# Recommencement of the Polling District and Polling Places Review 2024

# Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for the Polling District and Polling Places Review to be undertaken by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets

## Introduction

* 1. The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is carrying out a Polling District and Polling Places Review pursuant to the provisions of Schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended) and the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. This introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary polling districts and polling places.
	2. This review must be completed within a period of 16 months between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive).

1.3 The length of the review process is not prescribed, provided all the steps required by the legislation can be undertaken within it. However, the time allowed for the review should be sufficient to enable interested persons and groups to read and understand the proposals, gather comments, and respond with any alternative arrangements that they may wish to submit.

1.4 The Review will have regard to the guidance issued by the Electoral Commission on “Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations”.

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/reviews-polling-districts-polling-places-and-polling-stations>

1.5 The aim of the review is to ensure that the arrangements of polling districts, polling places and polling stations allow electors to cast their votes as easily and conveniently as is reasonably practicable, taking account of the boundaries of the borough wards and Parliamentary Constituencies.

1.6 The Review will be conducted in accordance with the terms of reference contained in this document.

1.7 Documents referred to, and other useful information, are available on the Council’s website here.

<https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/council_and_democracy/elections__voting/review_of_polling_districts.aspx>

**2. What will the Review consider?**

2.1 The Review will look at:

* The boundary, name, and references of existing polling districts.
* The scope for merging polling districts, retain/create new polling districts and/or delete polling districts if considered necessary.
* The polling places for each polling district.
* The suitability of existing polling places and stations used for each polling district (including access and suitability for use by disabled electors)
* Possible alternative polling places which may be more suitable or more convenient than existing polling places.
1. **What issues will not be considered as part of the Review?**

3.1 Representations on matters such as changes to Borough Ward boundaries and Parliamentary Constituency boundaries cannot be dealt with under this review.

**4. What is the area under review?**

4.1 The whole of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets is included in the scope of the review.

**5. Why is the Council carrying out a polling district review?**

5.1 Changes brought in by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 mean that the Council is statutorily required to carry out a review of polling districts and polling places which must be completed within a period of 16 months between 1 October 2023 and 31 January 2025 (inclusive).

5.2 Representations will be considered by the Councils General Purpose Committee on Monday 2 December 2024 with a final report submitted to Full Council for a decision on Wednesday 22 January 2025 as to the final arrangements.

5.3 The last compulsory review concluded on 15 January 2020 in accordance with the review window between 1 October 2018 – 31 January 2020 (Inclusive) this followed by a post-election review in 2021 held between 20 September 2021 and 29 October 2021.

**6. What is the present structure of polling districts?**

6.1 Tower Hamlets has 75 polling districts of varying sizes. Maps showing the geographical extent of each district are available on the Council’s webpage with hard copies available for inspection in Room TH206 at the Town Hall.

Electoral Services

Room TH206

Town Hall

160 Whitechapel Road

London

E1 1BJ

6.2 Details of the name, reference, and elector numbers for each polling district are also detailed on the website.

**7. How will the review work?**

7.1 The initial Notice of the Review was published on Monday 2 October 2023, but the process was suspended due to the GLA polls scheduled for Thursday 4 May 2024 and the uncertainty of when the General Election would be called, with the possibility of a combined poll with the GLA. In addition to the uncertainty Parliamentary Boundary amendments were also to be implemented once the General Election was called.

7.2 Following the conclusion of the GLA and the extraordinary General Election held on 4 July 2024 the review will recommence to fit the statutory conclusion deadline.

7.2 Copies of the revised Notice will be displayed at the Council’s offices and in at least one other conspicuous location within the authority.

7.3 The revised Notice of Review will be sent to interested parties, including elected representatives, political parties, known disability groups and other stakeholders.

7.4 A press release will be issued, and the Council will use its social media feeds to draw attention to the review and the process.

7.5 The revised period will run from 10th October 2024 until 22nd November 2024 (6 weeks).

This stage will involve:

* A compulsory submission from the (Acting) Returning Officer of the two UK Parliamentary constituencies namely Poplar & Limehouse and Bethnal Green & Stepney has been published alongside the submission by the (Acting) Returning Officer for the new constituency Stratford & Bow that now overlaps into the Tower Hamlets area. (See 8.4 below) \*
* Submissions from electors and other interested persons and bodies, including elected representatives and those with expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people.

7.6 Responses received before the end of the consultation period will be considered as part of a report to Council where it will decide on the most appropriate polling districts and polling places.

7.7 If the review results in the alteration of one or more polling districts the Electoral Registration Officer will make the necessary alterations to the electoral register.

7.8 Once the Council has agreed the proposals it will publish its conclusions along with all that documents that it is required to publish as set out in guidance from the Electoral Commission.

7.9 Electors will be made aware of any changes made to the place they must attend to vote.

7.10 Following the conclusion of the review the appeals process for any decision made by the Council is set out in guidance from the Electoral Commission. This can be found on their website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

**8. Who will we consult?**

8.1 Electors within the authority and the UK Parliamentary constituencies may make representation and the authority welcomes the views of all residents, particularly disabled residents, on the authority’s proposals, the (Acting) Returning Officer’s representation or any other matters.

8.2 The authority would also welcome any person or body with expertise in access for persons with any type of disability to comment on the authority’s proposals, the (Acting) Returning Officer’s representation or any other matters.

8.3 The Council is also consulting with elected representatives, Borough Council Members, political parties, disabled groups, and other parties deemed to have expertise in the process.

8.4 The (Acting) Returning Officer for the Parliamentary Constituencies of Bethnal Green & Stepney, Poplar & Limehouse and the (Acting) Returning Officer now responsible for the new constituency of Stratford & Bow have been consulted and their formal responses published on the webpage.

8.5 If alternative premises are proposed, they will be consulted and sent a copy of the Notice of the Review so they can respond to the consultation.

**9.**  **Timetable for the review**

9.1 The Polling District Review formally began when the initial Notice of Review was published and this has now been revised.

9.2 The revised timetable below outlines the main stages of the extended review

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| --- | --- |
| Publication of the revised notice and terms of reference (Start of the additional revised period) | Friday 11 October 2024 |
| Additional revised review Period | 6 weeks |
| Close of review period | Friday 22 November 2024 |
| Report to General Purposes Committee | 2 December 2024 |
| Report to Full Council | Wednesday 22 January 2025 |
| Publication of Council decision and conclusion of the review | No later than Friday 31 January 2025 |
| Publication of revised electoral register subject to any revised polling districts. | Monday 3 February 2025 |

**10. How to submit your views**

You can respond to the consultation in the following ways:

By email to PDReview2024@towerhamlets.gov.uk

By post to:

Polling Districts and Places Review 2024

Electoral Services

Room TH206

Town Hall

160 Whitechapel Road

London

E1 1BJ

If you have any questions about the review, please contact the team at PDReview2024@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call the electoral services office on 020 7364 0872

**Definition of terms**

**UK Parliamentary constituencies**

The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 states:

‘There shall for the purpose of parliamentary elections be …… constituencies each returning a single member……” Constituency means an area having separate representation in the House of Commons.’

UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries cannot be changed by this review.

**Polling district**

A polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of a UK Parliamentary constituency for the purposes of a UK Parliamentary election.

**Polling place**

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

Section 18B (4) (e) of the RPA 1983 states ‘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’. The Electoral Commission consider that polling places should always be defined more specifically than simply the polling district - for example, by designating the name of the polling place (normally a particular building or area and its environs).

**Polling station**

A polling station is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place. Unlike polling districts and polling places which are fixed by the local authority, polling stations are chosen by the relevant Returning Officer for the election.