

Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations

Local authorities are required to review their polling districts and polling places for UK parliamentary constituencies at least once every five years. In addition to compulsory reviews, local authorities may also conduct additional reviews at other points, depending on local circumstances. Additional local reviews do not affect the timetable for compulsory reviews.

This guidance provides a staged approach to conducting a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations according to the relevant legislative requirements. It has been informed by feedback from local authorities on their experiences of carrying out their previous reviews.

It includes specific guidance for managing the next compulsory review period which starts in October 2023.

It also incorporates learning from the Commission's experience of administering the appeals process.

We have produced a polling place review project plan checklist and a guide to assessing polling place suitability to assist you with the delivery of a review, both in terms of carrying out the compulsory review, as well as any interim locally determined reviews.

The roles and responsibilities of those involved in a polling place review

The local authority

The statutory responsibility for reviewing UK Parliamentary polling districts and places rests with each relevant local authority in Great Britain for so much of any constituency as is situated in its area. A relevant local authority is, in:

- England, the council of a district or London borough
- Scotland, a local authority
- Wales, the council of a county or county borough

Depending on the structure of the local authority, it may not be the full council which makes the decisions on any changes to polling districts or polling places. Some local authorities may have delegated that function, in which case the decision on polling districts and polling places becomes the responsibility of a committee or sub-committee. This will be set out in the council's constitution.

The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO)

Where a local authority makes any alterations to the polling districts within its area, the ERO must amend the register of electors accordingly – either on a notice of alteration or by publishing a revised register.

The changes to the register take effect on the date that the ERO publishes a separate notice stating that the alterations have been made, which should be done to coincide with the publication of a notice of alteration/publication of a revised register.

The (Acting) Returning Officer

The (Acting) Returning Officer ((A)RO) must comment during any review of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places on both existing polling stations and the polling stations that would likely be used if any new proposal for polling places were accepted.

The election rules require the (A)RO to decide how many polling stations are required for each polling place and they must allocate electors to the polling stations in such manner as they think most convenient.

The Electoral Commission

While legislation provides no role for the Commission in the review process, it does provide for a role after the conclusion of the review.

Once the local authority has published the results of its review, specified interested parties may make representations to the Commission to reconsider any polling districts and polling places. We may direct the authority to make any alterations to the polling places that we think necessary and, if the alterations are not made within two months, we may make the alterations ourselves.

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Terms used in a polling place review

Term

Definition

UK Parliamentary constituencies

The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 states: 'There shall for the purpose of parliamentary elections be the county and borough constituencies (or in Scotland the county and burgh constituencies), each returning a single member, which are described in Orders in Council made under this Act. [...] In this Act and, except where the context otherwise requires, in any Act passed after the Representation of the People Act 1948, "constituency" means an area having separate representation in the House of Commons. [1] '

Term

Definition

UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries cannot be changed by the review.

A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election.

In England, each parish is to be a separate polling district and, in Wales, each community should be a separate polling district unless there are special circumstances. This means that a parish or community must not be in a polling district which has a part of either a different parish or community within it, or any un-parished part of the local authority area within it, unless special circumstances apply. Those special circumstances could arise if, for example, the parish/community has only a small number of electors and it is not practicable for the parish to be its own polling district.

Polling district

In Scotland, each electoral ward must be divided into two or more polling districts unless there are special circumstances. Given the size of wards in Scotland, it is difficult to envisage what those special circumstances might be in practice.

When a parish or community is not a separate polling district or a Scottish electoral ward is not split into two or more polling districts, the special circumstances and the recommendation resulting from these should be clearly set in the review document for the council or relevant committee to consider.

Polling place

A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (A)RO. A polling place within a polling district must be designated so that polling stations are within easy reach of all electors from across the polling district.

We are aware that some authorities designate the entire polling district as the polling place. However the legislation states that 'the polling place must be small

Term

Definition

enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station'.
[2]

We therefore consider that polling places should always be defined more specifically than simply the polling district - for example, by designating the name of the polling place (normally a particular building or area and its environs).

Polling station

A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the relevant RO for the election.

1. Section 1 The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986
2. Section 18B(4)(e) The Representation of the People Act 1983

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Scope of compulsory polling place reviews

Polling districts and polling places for other elections are not automatically part of the compulsory review.

However, as polling districts and polling places for other elections are based on UK Parliamentary polling arrangements, the requirements of any other elections that are held within the local authority area should be taken into consideration as part of the review. This means that although it is the (A)RO who is the primary RO for the purposes of the review and has a statutory role to participate in it, all ROs within the constituency (if they are not also the (A)RO) should be involved in the review process.

The legislative requirements of a polling place review

Local authorities must comply with the following legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places ^[1] :

- each parish in England and community in Wales is to be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply
- in Scotland, each electoral ward must be divided into two or more separate polling districts, unless special circumstances apply
- the council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors
- the polling place must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified in the district)
- the polling place must be small enough to indicate to electors in different parts of the district how they will be able to reach the polling station

Local authorities must also comply with accessibility requirements, which you can find in our guidance on [the accessibility requirements of a polling place review](#).

1. The Representation of the People Act s18A

The accessibility requirements of a polling place review

Every person should be able to vote without facing barriers. By identifying and understanding the physical, psychological and information barriers disabled people may face when voting, ROs will be better able to make appropriate arrangements to help support them.

You can find more information in our guidance:

[Understanding the barriers to voting for disabled people](#).

As part of the compulsory review, local authorities must consider the accessibility of potential polling stations when considering designating or reviewing a polling place. In doing so they must

seek to ensure that:

- all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
- so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled

Engaging with accessibility experts

As part of the review the local authority must seek representations from those who have a particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability, as well as engaging any disability access groups and/or disability officer.

Your duty to consider the accessibility issues

Local authorities have a duty to review the accessibility of all polling places to disabled voters and ensure that every polling place, and prospective polling place, for which it is responsible is accessible to disabled voters 'so far as is reasonable and practicable'.

According to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission the duty to make reasonable adjustments comprises three requirements.

For service providers and those exercising public functions, these requirements are:

- Where a provision, criterion or practice puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.
- Where a physical feature puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled to avoid that disadvantage or adopt a reasonable alternative method of providing the service or exercising the function.
- Where not providing an auxiliary aid, for example a ramp for wheelchair user [1] , puts disabled people at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled, to provide that auxiliary aid.

Access to the polling station is still a barrier to some disabled people who want to cast their vote in person. Some of the main physical access issues which should be considered as part of a review are:

- polling places and stations with steps into the entrance, or otherwise inaccessible
- narrow doorways and corridors
- lack of space within the polling place that did not enable motorised wheelchair manoeuvrability
- lack of space and secrecy for the elector and their companion to discuss the elector’s choice of vote
- lack of low level polling booths or booths/tables that didn’t provide disabled voters with confidence that they could cast their vote in secrecy as they were positioned close to the polling station staff
- a lack of chairs to enable people to rest
- a lack of a clear display of guidance or aids (such as tactile voting devices) to enable people to feel confident about the process
- inadequate lighting

The Elections Act 2022 provides a duty for ROs 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 [2] . The review should therefore include consideration of whether the building can accommodate the equipment you will provide to support disabled voters.

We have produced an accessibility checklist that can be used to assess the suitability of each polling place and polling station which covers these, as well as other issues.

1. In the context of a polling station, an auxiliary aid could, for example, be a ramp for wheelchair users.
2. Rule 29(3A)(b) Schedule 1 The Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended by s.9 Elections Act 2022).

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Timing and length of compulsory polling place review

The timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places is set by legislation. [1] 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.

Schedule of forthcoming compulsory reviews:

Start On

Complete By

1 October 2023

31 January 2025

Start On

Complete By

1 October 2028

31 January 2030

1 October 2033

31 January 2035

A review is all the steps set out in Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983). The review process, from the publication of the notice of the review until the publication of the documents at the end, must take place within the specified period.

How long should the review process be?

The length of the review process is not prescribed, provided all the steps required by the legislation can be undertaken within it. However, the time allowed for consultation should be sufficient to enable interested persons and groups to read and understand the proposals, gather comments and respond with any alternative arrangements that they may wish to submit. The local authority may wish to have regard to any council guidelines on public consultation when carrying out the review.

1. Section 17 Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (ERA 2013) amended the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) s.18C

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Considerations for the 2023 - 2025 compulsory review period

The next compulsory review period is the 16 months between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025.

This will be a demanding period due to a high level of competing priorities that will need to be delivered alongside the compulsory review process. You will need to decide when to conduct your review based on an assessment of several factors, including:

- your overarching 'business as usual' workplan
- the impact of new UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries, which are expected to come into effect at the next UK Parliamentary general election
- the delivery of the next UK Parliamentary general election which must take place before 28 January 2025, and which could be called at relatively short notice following the repeal of the Fixed Term Parliament Act. (A)ROs will need to ensure that the UK Parliamentary election is conducted on the new boundaries and that the polling districts and polling places reflect these revised boundaries.
- the implementation of the significant legislative changes which form part of the next phase of the Election Act 2022 provisions.

You will need to ensure that you have the time and resources to carry out the review alongside your day-to-day delivery of electoral services. Our second key considerations document provides more information on the scale and timing of the legislative changes to be delivered, and the implications for your workplan:

Given the volume of anticipated changes and the impact of boundary changes for UK Parliamentary constituencies, we would advise that you undertake and complete the review as early in the compulsory period as possible.

The recommendations for changes to the UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries have been published by the Boundary Commissions for [England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#). It is expected that they will be made by the end of October, with UK Parliamentary general elections held after this date to be run on the new boundaries.

Conducting your review early in the compulsory period will ensure that you will be able to deliver the next UK Parliamentary general election on the correct boundaries, if it is called at short notice. More information can be found in our guidance

[Impact of new boundaries on the compulsory review process](#). As usual, the Commission will provide guidance and support to manage the impact of a UK Parliamentary general election called at short notice on the management of other electoral services activity, depending on when it is called (for example, during the annual canvass or in the run up to scheduled polls).

Although the new UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries will come into effect at the next UK Parliamentary general election, if a UK Parliamentary by-election is held before this date, this will still use the existing boundaries. Returning Officers will therefore need to make plans to run elections on both sets of Parliamentary constituency boundaries.

If you plan to change your polling district arrangements to support the new UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries, you will need to ensure that the electoral register reflects these new arrangements. As such, you may be required to publish your register twice: on 1 December following the conclusion of the annual canvass (unless you delay publication due to a by-election), and again, following the review, if it is not completed by 1 December.

When considering the implications of the timing for publishing the revised register following the review, you will need to consider:

- how you will ensure that candidates and agents have the information they need to support their participation in the run up to scheduled elections, particularly if this is carried out before the May 2024 elections. For example to ensure that they have the correct electoral register data to support their campaigns.
- any impact on poll card production, to ensure that you can supply data to your printers in time to meet your usual poll card deadlines.

If you plan to publish your revised register post compulsory review after 1 December, following the annual canvass, you will also need to give notice of your intention to republish. More information about the steps you will need to take is set out in our guidance for EROs in [England](#), [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

Preparing for the review

Whilst you cannot formally begin your review until the start of the next compulsory review period, there are steps you can take in advance to support this work:

- familiarise yourself with the proposed changes to the UK Parliamentary constituencies in your area
- contact ROs in neighbouring authorities, if new cross boundary arrangements will be created under the proposed changes
- contact your EMS suppliers about structuring the register to reflect planned boundary changes
- contact your print supplier to understand the deadlines for providing data to them in advance of any scheduled elections in May 2024
- liaise with other teams in your authority who may be able to support the review process
- early communication with interested groups in preparation for the review to make them aware of your plans and when and how the formal consultation stage will take place and how they can get involved
- prepare data in [anticipation of the start of the compulsory review period](#) in October

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Impact of new boundaries on the compulsory review process

Polling district reviews are undertaken in respect of, and polling places are allocated based on, UK Parliamentary constituencies. Planned boundary changes to existing constituencies will impact on your planning for the review.

Polling districts will form the building blocks of your review and the identification of the current polling district structure for the existing UK Parliamentary boundaries will be a useful basis for the review.

When planning and carrying out the compulsory review, local authorities will need to be mindful of what impact the new boundaries being laid will have on their polling districts, and how the scale of any required changes may impact on the timing of the review.

To support the review, local authorities should think about:

- identifying where polling districts affected by the new boundaries may need to be altered
- identifying potential polling places where polling districts may change, and carrying out an initial assessment on suitable buildings within the area
- identifying the polling districts where a change of polling place is likely to be required
- identifying where polling districts are not affected by the new boundaries (in whole or in part)

This information will give you an idea of the scope of any changes needed when the new boundaries come into force. Polling districts and places that do not have enforced changes as a result of boundary changes will still be subject to the full review process.

Further guidance relating to local government boundary changes coming into effect in the same period is set out in [Local government boundary changes](#).

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Local government boundary changes

In addition to the forthcoming UK Parliamentary constituency boundary changes, you may also have local government boundary changes coming into force. As a result, if significant changes are proposed for your area, the time and resources required to conduct the review may increase.

If your local authority has their local electoral boundaries reviewed during the statutory review period, you will need to consider how the electoral boundary review will fit with the polling districts/polling places review and whether it would be possible and desirable to align the two reviews. Although it is not required, EROs may find it beneficial to combine them.

You should think about any changes to your local government boundaries that are likely to impact on your polling districts and incorporate those changes into your review planning. For example, if the new UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries were based on your old ward boundaries, you may need to create additional polling districts to support the new boundaries.

An example is set out below, which illustrates how amendments can be made to polling districts to reflect ward boundary changes, and to enable you to produce registers on both the new and the old structures.

Example

Anytown District Council has undergone a local government boundary review which has changed the pattern of wards. The existing wards are split between two Parliamentary constituencies 'Anytown' and 'Newtown'. The parliamentary boundaries for these constituencies have not changed.

The existing 'Central' ward, currently made up of two polling districts 'North Midway' and 'South Midway', is to be abolished and absorbed into the 'Bunhill' and 'Ansell' wards. The new ward boundary will cut across the 'North Midway' polling district with half becoming part of the 'Bunhill' ward, and half part of the 'Ansell' ward. As such, the 'North Midway' polling district needs to be split into two polling districts, such as North Midway A and B, with 'A' to become part of the 'Bunhill' ward and 'B' to become part of the 'Ansell' ward.

In this example, the new polling district North Midway B, created to reflect the new ward boundaries, will need to be allocated to the correct Parliamentary constituency.

Current Structure

Parliamentary Constituency	Ward	Polling District
Anytown	Bunhill	A - Upper Bunhill
		B - Lower Bunhill
Newtown	Central	C - North Midway
		D - South Midway
Newtown	Ansell	E - Ansell East
		F - Ansell West

New Structure

Parliamentary Constituency	Ward	Polling District
Anytown	Bunhill	A - Upper Bunhill
		B- Lower Bunhill
Newtown	Bunhill	C1 - North Midway A

Parliamentary
Constituency

Ward

Polling District

Newtown

Ansell

C2 - North Midway B

D - South Midway

E - Ansell East

F - Ansell West

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Planning a compulsory polling place review

Local authorities will need to decide when they are going to conduct the compulsory review within the timescales provided by the legislation.

Even though a compulsory review cannot start before the statutory review period, local authorities can start planning for the review before then and should also carry out a preliminary polling place review.

There are some preparatory steps, detailed below, which can be taken outside the formal legal requirements of the review.

For example, local authorities may start compiling statistics and information which may assist them during the review. These may include:

- Electorate figures, broken down to street level within wards and existing polling districts
- Any local authority or national statistics that estimate population change within the area
- In England and Wales, a report from the authority's planning section detailing any proposed areas of new development and the approximate number of dwellings and expected population numbers for those areas
- In Scotland, this information can be obtained from the Housing Land Audit
- Detailed up-to-date maps of a scale that will assist in the designation of polling district boundaries
- Details of current polling places and an indication as to their overall suitability for purpose (including, for example, any surveys, diagrams or photographs completed with the assistance of Presiding Officers or polling station inspectors or as part of a previous review or post-election evaluation)
- Any comments or complaints regarding the current arrangements from the public, elected members or other bodies
- Up-to-date information gained from the existing and possible future polling station venue managers as to continued availability (highlighting, for example, planned renovation work or other future plans)
- Details of potential alternative buildings (public, private or temporary type constructions) that might appear suitable
- Advice and guidance from local disability groups and disability organisations (such as, for example, SCOPE, Mencap or Capability Scotland), and any expert help from officers within the council who are responsible for equality schemes
- Terms of reference and the criteria for assessing the suitability of the current/proposed arrangements

The documents required to be published or communicated during the review, such as the notice of review and the letters to (A)ROs and those with expertise in disabled access, could also be prepared. However, the notice cannot be published nor the letters sent before the start of the compulsory review period.

Timetable

Local authorities could also set the timetable for conducting the review.

It is important to factor into the review timetable the most likely scheduled date of the council or committee meeting where the detailed review proposals would be formally considered and approved.

The review officers should work closely with the lead officer in charge of these meetings to ensure that the date of the meeting and related deadlines can be factored into the review timetable.

Staff / project group / project lead

When planning for the review, the local authority will also need to identify who will lead and support the review, drawing staff not only from electoral services but also from other parts of the authority who may have expertise to assist and contribute.

Conducting a preliminary polling place review

The local authority should undertake a preliminary review of the current polling districts and polling places with a view to establishing their suitability, and identify any potential alternatives where required. This may be done before the start of the specified review period.

There is no requirement to change any of the polling districts and polling places if they are suitable, but any 'no change' decision must be fully justified as part of the overall proposals.

The review process should be structured and must be conducted formally with supporting documentation. This will ensure that there is a complete audit trail for all decisions taken and will contribute to the transparency of the process.

Close liaison with other departments of the council, such as communications, those providing services to disabled residents, and planning will help to increase the efficiency of the overall review process.

The local authority planning and property services departments, for example, will be able to provide guidance on the availability of locations and premises and details of any residential developments that might have an impact on future electorate figures.

Modelling possible options where changes are deemed necessary can be undertaken by using mapping and planning tools available within the local authority, particularly as most authorities will now have access to GIS mapping services which can pull data from a variety of sources.

Local authorities should determine the most appropriate method of involving relevant local authority staff and other interested groups as appropriate.

Assessing the current arrangements and proposals for change

The legislation suggests an approach starting with polling districts, followed by choosing polling places and then considering polling stations. In practice, however, it is important that good quality polling places are identified first, which can then be used as part of the process of defining suitable polling district arrangements that comply with the requirements set out in the legislation.

We have produced a checklist to assist with the evaluation of your current and proposed polling places and polling stations.

Considerations for a preliminary polling place review

As part of the preliminary review certain factors should be taken into account when considering the suitability of the current polling districts and polling places and in identifying potential new ones.

Polling districts

The following should be considered as part of the assessment of the suitability of polling district boundaries:

- Are the boundaries well-defined? For example, do they follow the natural boundaries of the area? If not, is it clear which properties belong in the polling district?
 - Are there suitable transport links within the polling district, and how do they relate to the areas of the polling district that are most highly populated?
 - Are there any obstacles to voters crossing the current polling district and reaching the polling place e.g., steep hills, major roads, railway lines, rivers?
-

Polling places

There are a number of factors that will need to be considered when reviewing existing polling places or when assessing new polling places, including:

Factor

Consideration

Location

Is it reasonably accessible within the polling district?

Does it avoid barriers for the voter such as steep hills, major roads, rivers, etc.?

Are there any convenient transport links?

Size

Can it accommodate more than one polling station if required?

If multiple polling stations are required, is the polling place capable of accommodating all voters and staff required to provide a good service to voters?

Is the size sufficient to provide necessary private areas or privacy screens for photographic identification checks?

Is the size big enough to ensure the flow of voters and reduce the risk of congestion and queues even where there is a high turnout?

Factor

Consideration

Availability

Is the building readily available in the event of any unscheduled elections?

Is there any possibility that the building may be demolished as part of a new development?

Accessibility

Is the building accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place?

Can the building accommodate any equipment provided to support disabled voters?

Ideally, there would be the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for electors in the area within which to establish polling stations.

In practice, however, the choice of polling places will often be a balance between the quality of a building (access, facilities, etc.) and the proximity of the building to the electors. When making a decision, all factors will need to be considered and the authority will need to be able to demonstrate their reasoning behind the decision.

Where, because of local circumstances, a polling place has been selected that is not fully accessible, then reasonable adjustments must be undertaken to provide access for all electors. Alternatively, the local authority should consider whether it would be appropriate to designate a polling place that falls outside the polling district.

Part of the decision-making process involves assessing if the polling place is capable of accommodating more than one polling station together with the necessary staff and equipment, particularly in circumstances where the number of electors allocated to a polling place is high.

The number of electors allocated to a particular polling station should not exceed 2,250.

In instances where there may be a higher turnout, such as at a UK Parliamentary election, (A)RO may wish to set up multiple polling stations within the polling place. Consideration will need to be given to whether the size and layout of the area or building can accommodate such arrangements.

Polling stations

When assessing the suitability of a room or area for use as a polling station, the (A)RO should consider how the size and layout would allow for the most effective throughput of voters taking into consideration the length of time it may take to check voters' photographic ID whilst ensuring the flow of voters and reducing the risk of congestion and queues. Those instances where there is a

high number of electors in the polling station at any one time on polling day should also be considered.

Each polling station should be designed to provide suitable conditions:

- for the elector to show their photographic identification in private if requested as well as vote in private
 - for staff to conduct elections in an efficient and effective manner and
 - for those entitled to observe the voting process to do so without compromising the secrecy of the ballot
-

Use of schools

It should be noted that for the purpose of taking the poll in England and Wales, the (A)RO is entitled to use, free of charge, schools maintained or assisted by a local authority as well as those schools that receive grants made out of moneys provided by Parliament.

This includes academies and free schools.

In Scotland, the rooms in schools that can be used free of charge for the taking of the poll are those in schools that are not independent schools within the meaning of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

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The polling place review process

When carrying out the review, local authorities must:

- publish a notice of the holding of a review
- consult the (A)RO for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in its area
- publish all representations made by an (A)RO within 30 days of receipt by posting a copy of them at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place in their area and by placing a copy on the authority's website
- seek representations from such persons as it thinks have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability. Such persons must have an opportunity to make representations and to comment on the representations made by the (A)RO(s)

On completion of a review, the local authority must give reasons for its decisions and publish:

- all correspondence sent to an (A)RO in connection with the review
- 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
- all representations made by any person in connection with the review
- the minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review
- details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within the local authority area as a result of the review
- details of the places where the results of the review have been published

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Stage 1 – notification of the review

The formal commencement of the review requires the local authority to give notice of the holding of a review.

The notice must:

- be displayed at the local authority's office and in at least one conspicuous place within the authority
- be published on the local authority website

Additionally, the authority could display copies in other public buildings and, in particular, those buildings frequented by disabled residents. The authority's disability officer should be able to give guidance on the most suitable places for reaching disabled residents.

The content of the notice

The content of the notice is not prescribed, but should state:

- that the local authority is conducting a review of polling districts and polling places
- that the (A)RO will make a comment on proposed polling stations, and an indication of when and where the (A)RO'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 authority would welcome the views of all residents, particularly disabled residents, on the authority's proposals, the (A)RO's representation 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 (A)RO's representation 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
- an indication of the timetable of the review and a deadline for representations

The authority should also send a copy of the notice to interested parties such as elected representatives, political parties, disability groups and other stakeholders.

Additionally, the authority could issue a press release and use social media feeds to draw attention to the review and the process.

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Stage 2 – consulting on the review

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 compulsory submission from the (A)RO of the UK Parliamentary constituency or constituencies, which must then be published by the local authority
- 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

The submission from the (A)RO

The (A)RO's submission must:

- comment on both the existing polling stations and the polling stations that would likely be used based on any proposed polling places
- contain information as to the location of polling stations within polling places

The local authority must publish the (A)RO's comments within 30 calendar days of receipt. The comments should be published at the local authority offices and in at least one conspicuous place

within each UK Parliamentary constituency contained wholly or partly in the local authority area.

The (A)RO's response could be copied and made available for residents to view. They should also be published on the local authority's website.

The submissions from the consultees

The authority should consult widely on the review and should seek out the views of interested groups or bodies, including:

- electors
- candidates and agents
- political parties
- members of the council
- other elected representatives

It will be particularly important to consult with those who have specific experience of assessing access for persons with different disabilities. These could include:

- disability sections
- occupational health departments within the council
- local and national disability groups

The authority should give consideration to the different types of disability which may make voting in person more difficult, and should also consider the council's own policy on disabled access. Consultees should be asked for comment both in general and, if appropriate, about particular buildings or areas within the authority.

Any persons involved in the consultation have the right to comment on the recommendations proposed by the (A)RO.

Any elector for a UK Parliamentary constituency either wholly within or partly within the local authority area may comment on any of the recommendations within the whole local authority area.

Any person or body that makes a comment should be invited to suggest alternative polling districts/polling places and should be encouraged to give a reason for the alternative proposal so that it may be given appropriate consideration.

The notice published by the local authority should provide a deadline for the submission of comments.

Last updated: 12 July 2023

Stage 3 – concluding the review

After considering all of the representations, the local authority must decide on the most appropriate polling districts and polling places, which must be approved by the council.

If the review results in the alteration of one or more polling districts, the ERO must make the necessary alterations to the electoral register. Depending on the timing of the review and the extent of the changes, the ERO has three options to ensure the register reflects the new polling districts:

- update the register on publication of the revised register following the conclusion of the annual canvass
- re-publish a revised register at another point in the year
- publish a notice of alteration

Where the ERO has decided to revise their register by republishing it to incorporate the changes, the law requires that they publish a notice 14 calendar days before the publication of the revised version of the register in a local newspaper, at their office and at some other conspicuous place or places in the area.

The legislation does not allow for a part publication of the register – a revised register can only be published for the whole of the local authority area.

Any alteration is effective on the date on which the ERO publishes a notice stating that the alterations have been made, which should be published at the same time as the register is revised or a notice of alteration published, as appropriate.

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Stage 4 – publishing the conclusion of the review

Once the council has agreed the proposals, details of the new polling districts and polling places must be made available to the public.

These should be made available at the local authority offices, in at least one conspicuous place in the constituency (or constituencies), and on the local authority's website. The reasons for choosing each particular polling district and polling place must be given.

Along with the reasons for the final decision of the review, the following must also be published:

- all correspondence sent to the (A)RO in connection with the review
- all correspondence sent to any person whom the authority contacted because they had particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people
- all representations made by any person in connection with the review
- the minutes of any meeting held by the council to consider any revision to the designation of polling districts or polling places within its area as a result of the review
- details of the designation of polling districts and polling places within its area as a result of the review
- details of the places where the results of the review have been published

It is important that electors are made aware of any changes made to the place they must attend to vote. For example, the poll card for the next election they are entitled to vote at could indicate if

their station has changed.

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Implementing the review before the new boundaries come into force

Where the polling districts/polling places review is carried out before the new electoral boundaries are fully in force, it will need to reflect both the current electoral boundaries and also the new boundaries that will come into effect at the next UK Parliamentary general election.

To avoid having to review the polling districts and polling places again once the new boundaries are fully in force, any parts of existing electoral areas that will be split when the new boundaries come into effect could be made into separate polling districts as part of the review.

Additionally, until the new boundaries are fully in force, the electoral register will need to be constructed in such a way that is capable of reflecting both the current and the new boundaries. Again, this can be achieved by making any parts of existing electoral areas that will be split when the new boundaries come into effect into separate polling districts. Your EMS software supplier will be able to advise how this can be implemented in practice.

For the same reasons, where, as a result of a review of one set of electoral boundaries, the boundaries for different elections are no longer co-terminous, (i.e. they no longer share the same boundaries) those areas that are no longer co-terminous could also be made into separate polling districts.

The example below sets out how registers could be split, to ensure that registers can be produced on both new existing and new structures.

Example

Anyfield City Council has 20 wards split between two Parliamentary constituencies, Anyfield and Newtown. All the polling districts are numbered according to constituency (A or N) then ward number (1-20) [numbers used for illustrative purposes for this example only].

The Anyfield City Council ward boundaries matched the old UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries, with wards 1-10 being in the Anyfield constituency and 11-20 being in the Newtown constituency. However under the new constituency boundaries, ward 11 is split between the two constituencies.

Therefore, the four polling districts (N11A-N11D) in ward 11 were reviewed to separate out the streets in the Anyfield constituency, creating a new polling district, A11E:

- N11A
- N11B
- N11C
- N11D
- A11E

Although in some cases polling districts like A11E may only have a few streets, creating a separate polling district will ensure that the electoral register reflects the new boundaries.

If required, you can produce registers on the old or new UK Parliamentary boundaries in case of requests from prospective candidates/parties based on the required polling districts for the constituency.

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The polling place review appeals process

Following the conclusion of the local authority's review, certain persons have a right to make representations to the Electoral Commission. If, on receipt of such representations, we find that a local authority's review did not:

- meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or a body of them, or
- take sufficient account of the accessibility for disabled persons of a polling station/ polling stations within a designated polling place

We may then direct the authority to make any alterations to the polling places that we think necessary and, if the alterations are not made within two months, we may make the alterations ourselves.

Last updated: 12 July 2023

Who is eligible to make an appeal?

We can only consider an appeal made by a person who we are satisfied is eligible to appeal. [1] The eligible persons and the evidence that we may request in order to be satisfied of their eligibility, are set out in the below table.

Eligible Persons

An interested authority.

In England, an 'interested authority' is the council of a parish, or where there is no such council, the parish meeting of a parish, which is wholly or partly situated within the constituency.

In Wales, an 'interested authority' is the council of a community which is wholly or partly situated within the constituency.

Not less than 30 electors in the UK parliamentary constituency, in which the polling district and / or polling place that is the subject of the appeal is situated.

A person (other than the Returning Officer) who has made representations to the authority / Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland (CEONI) during the review under Schedule A1 to the RPA 1983.

Evidence

Minutes of the parish or community council (or, if applicable, parish meeting) showing that the council (or, if applicable, parish meeting) wishes to bring the appeal.

The appeal itself should be set out in a letter from the clerk of the council.

Name, address and signature of each elector together with a statement confirming that:

- they are a registered elector in the constituency in which the polling district and / or polling place that is the subject of the appeal is situated, and
- the appeal is being sent on their behalf.

If the signatures run to more than one page, it must be clear on each page that the electors are confirming that they are registered electors in the relevant constituency and that the appeal is being sent on their behalf

Copy of the written representations made to the authority / CEONI during the review. For example, a letter or an email containing representations.

If the representations were made orally, the Commission will contact the authority / CEONI to obtain confirmation.

Eligible Persons

A person who is not an elector in a constituency in the authority's area (in respect of Northern Ireland, this is the whole of Northern Ireland) but who the Commission think has sufficient interest in the accessibility of disabled persons to polling places in the area or has particular expertise in relation to the access to premises or facilities of disabled persons.

Evidence

Information from the appellant explaining why they have an interest or expertise in disabled access. Examples of those who may fall into this category include charities that represent the interests of disabled persons and individuals who are disabled.

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1. Section 18D(1) Representation of the People Act 1983

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Grounds of appeal

An appeal can only be brought on the grounds that the review of UK Parliamentary polling districts or polling places was not conducted so as to ^[1] :

- meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency or any body of those electors, or
- take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.

An appeal may be brought on either or both of the above two grounds.

These grounds include both the way in which the review was carried out, i.e. the review process, and the outcome of the review, i.e. the polling district and/or place that was designated.

For example a review may not have been not conducted so as to meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency in respect of either or both of the procedural steps that were taken by the authority / CEONI during the review or the authority's / CEONI's decision at the end of the process to designate a particular polling district or place.

An appeal can only be made in respect of a completed review of UK Parliamentary polling districts or polling places. An appeal cannot be made where, for example:

- the review has not been completed - an appeal can only be made after the authority / CEONI has made a decision at the end of the review to designate polling districts and polling places.
- the authority / CEONI has failed to carry out a review, as required by legislation [2] , and where the appellant seeks to challenge that failure. Any person seeking to challenge any such failure should seek their own legal advice. A failure to carry out a review includes a failure to publish notice of a review or a failure to make a decision as to new polling districts and polling places.
- a UK Parliamentary polling district or polling place has been changed outside of a review - any person seeking to challenge any such change should seek their own legal advice.

There is no right of appeal in respect of a Returning Officer's decision as to the location of polling stations at any election.

1. Section 18D(2) Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983)
2. S.18C RPA 1983

Last updated: 12 July 2023

Making an appeal

An appeal should, as a minimum, include the following information:

- The name of the polling district and / or polling place that is the subject of the appeal, and in Great Britain the name of the local authority that carried out the review
- If possible, the date of the review, including the date of the notice of holding the review and the date of the decision
- A statement as to which of the four above categories of eligible person applies to the appellant, together with the relevant evidence
- Full details of the grounds of appeal, together with any evidence that is relied on
- The appellant's contact details so that the Commission can provide the appellant with its decision and also in case the Commission has any queries. In the case of an appeal brought by not less than 30 electors in the constituency, the appeal should indicate the person who is acting on behalf of the electors and to whom correspondence should be directed

How to submit an appeal

An appeal can be submitted to the Commission by post addressed to:

Legal Team
Electoral Commission

3 Bunhill Row
London, EC1Y 8YZ

Appeals can also be emailed to appeals@electoralcommission.org.uk.

If possible, an appeal should be made in writing. If this presents any difficulties please call us on 0333 103 1928 to discuss.

Upon receipt of an appeal, the Commission will assess whether the appeal is valid and acknowledge receipt.

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Deadlines for bringing an appeal

There is no deadline for bringing an appeal to a polling place review.

It can be brought at any time after the completion of a review. However, the Commission will not (other than in exceptional circumstances) make any decision on an appeal affecting an election between the notice of publication of that election and polling day.

It also ought to be noted that the time taken to complete a review varies, but can take several months, so there can be no guarantee that bringing an appeal at any particular point prior to this will result in a decision affecting a forthcoming election.

The Commission publishes details of previous appeals and Commission decisions, on our website. It also publishes the appeal documents.

Last updated: 12 July 2023

The Commission's process for considering an appeal

To reach a decision on an appeal, the Commission will consider all of the points that have been raised by the appellant that fall within the [grounds of making an appeal](#). [1]

The Commission will write to the authority / CEONI to ask for the information that relates to the review that is the subject of the appeal and for their response to the appeal.

The Commission will also ask the Returning Officer for the relevant UK Parliamentary constituency to provide their observations on the appeal.

The Commission will seek other information and consult with others as necessary on a case by case basis. For example, the Commission may:

- send a member of its staff to visit the polling district and polling place to consider the issues raised in the appeal on the ground
- if disability access issues have been raised in the appeal, instruct a specialist in disabled access to visit the polling place and / or provide advice
- invite input from relevant stakeholder groups

1. Section 18D(2) Representation of the People Act 1983

Last updated: 12 July 2023

Matters the Commission will take into account when considering an appeal

The Commission will base their decision-making process on a number of factors when considering an appeal.

The main factors are:

- whether the polling place meets the reasonable requirements of electors
- whether accessibility needs and disabled access have been considered

Further information regarding these considerations is detailed on the following webpages.

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The reasonable requirements of a polling place

Appeals will often raise issues relating to whether the polling place that has been designated meets the 'reasonable requirements' of electors in the constituency, or a particular group of those electors, for example electors residing in a particular part of the constituency. In deciding whether electors' 'reasonable requirements' have been met in the designation of a polling place, the Commission will not seek to identify the best polling place in the polling district.

Instead, the Commission will look at whether the designated polling place meets electors' reasonable requirements in respect of the issues that have been raised in the appeal, for example relating to the:

- location of the polling place
- size of the polling place
- availability of the polling place
- accessibility of the polling place

Electors' reasonable requirements will depend on local circumstances, for example they may be different in a predominantly urban polling district, compared with a polling district that is mainly rural.

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Disabled access to a polling place

Appeals that raise issues of disabled access may make points relating to the review process, for example, whether there was sufficient consultation and consideration of accessibility during the review, and also points relating to the outcome of the review, for example whether the designated polling place is sufficiently accessible. The Commission will consider how both of these types of issues were addressed in the polling place review.

On the review process, the Commission would expect the authority / CEONI to have carried out the steps set out in its guidance on [conducting a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations](#).

We have produced an accessibility check list which sets out key considerations we would expect to be made in assessing the suitability of each polling place and polling station.

In addition to writing to those groups or individuals the local authority has identified as having expertise in access issues, the authority should also have engaged any internal disability access group and/or disability officer as part of the review. If no such group or officer is available, an external disability expert should have been used.

On the outcome of the review, the Commission would expect that so far as is reasonable and practicable the polling place that is designated is accessible to electors who are disabled as required by legislation. ^[1] This will depend on local circumstances, including, for example, the availability of buildings in the area that could be used as a polling place. If a polling place has been selected that is not fully accessible, then reasonable adjustments must be undertaken to provide access for all electors.

Alternatively, the authority / CEONI has the power to consider as part of the review whether it would be appropriate to designate a polling place that falls outside the polling district.

1. Section 18B(4)(b) Representation of the People Act 1983

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The substance of the appeal

The Commission will consider any points that are made by the appellant(s) that fall within the two grounds of which an appeal can be made based on the circumstances as they existed during the review, not at the time of the appeal.

This is because any change in circumstances since the review is not relevant to our decision as to whether the review met reasonable requirements and / or took sufficient account of disability access. However, we will consider any change in circumstances when deciding whether it is necessary to direct a change to polling places.

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When will the Commission make a decision?

The Commission will reach a decision as soon as possible. The length of time taken to reach a decision will vary in each case.

For example, it will depend on:

- whether there are any delays in obtaining information from third parties
- the complexity and number of issues raised in the appeal
- the number of appeals that have been submitted within the same period

Depending on when the appeal is received and the issues it raises, it may not be possible for the Commission to issue a decision in time for it to be implemented by the authority at an upcoming election.

The appeal decision will be set out in a letter addressed to the appellant, the authority and the Returning Officer. The letter will include the following details:

- Summary of decision
- Relevant legislation and guidance
- The review
- The appeal
- Decision
- Direction(s) (if any)

The 'decision' section will set out the Commission's conclusion on whether the authority conducted the review so as to:

- meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency or any body of those electors, or
- take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.

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What happens upon the conclusion of a successful appeal?

Directing alterations

The Commission may direct the authority / CEONI to make any alterations to the polling places designated by the review which the Commission thinks necessary in the circumstances. [1]

If the authority fails to make those alterations before the end of two months starting on the day the direction is given, the legislation provides that the Commission may make the alterations themselves. [2]

The Commission has no power to direct changes to be made to the designated polling districts. The Commission also has no power to direct the authority / CEONI to carry out another review. However, if the Commission considers it appropriate it will recommend that the authority makes a change to its polling districts or recommend that the authority / CEONI carry out another review.

1. Section 18D(4)(a) Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983
2. S.18D(4)(b) RPA 1983

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Current appeals

We have received a polling place review appeal under the Representation of the People Act 1983. This appeal is against the decision of West Suffolk Council to move the polling place in Westley (the Westley Club) in the constituency of West Suffolk so that Westbury Community Centre in the constituency of Bury St Edmunds becomes the new polling place for Westley electors.

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Past appeal decisions

Authority	Decision date	Decision documents
Derbyshire Dales District Council	29 March 2021	Our decision letter to Derbyshire Dales District Council
South Norfolk District Council	7 August 2020	Our decision letter to Saxlingham Nethergate Parish Council
Elmbridge Borough Council	22 June 2016	Our decision letter to Elmbridge Borough Council I
		Our decision letter to Woking Borough Council (1 of 2)
Woking Borough Council	16 November 2016	Our decision letter to Woking Borough Council (2 of 2)
		Summary of appeal (1 of 2)
		Summary of appeal (2 of 2)

Many of our appeals have been archived. Please contact us if you can't find what you're looking for.

Last updated: 12 July 2023

Amending polling places outside of the compulsory review period

If a polling station becomes unavailable, the (A)RO should consider whether another polling station could be designated within the polling place. Changing the polling station within the polling place would not require a review.

If a building becomes unavailable before an election, the polling place can be changed by the local authority in accordance with their decision making arrangements. If delegation procedures are in place, for example to a committee of the council, these should be followed as set out in the council's constitution and the person or persons who are entitled to make changes to polling places should be contacted.

Between compulsory reviews, all polling places and polling stations used should be kept under consideration, and an evaluation of their suitability carried out after each election. If any changes are identified as being desirable, the same steps should be followed as for conducting the compulsory review.

The local authority can carry out an interim review and change some of their polling districts and polling places before the end of the 5-year cycle, but the same processes should be undertaken for the affected areas as for the compulsory review. Without going through these processes, the local authority will have difficulty evidencing their decision making and explaining how they took into consideration the views of disabled persons and the reasonable requirements of electors

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