



REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS & POLLING PLACES 2023

INFORMATION SHEET

North Devon Council is conducting a review of Polling Places and would welcome representations from any elector or body within our boundary. The authority would welcome any person or body with expertise in access for persons with any type of disability to make a representation or to comment on the authority's proposals, the Returning Officer's representation or any other matter. Any such persons or bodies making representations should, if possible, give alternative places that may be used as polling places.

1. Background to the Review

Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, the council has a duty to divide its area into polling districts and to designate a polling place for each district for UK Parliamentary elections. It also has to keep these arrangements under review. The arrangements made for parliamentary elections are also used at other elections.

The next compulsory review of polling districts and places within the local authority is between 1 October 2023 and by 31 January 2025.

2. The Legislative requirements of a polling place review

The aim is to review polling districts, polling places and polling stations to ensure that:

- Each parish in England and community in Wales is to be a separate polling district, 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

3. Accessibility

- The authority must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in its area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances
- The authority must have regard to the accessibility to disabled persons of potential polling stations in any place which it is considering designating as a polling place.

4. Terms

“Polling districts” are geographical electoral areas into which wards and constituencies may be sub-divided.

“Polling places” A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. 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.

“Polling stations” 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 Returning Officer for the election.

The final decision on the situation of polling stations rests with the Returning Officer.

Ward boundaries are not part of this review and therefore cannot be altered.

5. Practical Considerations

Availability

There is no such thing as a purpose built polling station. We have to adapt and use the buildings which are available in the locality. Whilst regulations permit the Returning Officer to use schools, the owners of other buildings (Church halls, sports clubs etc.) have no such obligation.

Suitability

When selecting a polling station there are some basic criteria which need to be considered.

- Geographically central for the majority of the electorate.
- Appropriate for democratic use.
- Health and safety arrangements
- Enough useable space.
- Exclusive use.
- Access (including parking).
- Welfare facilities for staff.
- Cost.

Topography

Considerations such as steep hills and other natural boundaries, railway lines, busy main roads etc. need to be taken into account.

Other Factors

Use of “Schools”

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

6. Timetable.

The Council is required to publish notice of the holding of a review. This has been carried out by way of notices posted at Lynton House, Commercial Road, Barnstaple, EX31 1DG. It has also been published on the Council's website. The timetable for the review is set out below:

Commencement of Consultation	Monday 2 October 2023
Closing date for representations	Friday 10 November 2023
Publication of any Returning Officer's Representations	Within 30 days of receipt
Report to Full Council Committee	Wednesday 17 January 2024
Completion of review and Publication of final Polling District Places Order	By Thursday 01 February 2024

7. List of consultees

Any elector in the Constituency may make representations on the designation of polling districts or places. In addition, the Council has notified the following groups/individuals about the review:

The (Acting) Returning Officer, North Devon District Council
All North Devon District Councillors
All Devon County Councillors for North Devon
North Devon Parish & Town Councils
Selaine Saxby (MP) North Devon Constituency
Registered Local Political Parties
Local disability groups and disability organisations

8. Completion of the review

The revised Polling District Places Order must be approved and published by 1st February 2024. The following information will be published on the Council's website and made available, on request, at North Devon District Council, Lynton House, Commercial Road, EX31 1DG.

- All correspondence sent to the Returning Officer in connection with the review
- All representations made by any group or person in connection with the review
- Proposals for the designations of polling districts and polling places
- Details of the actual designations of polling districts and polling places agreed as a result of the review

9. Challenging the Review

Although the Electoral Commission has no initial role in the review process itself, it does have an important role in respect of considering representations and observations that a Council has failed to conduct a proper review on one of two grounds:

- That the Council has failed to meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or a body of them (i.e. the reasonable requirements of a particular area of the authority have not been satisfactorily met); or
- That the Council has failed to take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.

Representations based on any other grounds will not be considered by the Commission.

All representations made to the Commission must be made in writing either by post, email or fax and should include the location and any other relevant information, stating specifically why it is inaccessible or does not meet the reasonable requirements of the elector

10. Who may make a representation to the Electoral Commission?

- Any parish council which is wholly or partly situated within each constituency
- Not less than thirty registered electors in the constituency (although electors registered anonymously cannot make a representation)
- A person (except the (Acting) Returning Officer) who made representations to the council when the review was being undertaken
- Any person who is not an elector within the constituency but who the Electoral Commission feels has sufficient interest in the accessibility of disabled persons in the areas or has particular expertise in relation to the access to premises or facilities of disabled persons

The (Acting) Returning Officer is entitled to make observations on any representations made to the Commission.

11. What will the Electoral Commission do?

The Electoral Commission is required to consider any representations and observations and may direct the relevant council to make any alterations it sees necessary to the polling places designated by the review. Should a Council fail to make the alterations within two months of the direction being given, the Commission may make the alterations itself.

Further information on making an appeal [Making an appeal | Electoral Commission](#)

12. Representations

Any persons wishing to make comments or representations regarding the proposals may do so. Any representations you wish to make should be **received by close of business (5pm) Friday 10 November 2023**

All representations can be made in writing either by post or e-mail or by completing the [online survey](#)

Representations by post should be sent to:

Electoral Registration Officer
North Devon Council
Lynton House
Commercial Road
Barnstaple
EX31 1DG

Representations by email should be sent to: elections@northdevon.gov.uk

For any queries, please telephone the Electoral Services helpline on 01271 388277.

All representations will be published on the Council's website as soon as possible after receipt. Even if you have already commented on the proposals, you may make further submissions in response to views and comments you see on the website.

Whilst we cannot receive anonymous submissions, personal details of members of the public will not be made public. Submissions from representative bodies and person such as Councils and Councillors, will be named within the report.

The final decision will be taken by members of the Council and a notice of any alterations will be published on the Council's website no later than 1 February 2024. Any changes will become effective at all elections held after that date.