open to assist with accessibility except for fire doors.
* Any loose mats and obstructions are removed if they are likely to present a tripping hazard.
* Large print versions of the ballot papers are provided at every station to assist the visually impaired
* Large handheld copies of the ballot papers are also prepared
* Every polling station has a low-level polling booth compartment to ensure wheelchair users can cast their vote comfortably and in secret.
* A tactile voting device is available at every polling place to assist the visually impaired
* Temporary ramps are provided at locations on polling day where access is not permanently available, these provided and assembled by Tower Hamlets. All ramps are secure and stable with low gradients.
* Ballot boxes are set at a low level in the polling stations to enable wheelchair users to access the box aperture.
* Ballot boxes have a highlighted aperture (white) to assist the visually impaired place their papers into the box
* If the entrance is different to assist people with mobility problems, then the alternative entrance is clearly signed
* The law provides for the Presiding Officer on duty to assist any elector who asks for help, and this is formally recorded
* The law also provides for a Presiding Officer to permit a companion over the age of 18 to assist an elector if requested and this is also formally recorded.
* Large polling station signage is displayed at every station
* The guidance for voters displayed in the polling place is displayed in pictorial form
* The lighting within the polling stations is reviewed both inside and outside the polling place on the day to ensure that those with visual impairments can read and assess the documentation and to access and egress the places safely particularly at night and early mornings.
* A dedicated facilities team are available throughout the day if any of these issues need addressing who will attend the premises with the necessary equipment if requested.
* Facilities will be provided to any elector who wishes to have their voter ID checked in private.