

**Review of Polling Districts,
Polling Places and Polling Stations
2014/15**

Guidance Booklet

1 Introduction

In accordance with the *Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Parliamentary Elections) Regulations 2006*, as amended by the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013*, every local authority in the UK is required to conduct a review of polling districts and polling places in its area.

The next compulsory review must be completed by 31 January 2015.

Bath & North East Somerset Council will commence the review on Monday 1 December 2014 and will complete the process by Thursday 15 January 2015.

Timetable

Notice of Review	Monday	1 December 2014
Distribution of booklet to consultees	Tuesday	2 December 2014
End of consultation period	Friday	2 January 2015
Report to Full Council	Thursday	15 January 2015
Publication of review result	Friday	30 January 2015
Publication of the revised register	Monday	2 March 2015

All notices, comments and representations relating to this review will be published and made available to the public at the following Council locations:

- Guildhall, High Street, Bath, BA1 5AW
- Keynsham Civic Centre, Market Walk, Keynsham, BS31 1FS
- The Hollies, High Street, Midsomer Norton, BA3 2DP

A copy of the notice will also be available to download from the Council website (www.bathnes.gov.uk/reviews).

2 Definition of terms

2.1 UK Parliamentary constituencies

The *Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986* defines a parliamentary constituency as “an area having separate representation in the House of Commons”.

Bath and North East Somerset includes two parliamentary constituencies: the constituency of Bath and the constituency of North East Somerset.

UK parliamentary constituency boundaries cannot be changed by this review.

2.2 Local government wards

Local government wards are the key building block of UK administrative geography, being the spatial units used to elect local government councillors.

Bath and North East Somerset includes 37 local government wards, which are represented by a total of 65 councillors.

Bath & North East Somerset Council ward boundaries cannot be changed by this review.

2.3 Polling districts

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.

Every local authority in the UK is responsible for dividing its area into polling districts for UK parliamentary elections held within its area, and for keeping the polling districts under review.

When designating polling districts, the local authority must seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances. In addition, and unless there are special circumstances that lead the authority to determine otherwise, each parish must be in a separate polling district.

For European parliamentary elections, the same polling districts as designated for UK parliamentary elections are to be used unless the relevant authority considers that there are special circumstances that make alternative designations appropriate.

For local government elections, a local authority may divide its designated electoral areas (i.e. wards or electoral divisions) into polling districts. Although there is no requirement to sub-divide local government electoral areas into polling districts, it is recognised good practice to do so. When doing so, every effort must be made to ensure that the polling district scheme for local government elections mirrors as closely as possible that agreed for parliamentary elections.

2.4 Polling places

A polling place is the geographical area in which a polling station is located.

The polling place for a polling district must be within the area of the district unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area either wholly or partly outside of the polling district. When designating polling places, the local authority must seek to ensure that all electors have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

Should a local authority fail to designate a polling place, the entire polling district will be classed as the polling place for that district.

The local authority must keep the polling places under review.

2.5 Polling stations

A polling station is the actual room or area where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district.

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.

When designating polling stations, the Returning Officer must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling stations are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.

The election rules permit the Returning Officer to provide one or more polling stations within the same room, and must supply each with a sufficient number of voting compartments.

Returning Officers for parliamentary elections are treated as honorary positions, which are held by a Mayor or Sheriff. It is the Acting Returning Officer who organises the election. The Acting Returning Officer for the parliamentary constituencies of Bath and North East Somerset is the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

2.6 Scope of the review

The review relates to polling districts and polling places for all elections held in Bath and North East Somerset.

2.7 Criteria to be followed during the review

As part of the assessment of the suitability of **polling scheme** the following points should be considered:

- Are the polling district boundaries well-defined, e.g. 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?
- Any new polling stations identified should have good access for people with disabilities;
- Ideally all polling stations should be located within their own polling districts;
- No polling station should be shared by two or more Council wards;
- The Acting Returning Officer may use, free of charge, any room in a school maintained or assisted by Bath & North East Somerset Council, or a school in respect of which grants are made out of monies provided by parliament to the person or body responsible for the management of the school;
- Up to 2,500 electors may be allocated to one polling station; if the premises are suitable, two separate polling stations (up to 5,000 electors) may be provided.

3 The review process

3.1 STAGE 1 – Notification of the review

The review process commences with the publication of the notice of review. Bath & North East Somerset Council will publish the notice on Monday 1 December 2014.

3.2 STAGE 2 – Consultation

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

- A compulsory submission from the Acting Returning Officer of our two parliamentary constituencies. The Acting Returning Officer will comment on both the existing polling stations and any proposed alternative or additional polling stations. His comments will be available on the review webpage from Friday 8 December 2014.
- 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. Any person or body that makes a comment should suggest alternative polling districts/polling places and should give a reason for the alternative proposal so that it may be given appropriate consideration.

3.3 STAGE 3 – The conclusion of the review

After considering all of the comments and representations, Bath & North East Somerset Council will decide on the most appropriate polling districts and polling places.

If the review results in the alteration of one or more polling districts, the Electoral Registration Officer will re-publish a revised electoral register on Monday 2 March 2015.

3.4 STAGE 4 – Publishing the conclusions of the review

Once the Council has agreed the proposals at its meeting on Thursday 15 January 2015, details of the new polling districts and polling places will be made available to the public at the following Council locations:

- Guildhall, High Street, Bath, BA1 5AW
- Keynsham Civic Centre, Market Walk, Keynsham, BS31 1FS
- The Hollies, High Street, Midsomer Norton, BA3 2DP

A copy of the notice will also be available to download from the Council website (www.bathnes.gov.uk/reviews).

Along with the decision of the review, the following documents will also be published:

- All correspondence sent to the Acting Returning Officer in connection with the review;
- All correspondence sent to any person whom the Council contacted because they had particular expertise in relation to access premises or facilities for disabled people;
- All representations made by any person in connection with the review;
- the minutes of the 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 as a result of the review.