**SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS & POLLING PLACES/STATIONS 2023**

**General Information**

The Council is required to carry out a scheduled statutory review to be completed by January 2025

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 2019.

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 considered.

**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**

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| Event | Date |
| Publication of Notice of the Review | Monday 2 October 2023 |
| Consultation Period | 2 October – 3 November 2023 |
| Publication of the Returning Officers representations | within 30 days of receipt |
| Report to General Purposes Committee | Monday 4 December 2023 |
| Final report to Full Council | Tuesday 12 December 2023 |
| Publication of result of review | Friday 15 December 2023 |
| Implementation of report recommendations | Republish Register of Electors on 2 January 2024 (if changes to polling districts)  |

**Potential Issues and Considerations**

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

1. Bristnall Ward

Langley Swimming Centre, Vicarage Road, Oldbury B68 8HS. The swimming centre has now closed and so will not be available for elections going forward.

1. Soho & Victoria Ward

Hadley Stadium, Wilson Road, Smethwick B66 4NL. We currently use the building on Waterloo Road as a polling place, however we have received complaints from our staff that this is a poor quality polling station.

1. West Bromwich Central Ward

The Mercure Birmingham West, Birmingham Road, West Bromwich B70 6TU. Numerous issues with this polling station in May 2023. The hotel changed the room we had booked last minute and did not inform us. The room they had moved us to was not suitable to be used as a polling station.

**Point of Contact**

Electoral Services

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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

Nicola Richards MP

Shaun Bailey MP

Sandwell Labour Party

Sandwell Conservative Party

Sandwell Liberal Democrats

Sandwell Green Party

Sandwell Reform UK

Sandwell Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Action on Hearing Loss

Age UK

Association for the Blind

Mencap

RNIB

RNID

Sandwell Visually Impaired

Scope