

Teignbridge District Council
Full Council
Tuesday 29 October 2024
Part i

Statutory Review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations

Purpose of Report

To:

1. Set out the legislative requirements for conducting a Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places.
2. Communicate the findings based on responses to the Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places.
3. Set out draft recommendations following the initial consultation process and subsequent period for comments.
4. To seek support for the recommendations detailed below.

Recommendation(s)

The Council RESOLVES to:

1. Adopt the draft Order for Newton Abbot (Appendix A) and the draft Order for Central Devon (Appendix B).
2. Continue to designate the whole of a parish or polling district as the polling place for the purposes of siting a polling station.
3. Give further consideration during 2026 to the polling arrangements for the parish of Exminster.

Financial Implications

Refer to 4.1 below.
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Legal Implications

Refer to 4.2 below.
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Risk Assessment

Refer to 4.3 below.

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Environmental/ Climate Change Implications

Refer to 4.4 below.
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Executive Member

Cllr Richard Keeling

Appendices/Background Papers

Appendix A – Draft Order for Newton Abbot (attached)
Appendix B – Draft Order for Central Devon (attached)

Notice of Review

[Statutory Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places - Teignbridge District Council](#)

Definitions

[Statutory Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places - Definitions - Teignbridge District Council](#)

Criteria for polling places and polling districts

[Statutory Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places - Criteria for polling places and polling districts - Teignbridge District Council](#)

Proposals for the review of polling stations

[Statutory Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places - Proposals for the review of polling stations - Teignbridge District Council](#)

Electoral Commission guidance on conducting polling districts and polling places reviews [Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations | Electoral Commission](#)

1. Introduction/Background

Local authorities are legally required to review their polling districts and polling places for UK parliamentary constituencies at least once every five years. Local authorities must comply with the legislative requirements contained in the Representation of the People Act 1983 Sections 18A to 18C.

The legislation requires that:

- each parish in England is to be a separate polling district, unless special circumstances apply
- the council must designate a polling place for each polling district, unless the size or other circumstances of a polling district are such that the situation of the polling stations does not materially affect the convenience of the electors
- the polling place must be an area in the district, unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district (for example, if no accessible polling place can be identified in the district)
- 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

Every person should be able to vote without facing barriers and, as part of the compulsory review, local authorities must consider the accessibility of potential polling stations when considering designating or reviewing a polling place.

For reference, the definition of a polling district, polling place and polling station is as follows:

Polling District

A polling district is the area created by the separation of a ward into smaller parts within which a polling place can be determined which is most suitable for the electors.

Polling Place

A polling place is the area (or may be a building) in which the number of polling stations will be selected by the Returning Officer.

Polling Station

A polling station is the room or area in which voting takes place. This must be located within the polling place that has been designated for the particular polling district. The number of polling stations to be accommodated within a polling place is the decision of the Returning Officer for the election.

Where possible, it is the Council's policy to avoid the use of schools and to only consider using a school where there is no other suitable premises in the area.

As part of the review process the Council is required to seek representations from its residents and from other groups and/or organisations who may have an interest in polling arrangements. During this review we directly contacted the following:

- The (Acting) Returning Officer for Newton Abbot
- The (Acting) Returning Officer for Central Devon
- The Member of Parliament for Newton Abbot
- The Member of Parliament for Central Devon
- Teignbridge District Councillors

- Devon County Councillors representing divisions within the Teignbridge area
- Teignbridge Town and Parish Councils
- Registered Political Parties & Election Agents
- Scope
- RNIB South West
- Age UK Devon

2. Responses to the initial consultation

During the initial consultation period the (Acting) Returning Officer for Newton Abbot constituency confirmed that he is happy with the proposed arrangements for Newton Abbot. A response was not received from the (Acting) Returning Officer for Central Devon constituency.

From the other consultees listed we received the following responses:

The County Councillor for Exminster and Haldon requested that provision is made for a separate polling station to serve electors at the new Matford development in the parish of Exminster. This request was supported by a submission from Exminster Parish Council. The reasons given are as follows:

- The size of the new community is likely to be in the region of 2,000 homes.
- There is no direct bus link between the Matford development and Exminster.
- There is no practical walking route from the Matford development to Exminster.
- Parking is limited at the current Exminster polling station (Victory Hall, Exminster).

We did not receive any responses to the consultation from Exminster residents and, to date, we have received no complaints from electors concerning the polling station location for Exminster parish at either the May 2024 Police and Crime Commissioner elections or at the recent UK Parliamentary general election in July 2024.

In addition to the responses concerning Exminster, we received positive responses from the following Town and Parish Councils concerning their current polling arrangements:

- Bovey Tracey Town Council
- Hennock Parish Council

There were no responses received from any of the other consultees and no responses from any members of the public.

3. Draft recommendations

In each parish area we have designated the whole of the polling district, or parish, as a polling place to give the greatest flexibility as to where a polling station may be sited. An exception to this is where there is no suitable place within the parish so a neighbouring parish may have been designated as the polling place. An example of

this is Ashcombe where there is no suitable premises to site a polling station, so the neighbouring parish of Mamhead is designated as a polling place for this parish. The combined electorate of both parishes is just 141 so it is easily manageable and sensible to run a combined polling station there.

Our policy has been and will continue to be, to avoid using schools where possible. This minimises disruption for pupils and takes account of the numerous complaints we have received from parents in the past when schools have had to close for us to use on polling day. At present we only use one school – Canada Hill Primary School in Ogwell and the school manages to stay open due to careful management of voter access to the premises. Not all schools have the space or facilities to allow this.

We have also managed to move away completely from using mobile polling stations (portacabins). It became increasingly difficult to attract staff who were willing to work in them, particularly where they had to use mobile toilets and generators. We also received numerous complaints from electors who didn't like using them or had access issues with them, and from residents objecting to having them sited outside their homes and the noise nuisance created by the generators. In addition to this they are an expensive option. As an example, the most expensive polling station used this year was in the region of £400 compared to more than £3,000 for the last mobile station we used in May 2019. At national elections the cost is covered by the consolidated fund, but it becomes a very expensive option for local authorities when running their own local elections, particularly at parish level where costs are recharged to the parishes.

Having given due consideration to the submissions concerning the polling arrangements for Exminster parish, the review recommends deferring the siting of an additional polling station until the next scheduled Teignbridge District and Parish elections in May 2027. There is no indication that voter turnout is lower in Exminster than at other Teignbridge polling stations, which suggests there are no immediate issues of concern with the current polling arrangements.

There are around 400 electors registered to vote in the new development (equating to 12.32% of the Exminster electorate) and the existing polling station in Exminster copes well with the number of electors allocated to it. The total number of electors currently allocated to Exminster Victory Hall is 3,245 with only 400 of these coming from the new development. It is felt these numbers will remain manageable for the 2025 County Council elections but are aware that, as the development and its population continue to grow, the polling arrangements will need a further interim review before the next full review due to be held in 2029. The other issue to be considered for the new area is where a polling station can be sited. Matford Brook Academy has been suggested as a possible location, but as stated, our policy is to avoid using schools where we can in order to prevent disruption to pupil attendance. In the absence of an obvious alternative location the siting of a mobile polling station may need to be actively considered. As there are no scheduled elections due to be held in Teignbridge during 2026, the review feels this will give an ideal opportunity to revisit the Exminster polling arrangements ahead of scheduled elections in 2027 and to fully investigate and evaluate the viable options available.

4. Implications, Risk Management and Climate Change Impact

- 4.1 Financial** – There are no immediate financial implications as the proposed arrangements have not significantly changed from those presently in place. There would be a financial implication should a decision be made to use a mobile polling station for Exminster in the future, but this will be assessed at that point in time. The siting and designation of a polling station is a decision for the Returning Officer, not the Council.
- 4.2 Legal** – There is a legal obligation to conduct the review and, where necessary, to keep the arrangements under continuous review outside of the statutory period. Any arrangements not properly in place may be subject to a legal challenge.
- 4.3 Risks** – The review has been conducted with adherence to Electoral Commission guidance and with reference to current legislation in order to mitigate any risk. The greatest risk is to not have an up to date Polling Districts and Polling Places Order in place as this will create uncertainty concerning the satisfactory designation of polling stations and may leave the Council open to challenge.
- 4.4 Environmental/Climate Change Impact** – The location of polling stations has environmental implications where transport accessibility may influence the electorate's travel behaviours during local and national elections. The location and density of population centres tends to dictate where polling stations are held, with a tendency to use local existing venues including town halls, village halls, and community centres, which will make it easier to visit them via walking, cycling, and shared transport. The report gives examples of where additional polling stations are under consideration, and examples of how temporary venues may need to be created to meet local need; should these changes progress, then consideration should be given for accessibility via sustainable transport on a case-by-case basis where it is possible to do so.

4. Conclusion

As no other issues were raised during the initial consultation and no responses were received from any members of the public, the recommendation of the review is that Teignbridge adopts the draft Order for Newton Abbot and the draft Order for Central Devon

The draft recommendations were published on Monday 16 September. The closing date for comments on these proposals was Friday 4 October and no comments were received.

It is therefore recommended that Teignbridge Council

1. Adopts the draft Order for Newton Abbot and the draft Order for Central Devon.
2. Continues to designate the whole of a parish or polling district as the polling place for the purposes of locating a polling station.
3. Gives further consideration during 2026 to the polling arrangements for Exminster.