

COUNCIL
29 January 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: INTERIM REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICT, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

REPORT OF: Democratic Services Manager / (Acting) Returning Officer / Electoral Registration Officer.

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places – Non-Executive function (Electoral Services: Governance)

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Thriving Communities/ Accessible Services

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To detail the outcome of the interim review of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations following the Community Governance Review in 2025.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That Council designates the Polling Districts and Polling Places as per the Returning Officer's Proposals attached as Appendix A to the submitted report, effective as of 2 March 2026.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places, which had to be concluded by 31 January 2025.
- 3.2. Outside of compulsory reviews, the (Acting) Returning Officer (RO) for each authority is also encouraged to conduct regular assessments of existing arrangements. Following completion of the Community Governance Review (CGR) 2025 which resulted in changes to parish wards – specifically in Ickleford, Baldock, Royston, Clothall and Bygrave. Therefore, the polling arrangements were required to be considered.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. Interim Polling Districts and Polling Places reviews, such as this, should follow the same process as a statutory review.
- 4.2. When designating each polling district and polling place, alternative options have been considered where identified and available. Options are outlined in Appendix A and summarised under paragraph 8.6 of this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. When conducting the review, the Council must:

- Consult the RO for every parliamentary constituency which is wholly or partly in North Hertfordshire; and
- Seek representations from electors and other interested persons and bodies including elected representatives and such persons that have a particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.

5.2. The consultation gave respondents the opportunity to make representations on the RO's draft proposals for the arrangement of polling districts, polling places and polling stations.

5.3. In total 20 consultation responses were received – 13 via the online survey and seven via email.

5.4. The Notice of Review was published on 14 October 2025 on the Council's website and at the District Council Offices, as well as being distributed to each parish for display and included within the Members' Information Services (MIS). A press release was issued on 31 October 2025, as well as social media posts to promote the consultation stage.

5.5. Publication of the Notice of Review formally commenced the consultation period which concluded on 30 November 2025.

5.6. As part of the consultation, the Council was required to seek the views of interested bodies or groups. These included local disability groups such as charities who have guides on access. In addition, consideration must be given to the different types of disability that may make voting in person more difficult. The Electoral Commission's guidance stresses the importance of consulting those persons and bodies who have experience of assessing access for persons with different disabilities.

5.7. The following persons or groups were informed of the consultation:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • MPs for Hitchin and North East Hertfordshire | • Parish Councils (via the Parish Clerk) |
| • North Hertfordshire District Councillors | • Age UK Herts |
| • Acting Returning Officers for Hitchin, North East Hertfordshire, and Stevenage | • Autism Bedfordshire/Hertfordshire |
| • Local Political Parties | • Hertfordshire Mind |
| | • Sheltered accommodation schemes |
| | • Stroke Association Hertfordshire |
| | • Support Activities Group |

5.8. Stakeholders, including Members of the Council, were approached by email on 14 October 2025 with a further communication sent on 12 November 2025.

- 5.9. While this review focused on changes as a result of the CGR, the review welcomed any comments or representations on existing polling arrangements for other areas within North Hertfordshire. A full summary of representations is included with this report at Appendix B.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1. This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. A Community Governance Review (CGR) which considered parish electoral arrangements concluded in 2025. This triggered an interim PDR to take account of the changes to parish boundaries and to ensure that the electorate have suitable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances, and that so far as is reasonably practicable the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled.

- 7.2. The interim review must be concluded in time to advertise publication of the revised Register of Electors on 2 March 2026, so that North Hertfordshire has agreed and functioning polling districts and polling places ready to be used at the scheduled parish elections in May 2026.

- 7.3. For this report, it is important the following terminology is understood:

- **Polling District** – a geographical area created by sub-dividing an electoral area. All wards within North Hertfordshire are divided into polling districts, which form the basis upon which the register of electors is produced. Unless there are special circumstances, each parish must be in a separate polling district.
- **Polling Place** – the designated building or area within which a polling station is situated. In the absence of any legal definition, this can be regarded as widely as a polling district or as narrowly as the building in which a polling station is located.
- **Polling Station** – the actual room or area within the polling place where voting takes place.

- 7.4. The overall timescales for the interim PDR are as follows:

14 October 2025	Formal notice of review and commencement of public consultation period
28 October 2025	Publication of (Acting) Returning Officer's comments.
30 November 2025	End of public consultation period
29 January 2026	Final proposals considered by Council
2 March 2026	Publish revised register of electors (where relevant changes have been made).

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. A polling district can only be in one parish / ward / division / constituency (i.e. an electoral boundary line cannot cross through a polling district). This means that a parish or community must not be in a polling district which has a part of either a different parish or community within it, or any un-parished part of the local authority area within it, unless special circumstances apply.
- 8.2. Special circumstances can be considered where there is a small number of electors, and it is not practicable for the parish to be its own polling district. Whilst there are a significant number of polling districts within North Hertfordshire with a small number of electors, there are no proposals to amend these boundaries as part of the interim PDR.
- 8.3. Each polling district is allocated with a polling place and a polling station which the electors within the given polling district visit to vote at election time. Polling districts and polling places are fixed by the local authority; it is the Returning Officer for the election who determines the polling station within the polling place.
- 8.4. The Polling Places proposed have been based on an assessment of the available options and the accessibility of the respective venues. These are considered at Appendix A of this report.
- 8.5. As part of the CGR, the following changes were made to parish boundaries:

Bygrave

External boundaries of Bygrave (BBE) were adjusted so that Baldock was excluded to follow the district ward of Baldock East as illustrated in Appendix C.

Clothall

External boundaries of Clothall were adjusted so that Baldock was excluded from them to follow the district wards of Baldock East and Baldock West. Area CBW moved from Clothall to Baldock West and CBE from Clothall to Baldock East as illustrated in Appendix C.

Ickleford

Creation of a new a parish ward for the Lavender Grange community as illustrated in Appendix D:

Ickleford parish ward: 6 councillors
Lavender Grange: 2 councillors

Royston:

The current Town wards were abolished and replaced with wards that aligned completely with the district wards. The number of Town Councillors were reduced from 15 to 13:

Heath: 4

Meridian: 5

Palace: 4

- 8.6. Recommendations at Appendix A of the report are summarised as follows:

Ickleford

1. That the polling district H-CA-ICK – Cadwell (Ickleford) be amended and a new polling district be created to align with the new parish wards, following the boundary determined by the CGR and named as follows:
 - H-CA-ICK – Cadwell (Ickleford) (1509 electors)
 - H-CA-LG – Cadwell (Lavender Grange) (244 electors)
2. That the following polling places are designated as the polling districts:
 - Ickleford Village Hall be the designated polling place for Ickleford parish ward.
 - Ickleford Village Hall be the designated polling place for Lavender Grange parish ward.

Baldock East

3. The following polling districts be amalgamated to form a new polling district called N-BE-2 – Baldock East 2 (29 electors):
 - N-BE-BYW (29 electors)
 - N-BE-CL (0 electors)
4. That Tapps Garden Centre become the designated polling place for N-BE-2 – Baldock East 2.

Royston Heath

5. The following polling districts within the Royston Heath parish ward be amalgamated into one new polling district, N-RHE-3 – Royston Heath 3 (2941 electors):
 - N-RHE-3- Royston Heath 3 (1635 electors)
 - N-RHE-4 Royston Heath 4 (967 electors)
6. That the designated polling place for Royston Heath 3 become The Old School House.
7. That N-RHE-5 - Royston Heath 5 is renamed N-RHE-4 – Royston Heath 4.

Royston Meridian

8. The following polling districts within the Royston Meridian parish ward be amalgamated to create a new polling district, N-RM-1 - Royston Meridian (North) (3112 electors):
 - N-RMR-1 (1240 electors)
 - N-RMR-2 (1872 electors)
9. That the designated polling place for Royston Meridian North be Royston Leisure Centre.
10. The following polling districts within the Royston Meridian parish ward be amalgamated to create a new polling district, N-RM-2 - Royston Meridian (South) (2311 electors):
 - N-RMR-3 (1344 electors)
 - N-RMR-4 (967 electors)
11. That the designated polling place for N-RMR-4 - Royston Meridian 4 be Market Hill Rooms.

Hitchin Walsworth (Billing Place)

12. That the polling district boundary for H-HWA-2 Hitchin Walsworth be moved to incorporate dwellings 1 through 24 at Billing Place (21 electors).
- 8.7. For polls in May 2026 the Council has applied to MHCLG to participate in election pilots. These pilots focus on accessibility. North Herts Council has applied to partake in early in person voting and voting hubs. Where applicable, these polling places have been identified as part of this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. 4.4.1 (q) of the Functions of the Full Council states that Council must 'agree proposals for the compulsory polling districts, polling places and polling stations reviews, district boundaries, electoral wards and the number of District Councillors'.
- 9.2. 14.6.9 (a)(vi) Delegation of Authority - Director: Governance states that Electoral Services B '(subject to compulsory reviews reserved to Full Council) vary polling districts and polling stations.
- 9.3. The Electoral Commission states in its guidance 'Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations' that:

'Between compulsory reviews, all polling places and polling stations used should be kept under consideration, and an evaluation of their suitability carried out after each election. If any changes are identified as being desirable, the same steps should be followed as for conducting the compulsory review.'

The local authority can carry out an interim review and change some of their polling districts and polling places before the end of the 5-year cycle, but the same processes should be undertaken for the affected areas as for the compulsory review. Without going through these processes, the local authority will have difficulty evidencing their decision making and explaining how they took into consideration the views of disabled persons and the reasonable requirements of electors.

- 9.4. Sections 18A – 18E and Schedule A1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 provides the statutory requirements of the polling review.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The Electoral Commission recommends ratios when allocating electors and staff to Polling Stations and as the population of the district, and consequently the number of electors increase as new residential developments proceed, will mean new polling stations may be required and therefore have ongoing cost implications.
- 10.2. The anticipated costs of the various elections are taken into account during the annual budget setting process.
- 10.3. For contested Town/Parish/County Council elections the costs are recharged to the respective authority (unless a year when a District Council election or any other election is held in which case the costs are proportioned between the respective Councils).
- 10.4. For uncontested Town/Parish elections the respective Town or Parish councils are charged an uncontested fee as agreed as part of the 'Electoral Services – Scales of Fees' report.
- 10.5. For national polls the government issues a Fees and Charges schedule which identifies for each authority a "maximum recoverable amount" and subsequently claims are made to the Cabinet Office for reimbursement of the fees incurred i.e. Parliamentary/Police and Crime Commissioner elections. Claims can take a significant time to determine, and the Council does not always receive the full amount submitted. As in paragraph 10.3, the cost of national polls is shared if other elections are combined.
- 10.6. As a result of the changes proposed within this interim polling station review will see a minimal reduction in polling stations. While this is not a determining factor there will be some cost savings as a result of these changes:
- a new polling station with x2 staff following the creation of the Lavender Grange Parish Ward;
 - potentially two less polling stations as a result of the merger of polling districts within Royston (approximately x4 less staff).
- 10.7. Factors which are required to be considered as part of the review of polling places include location, size, availability, and accessibility. The cost of venue hire would be applicable for local elections where the cost of polling place hire is met by the Council.

- 10.8. Scheduled elections in May 2026 are parish elections for Codicote, Kimpton, Knebworth and Royston and the cost is attributable to the respective parish. Any additional costs associated with elections in May 2026 relating to accessibility pilots are to be funded by MHCLG.
- 10.9. If the Council opts to make changes to the Polling Districts as recommended in the report at this meeting, there will be a requirement to re-publish the Revised Register of Electors on 1 March 2026. This will follow mandated advertising of the re-publication of the Revised Register during February 2026 at a cost in the region of £900.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. The Council needs to ensure it complies with the same requirements when conducting an interim review as it would when conducting a statutory review. If the Council opted to not designate the Polling Districts and Polling Places at this meeting, this would result in severe repercussions on the Electoral Services Team regarding preparations for the forthcoming parish elections as well as for future candidates. This is in addition to the extra burdens already being placed on the Team from opting to take part in the flexible voting pilots.
- 11.3. Once the review has concluded, certain persons have a right to make representations to the Electoral Commission. If, on receipt of such representations, the Electoral Commission finds that the Council did not:
- Meet the reasonable requirements of the electors in the constituency, or
 - Take sufficient account of the accessibility for disabled persons of a polling station within a designated polling place.

The Electoral Commission may direct the Council to make any alteration to the polling place as deemed necessary, and if the alterations are not enacted within 2 months, the Electoral Commission may make the alterations themselves.

- 11.4. The requirement to undertake the review, including the associated consultation, provides the Council with the opportunity to assess the suitability of polling arrangements, to ensure that facilities provided are accessible to all and do not present any barriers to people's participation in elections.
- 11.5. Between compulsory reviews, all polling places and polling stations continue to be evaluated as to their sustainability at each election.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. As part of the review the Council must:

- Seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.
- Seek to ensure that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.

12.3 The consultation clearly sets out the rationale for the locations of the polling places/station with clear consideration of accessibility.

12.4 A large majority of our polling stations have adequate, if not, excellent facilities for electors with mobility problems. However, it is necessary for us to provide some temporary access ramps in some locations on polling days, to bring them up to a satisfactory standard.

12.5 The suitability and accessibility of polling places continue to be monitored at election times both by the staff employed there and by Polling Station Inspectors (PSI) who are required by the Returning Officer to visit each polling station usually twice during the hours of poll.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report. However, is a Polling Place must be an area within the district (unless special circumstances make it desirable to designate an area wholly or partly outside the district) a local provider will usually be used to deliver this.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1. Staffing an election can be highly resource intensive. This varies and is dependent on the type of election. For instance, a by-election or Neighbourhood Plan Referendum requires less resource than a District or Parliamentary election.

15.2. In terms of this report, other than officer time required to inspect, consult, collate, and review proposals in addition to any time spent researching alternative locations, there are no human resource implications.

APPENDICES

15.3. Appendix A – Recommendations and Proposals of the report

15.4. Appendix B – Representations

15.5. Appendix C – Baldock Map (Community Governance Review 2025)

15.6. Appendix D – Lavender Grange Map (Community Governance Review 2025)

15.7. Appendix E – Maps of polling districts referenced at Appendix A of this report

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 16.1. Melanie Stimpson, Democratic Services Manager (and (Acting) Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer)
melanie.stimpson@north-herts.gov.uk
- 16.2. Isabelle Alajooz, Service Director: Governance (and Monitoring Officer/(Acting) Deputy Returning Officer)
isabelle.alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk
- 16.3. Shelley Abel, Electoral Services Manager
shelley.abel@north-herts.gov.uk
- 16.4. Ian Couper, Service Director: Resources
ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk
- 16.5. Tim Everitt, Performance and Risk Officer
Tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk
- 16.6. Reuben Ayavoo, Policy and Communities Manager
Reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1. Council's website: Polling District Review
(Polling District and Polling Places Review 2025 including the initial Acting Returning Officer's Recommendations for parliamentary constituencies within the North Hertfordshire District area)
[Polling District Review | North Herts Council](#)
- 17.2. [The North Hertfordshire District \(Reorganisation of Community Governance\) Order 2025](#)
- 17.3. Reviews of Polling Districts, Polling Places and Polling Stations Guidance; The Electoral Commission
[Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations](#)
- 17.4. [Delegated decision - Polling station for Little Wymondley and Todds Green \(formerly at Wymondley Baptist Church\) combined with the polling station for Great Wymondley at Great Wymondley Village Hall.](#)