

Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations: Consultation document

Introduction

All district councils are required to complete a review of polling districts and polling places every five years. This particular review must, by law, be completed by 31 January 2025.

The purpose of the review is to ensure electors are given “such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.”

As part of the statutory review, contributions from the (Acting) Returning Officers for the Parliamentary Constituencies that represent the district should be sought. As such, Sevenoaks District Council will consult with the (Acting) Returning Officers for the Sevenoaks and Tonbridge constituencies.

This consultation document contains an assessment of existing and proposed polling districts and polling places within the district.

Commenting on the proposed recommendations

We welcome the views of all residents, particularly disabled residents, or any person or body with expertise in access for persons with any type of disability, on the proposals within this consultation document. Anyone making representations should, if relevant, give alternative places that may be used as polling places.

The consultation period runs from 11 October to 15 November 2024. Any changes are expected to take effect from 2 January 2025.

Anybody making representations should be aware that, upon completion of the review, all correspondence and representations received must, by law, also be published.

Any comments or contributions must be made in writing by **15 November 2024** and may be submitted as follows:

By post: Electoral Services, Sevenoaks District Council, Argyle Road,
Sevenoaks, TN13 1HG

By email: elections@sevenoaks.gov.uk

Definitions

Polling districts	A polling district is a geographical area. District councils are required to divide their area into polling districts for the purposes of elections. The polling district determines which polling station an elector must attend in order to vote in person. Each parish and parish ward must have a separate polling district.
Polling place	A polling place is the building or area in which polling stations will be selected by the (Acting) Returning Officer at an election. The district council must designate polling places for each polling district. Each polling place should, as far as practicable, be accessible to electors, including those with disabilities.
Polling station	A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. These are chosen by the relevant (Acting) Returning Officer for a given election, and not by the council.
Returning Officer	The individual who has responsibility for delivering free, fair, democratic elections in accordance with the relevant legislation. This role is independent of the council. At a Parliamentary Election, this individual is known as the Acting Returning Officer, hence the term '(Acting) Returning Officer' refers to the individuals responsible for delivering each level of election. This is also known as the (A)RO.

How these proposals have been developed

- Polling districts

A review of the boundaries and extent of each existing polling district has taken place, to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate. Each parish and parish ward is to be a separate polling district, and the boundaries and designations of polling districts should not adversely impact on an elector's ability to attend their polling station.

- Polling places

Each venue included on the schedule of polling places has been assessed for its suitability in line with Electoral Commission guidance. This included a review of accessibility and core facilities required for use by polling station staff. Each venue has been a polling station at recent elections.

In preparing this consultation, the accessibility levels of current polling stations, the assessments undertaken previously, and the current numbers of electors and levels of postal voting have been considered.

It should be noted that for the purpose of taking the poll, the (A)RO is entitled to require the use of schools. However, we have taken the view that insofar as is possible we should minimise the use of schools to attempt to avoid school closures and disruption to schooling. However, in some areas there is no suitable alternative and we continue to recommend the use of schools.

Wherever possible, at polling places that have access issues, arrangements are in place to support electors to vote, this includes polling staff directing voters to an alternative entrance or setting up

ramps (where appropriate) in liaison with the caretaker of the premises. Unfortunately, due to the nature of some of the facilities there is limited scope at some venues for this. In these areas, polling station staff are trained how to best assist voters who may need additional support or who would be unable to enter the polling station unaided.

Draft proposals

- Polling districts

Following this review, **no changes** are proposed to the boundaries and extents of polling districts as they remain relevant and appropriate. It is noted that the Sevenoaks District is currently subject to an Electoral Review being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and they will report their recommendations in 2026.

The decision as to how many polling stations should be placed within a polling place is one for the (A)RO to make at a given election, and this decision is reviewed ahead of each election to take into account changes in electorate, postal voters, likely turnout and any level of combination of polls.

- Polling places

Please see the Polling Places Analysis document for draft proposals for polling places, listed by Parliamentary Constituency and then by district ward within the constituency.