

**ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL
REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES
ARGYLL AND BUTE UK PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY**

1. Introduction

While there has always been a requirement on the relevant local authority to keep under review the polling districts and polling places used at parliamentary and local government elections, the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling stations and polling places. The next compulsory review must now be started and completed between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive). In practice in Argyll and Bute, the fixing of polling district boundaries and polling places is delegated to the Chief Executive who also acts as the Returning Officer. A review has now been undertaken based on a range of data and several changes are proposed. These proposals now need to be the subject of public consultation.

The polling districts and polling places were last reviewed in Argyll and Bute in 2018. The polling district boundaries and polling places are the same for all elections whether UK Parliamentary, Scottish Parliamentary or local government elections.

2. Definition of terms

Polling district: the area created by the division of a constituency or ward into smaller parts, within or for which a polling place can be designated which is convenient to electors.

Polling place: the building or area in which polling stations are situated. Polling places are normally within the polling district unless it is not possible to find a suitable place within the area or it is more convenient for the majority of voters. Certain types of buildings are not normally designated as polling places, for example, places of worship and licensed premises, and schools are only used where there is no reasonable alternative in order to avoid disruption to pupils education.

Polling station: the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. The number of polling stations in a polling place depends on the number and distribution of electors in the polling district.

3. What is not being reviewed

- the boundaries or name of any parliamentary constituency
- the boundaries or name of the Council or electoral wards within Argyll and Bute
- any other aspects of the electoral process.

4. Aim of the Review

- (a) To seek to ensure that all the electors in the constituency have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances

- (b) To seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who may have a disability.

In an ideal world electoral administrators would have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for the electors in the area. In practice however this is not always the case and there may be little choice available. Where it is necessary to use a place where the access is not ideal then every reasonable adjustment is made to provide access for all electors.

The choice of polling place will often be a balance between the quality (access, facilities, etc.) of a building and the distances between the residents and that building compared to other options for polling places. There is no fixed rule on how to decide how this should be done. The legislation provides that all electors in a constituency should have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

If a building becomes unavailable before an election (for example damage/destruction by fire) and there is no time to conduct a formal review to choose a new polling place, the polling place is changed immediately. This is achieved by a simple declaration and public notice that a polling place has been changed made by the proper officer of the Council (the Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support in Argyll and Bute).

4. Current Position

A review of the polling arrangements has now been completed. This review considered a range of data including:

- Experience of the current polling arrangements in recent electoral events;
- Feedback from polling staff and Polling Station Inspectors;
- Comments and complaints from voters;
- Equality and Diversity Policy / Accessibility of polling places;
- Advice from the Valuation Joint Board / ERO with respect to anticipated changes in the electorate;
- Proposed housing developments in the area from the Housing Land Audit & Local Development Plan;
- Potential need for any new school buildings; and
- Cost of polling place hire.

5. Public Consultation

Electors and interested parties are entitled to make representations about polling districts and polling places. The proposed polling arrangements need to be offered for public consultation before being considered and agreed by Argyll and Bute Council. There is also a requirement for formal comment from the Returning Officer.

6. Timetable

Any elector or interested party may make representations about the proposed Polling District Boundaries and/or the Polling Places. If you wish to offer any comments or representations please submit them in writing by Monday 30th October 2023 by email to elections@argyll-bute.gov.uk.

Where any person or body wishes to make representations that differ from those proposed regarding any particular Polling Place, they should suggest an alternative Polling Place and should give reasons for the alternative proposal.

After the deadline, and consideration of all representations received, a report containing the final proposals for polling districts and polling places will be submitted for consideration at a meeting of Argyll and Bute Council.

Following the review the electoral register must be altered to reflect the polling districts. As implementation of any changes must occur in 2024, it is important to meet the deadlines which the Electoral Registration Officer has in terms of revising the register and publishing.

7. Following the review

It is of course vital that electors are made aware of the place they must attend to vote. The poll card for the next electoral cycle will indicate that detail including if their station has changed to allow the elector to consider their method of voting.

The next full review will be carried out not later than five years after the current review of 1 October 2023. It may be held earlier, if this may make it more convenient in either ensuring polling districts and places are most appropriate before certain elections or for using any non-election year when there is more time to conduct a review.

Polling districts and places are kept under review between major reviews. Changes to polling districts and polling places can be made at any time, for example as the availability of polling places varies.

Douglas Hendry, Executive Director with responsibility for Legal and Regulatory Support, Argyll and Bute Council, Kilmory, Lochgilphead PA31 8RT

1st October 2023