

REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES

Evaluating the suitability of potential polling stations

It is important that the accessibility needs of all voters are considered when designating polling places. There are a number of steps that can be taken to facilitate this process.

Consider the location of the polling place:

- Is it located close to where most of the electors in the polling district live?
- Is it at the top or bottom of a steep hill?
- Does it have suitable access from a road?
- If there is a pavement, does it have a dropped kerb close by?
- Are there any convenient public transport links?

Availability of parking:

- Are there adequate parking facilities close to the entrance of the building?
- If not, is there anywhere close by that could be used for parking just on polling day?
- How far do electors have to walk from the car park to the polling station?
- Is there a designated disabled parking space, or could one be provided?
- Is there a dropped kerb from the parking area to the polling station?

All approaches should:

- Have a hard, smooth, nonslip surface, without steps, potholes, broken slabs etc. – gravelled surfaces can present difficulties to wheelchair and buggy users
- Not have any severe gradients
- Be well lit

Entrance:

- Does the building have a level entrance?
- Are there any steps to the entrance of the building?
- Are the stairs highlighted in any way?
- Is there a handrail by the steps?
- Is a permanent ramp provided?
- If not, could a temporary ramp with a suitable gradient be provided safely, or is there another entrance which people with disabilities or other electors could use?
- Is the door wide enough for a wheelchair user to gain access?
- How heavy are the doors for a frail or elderly person to open? Would they need to be propped open?

Inside the building:

- Are there any internal steps or barriers for electors to negotiate?
- Are doormats level with the floor? If not, can they be removed?
- Are there any other trip hazards?

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- Is there a suitable non-slip floor covering? Would it become slippery when wet?
- Are there any corridors which may be difficult to negotiate for any electors using wheelchairs or those who find walking difficult?
- In terms of the layout of polling equipment in the room to be used as a polling station, is there enough space in the room for staff, polling equipment and a number of electors, including a wheelchair user?
- Is there adequate lighting in the room? Switch on all the lights available to test this.
- Is there any need for additional lighting?
- Moveable mats, heavy curtains trailing on the floor, a mix of carpet and wooden flooring with edging lips in between, and highly polished floors can all be potential hazards. If the premises has any of these features, can anything be done to remove or improve them?

Another key factor to consider when assessing the suitability of a particular building or location is the facilities available to polling station staff. It must not be overlooked that the staff will be on duty for approximately sixteen hours, and that they will not be permitted to leave the premises. Their basic human needs must not be discounted. Issues to consider include the provision of:

- Adequate toilet facilities
- A kitchen, or at a minimum, access to tea and coffee making facilities
- Adequate heating/cooling
- A separate area adjacent to the polling station where breaks could potentially be taken
- A telephone
- Comfortable adult chairs

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