



# **WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## Public Consultation Document Polling District and Polling Places Review for the Borough of Wokingham

Wokingham Borough Council  
Civic Offices  
Shute End  
Wokingham  
RG40 1WH

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## 1. Introduction

Section 17 of the Electoral Registration Act 2013 introduced a formal process for the timing of compulsory reviews of all UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places.

A full review of the whole borough must be carried out every five years. The last review was undertaken in 2018. This review is particularly complex due to changes in the parliamentary, borough and some town and parish council boundaries. The polling district scheme must therefore serve;

- Future parliamentary elections
- The 2024 all out borough council elections on new warding arrangements
- Any town or parish elections/by-elections on the existing arrangements until the town and parishes complete their electoral cycle in 2027

The borough warding arrangements implemented by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England also have several wards that cut across the existing town and parish boundaries. Polling districts are required that enable the administration of borough and town and parish councils effectively. To administer elections effectively there needs to be separate polling districts for each town, parish and borough ward. Ensuring separate polling districts reduces the risk of ballots being entered into the wrong ballot box and delaying the verification and counting process. Towns and Parishes may wish to alter their boundaries through a Community Governance Review but these will need to take place following the 2024 elections. Polling districts will be reviewed following any CGR.

By way of explanation:

- **Parliamentary Constituency**  
Is the area designated by the Boundary Commission for England having separate representation in the House of Commons. Wokingham Borough area contains parts of 4 separate Parliamentary Constituencies. This cannot be changed by the review.
- **Borough Boundary**  
Is the area designated as the responsibility of Wokingham Borough Council. This cannot be changed by the review.
- **Wards**  
Are the building blocks for the Borough and Parliamentary Constituency boundaries. The Wards are created by the Local Government Boundary Commission. The wards boundaries cannot be changed by the review. Borough Councillors are elected to represent registered voters in a ward.
- **Polling Districts**  
Are the building blocks for the wards, within which a polling place must be determined which is convenient to the electors. These boundaries can be adjusted as part of this review.
- **Polling Places**  
The building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer. These can be changed as a result of this review.
- **Polling Stations**  
The actual room or area where voting takes place. This must be located within the polling place and designated for the particular polling district. This function is the responsibility of the Returning Officer and does not form part of this review.

## 2. Timetable

Date	Task
19 October	Report to Full Council outlining the review process and agree timings
23 October	Publication of the Notice of Review
20 October	Open consultation

19 November	End of Consultation period
Mid-End November	Publication of Consultation Responses
18 January 2024	Report to Full Council with recommendations
19 January 2024	New Polling Places designated

### 3. The Review Process

The review will be undertaken by Council officers in consultation with local Councillors, local MP's, Parish Councils, disability groups and residents. There are a number of factors to take into account when considering polling districts and polling places. Guidance from the Electoral Commission lists the following key considerations:

With regard to polling district boundaries:

- Boundaries: Are they well defined? For example do they follow the natural boundaries of an area? If not, is it clear which properties belong in the polling district?
- Location: Are there suitable transport links within the polling district, and how do they relate to the areas of the 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, impassable main roads, railway lines, rivers?

With regard to polling places:

- The location: Is it reasonably accessible within the polling district? Does it avoid barriers for the voter such as steep hills, major road, rivers etc.? Are there any convenient transport links? Is it fairly central to the majority of the allocated voters?
- Size: Can it accommodate more than one polling station if required? If multiple polling stations are required, is the polling place ample enough to accommodate all voters going into and out of the polling stations, even where there is a high turnout? It is also advisable to take into consideration any expected growth due to new development.
- Suitability: 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? Is the building accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place?
- This review document will be sent to all stakeholders, including the (Acting) Returning Officer, local members of parliament, Councillors and local political parties. It will also be sent to persons/organisations who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

Inevitably there will be an element of compromise between the different factors involved in reviewing polling places and polling district boundaries, and indeed the Electoral Commission acknowledges this: "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 their decision.

The consultation period for this review will last for six weeks. The timescale will allow for formal ratification of the final scheme of polling districts and polling places to be agreed at the Full Council meeting in March 2019, before being formally adopted in January 2020.

### 4. The Current Arrangements

A list of the proposed and current polling districts and polling places is attached at an Appendix A to this document.

Detailed maps showing existing ward and polling districts and current polling places is available here [Boundary Review \(arcgis.com\)](http://BoundaryReview(arcgis.com)).

### 5. Making representations

Any registered elector in Wokingham may make representations to the Council. Representations will also be considered from persons who have particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

We would encourage anyone making representations to suggest alternative polling districts/places where appropriate and to give reasons for the alternative.

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.

## **6. Completion of the review**

On completion of the review, the Council is required to give reasons for its decisions in respect of the designation of both polling districts and polling places.

In addition, the Council must publish:

- all correspondence sent to the (Acting) Returning Officer in connection with the review and all correspondence sent to any person who the Council 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 meetings held by the Council where details of the review have been considered;
- details of the actual designations of polling districts and polling places agreed as a result of the review; and;
- details of where the results of the review have been published.

A report on the final proposed scheme of polling districts and polling places will be presented for formal ratification at the Council meeting in March 2019 in time for changes to be brought into effect for the local government elections due to be held on 7 May 2020.

## **7. Challenging the Outcome of 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 made that a Council has not conducted a review so as 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;
- take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons of polling stations within a designated polling place.

Who may make a representation to the Electoral Commission?

Section 18D (1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, sets out who may make representations to the Electoral Commission namely;

- not less than thirty registered electors in the constituency;
- any person who made representations to the Council when the review was being undertaken (except the (Acting) Returning Officer);
- any person who is not an elector within the constituency who the Electoral Commission feels has sufficient interest in the accessibility of disabled persons;
- in England, any parish council which is wholly or partly situated within the constituency (or parish meeting where there is no council).

Also the (Acting) Returning Officer may make observations on any representations made to the Commission.

The Electoral Commission is required to consider any such 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.