

SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS & POLLING PLACES/STATIONS 2019

General Information

The Council is required to carry out a scheduled statutory review to be completed by January 2020

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 requires each local authority to undertake a review every five years. The last statutory review was undertaken in 2014.

The statutory responsibility for reviewing UK Parliamentary polling districts and places rests with each relevant local authority. The final decision on the situation of polling stations rests with the Returning Officer.

A **polling district** is a geographical sub-division of an electoral area, i.e. a UK Parliamentary constituency, a European Parliamentary electoral region, a ward or an electoral division.

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

A **polling station** is the actual room or building where the process of voting takes place, and must be located within the polling place designated for the particular polling district. The Returning Officer for the particular election must provide a sufficient number of polling stations, and allot the electors to those polling stations in such manner as he or she thinks the most convenient.

What the Rules say*

(a) 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;

(b) the authority must seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place for which it is responsible is accessible to electors who are disabled;

(c) 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;

(d) the polling place for a polling district must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate any area wholly or partly outside the district;

(e) 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.

**(Representation of the People Act 1983 s.18)*

Practical considerations when designating polling places

Access

All polling stations should have access facilities for disabled electors. This includes wheelchair users. There are various building regulations which determine how adaptations can be made. It is not always possible for the owners of buildings to make permanent structural changes. Where permanent facilities are not possible, the Returning Officer tries to make temporary provision, usually by means of a portable ramp. However, it must be remembered that, on occasion these ramps can cause a hazard and thus it is not always a practical solution.

A polling station should be within reasonable walking distance for most electors.

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
- Welfare facilities for staff
- Cost

Topography

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

Other Factors

Use of Schools

The Returning Officer would not use a school as a polling station where there is a reasonable and viable alternative. However, this is not always possible. Whilst regulations permit the Returning Officer to use schools as polling stations, every effort will be made to ensure that the school remains open on polling day, although ultimately this decision lies with the school itself. Any alternate suggestions for other suitable venues will be considered.

Overall Number of Polling Stations

There are no legislative limits on the number of polling stations an authority can provide. However, when considering numbers, there needs to be sufficient to run

efficient and effective elections, which are as accessible and convenient to the electorate as possible and which follow the principle set out above.

Timetable

Event	Date
Publication of Notice of the Review	Friday 28 June 2019
Consultation Period	28 June – 30 August 2019
Publication of the Returning Officers representations	within 30 days of receipt
Report to General Purposes Committee	Monday 30 September 2019
Final report to Full Council	Tuesday 15 October 2019
Publication of result of review	Wednesday 30 October 2019
Implementation of report recommendations	Register of Electors published on 1 December 2019 to take effect for all elections after this date

Potential Issues and Considerations

Below is information relating to some known concerns relating to polling stations.

1. Langley Ward
Temporary Hut, York Road, B65 0SG. The security of this temporary hut at this location is a concern. The temporary hut was repeatedly vandalised leading up to the election on 2 May.
2. Newton Ward
Temporary Hut, Meadowside Close, Great Barr, B43 6BP. Temporary huts are less than ideal due to cost and accessibility factors. This particular temporary hut is also currently positioned in the middle of a residential street meaning some disruption to local residents.
3. Old Warley Ward
Temporary Hut, On School Car Park, Perryfields Maths & Computing College, B68 0RG. We have previously used a room within the school building as a polling station and the school has been able to remain open on polling day. Unfortunately, due to ongoing renovation works at the school, we have been unable to use a room within the school at the elections on 2nd and 23rd May without closing the school. We have used a temporary hut on the school site to try and minimise disruption. However, as well as the cost and accessibility factors that comes with using a temporary hut, the site is not an ideal place the accommodate a temporary hut whilst the renovation work takes place.
4. Princes End Ward
William Perry Boxing Club, High Street DY4 9JB. The boxing ring within the building is not able to be moved to accommodate a bigger polling station. As a result, the area that is used for the polling station is very limited for space and can cause accessibility issues for disabled voters.
5. Smethwick

Temporary Hut, Car Park at, Londonderry Lane Playing Fields, B67 7EE. The car park which the temporary hut is situated will no longer be available due to redevelopment work.

6. St. Paul's Ward

Galton Village Play Centre, 25 Woodland Drive B66 1JF. The building is in the process of being changed to residential use and so it will no longer be available for future elections.

Point of Contact

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<http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/pollingstationreview>

List of Consultees

The (Acting) Returning Officer, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
The (Acting) Returning Officer, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
All Sandwell Borough Councillors
John Spellar MP
Tom Watson MP
Adrian Bailey MP
James Morris MP
Sandwell Labour Party
Sandwell Conservative Party
Sandwell Liberal Democrats
Sandwell Green Party
Sandwell UKIP
Sandwell For Britain Movement
Black Country Party

Action on Hearing Loss
Age UK
Association for the Blind
Mencap
RNIB
RNID
Scope