

Setting up a polling station

Setting up a polling station in a way that manages the flow of voters well and helps make the voting process accessible to all is key to ensuring a positive voter experience. Adaptations may also be made so that the set up supports the safe management of the polling station in light of coronavirus. Polling station staff and anybody else responsible for setting up polling stations should be made aware of the following considerations, so they can feed into the set-up plans.

Signage to the polling station

- A large polling station sign should be visible and be positioned so that voters can easily identify the polling station.
- There should also be directions (arrows and/or instructions) steering the voter to the entrance
- If there is a different entrance to assist people with mobility problems then this entrance should similarly be clearly signed and signage should be checked to ensure that it can be read by someone in a wheelchair.
- The appropriate 'Guidance for voters' notice must be displayed both inside and outside the polling station. Outside the polling station, it should be displayed in a prominent location for voters to read as they make their way to the polling station.
- If the Returning Officer has provided the notice in Braille, in languages other than English or Welsh, or in pictorial formats, these too should be displayed.
- Any signage providing public health information displayed inside and outside the polling station should be accessible to everyone attending the polling station

Car parking

- Any car parking spaces for disabled people should be clearly marked and regularly monitored during the day
- On site car parking facilities for staff and others should also be regularly monitored.
- Be aware of the nearest parking facilities to advise voters.

Level access to polling stations

- The polling station should be accessible to all voters.
- If temporary ramps are to be used at a polling station, the Presiding Officer should be informed beforehand and ideally be shown how to install them if they will not be in place before polling day.
- Where a one way system is used and ramps are required, ensure that they are in place at both entrance and exit to the polling station.

- Ramps should be secure and stable with a low gradient. If they are not fitted properly, they can be dangerous and could cause injury to electors.
- There should be no obstructions or hazards along the route to the entrance. Any problems of this nature should be reported to the elections office immediately.
- Polling station staff should check any temporary ramps at regular intervals during the day to make sure that they have not become dislodged.

Entrances to polling stations

- All doors, especially those on designated disabled access routes should be permanently propped open. Fire doors however, must not be propped open.
- Ensure doormats are flush with the floor. Any loose mats should be removed if they are likely to present a tripping hazard.

Inside the polling station

- Polling station staff should set up the station in such a manner that the voter can move smoothly through the process, as well as keeping their distance, even if there is limited space.
- If a one way flow of voters around the polling station is established, this should be wheelchair accessible
- The staff themselves must consider the best place to site themselves, the ballot box and the polling booths, so that voters can easily identify the staff, move to the voting booths and then to the ballot box without obstructing other voters. The ballot box must be accessible to all, including voters in wheelchairs, and must also be positioned in a way that prevents voters from leaving the polling station without placing their ballot paper(s) in the ballot box(es).
- If polling agents have been appointed make sure they are positioned so that they can observe the process without obstructing the voting process.

Lighting of polling stations

- Adequate lighting is important for all voters but especially for people with visual impairments. Many people's vision is dependent on the quality of lighting, especially for reading and writing. Good lighting, both in the polling booth and where the large-print versions of the ballot papers are displayed, is vital.
- Lighting outside the polling station, particularly in the area leading up to the entrance, should be checked to ensure it will be effective for evening voters.

Low-level polling booths and ballot boxes

- Low-level polling booths should be installed in every polling station to ensure that voters in a wheelchair are able to cast their vote comfortably and in secret. They should be positioned to encourage people to keep their distance and limit close contact with others

- The ballot box should be placed on a chair rather than a table as this allows wheelchair users and other people who are not able to reach ballot boxes on tables the opportunity to cast their vote independently.
- A white strip placed around the slot of the ballot box helps visually impaired people to locate the opening more easily.

Instructions and guidance for voters

- Every polling booth must have the instruction notice that provides information on how to mark the ballot papers. Each booth should be checked regularly to ensure it is still there and has not been defaced.
- The appropriate 'Guidance for voters' notice must be displayed both inside and outside the polling station.
- If the Returning Officer has provided the notice in Braille, in languages other than English or Welsh, or in pictorial formats, these too should be displayed.
- Any public health notices should be clearly visible, including for wheelchair users and those who may have a visual impairment

Large-print notices of the ballot paper and hand-held sample copies

- A large-print version of the ballot paper must be displayed inside the polling station for the assistance of voters who are blind or partially sighted. It should, therefore, be displayed in a suitable well-lit location where electors can easily see it before being issued with their ballot paper.
- The legislation also requires that enlarged hand-held copies of the ballot paper, marked as 'sample', are available to anyone who requires them. This can be given to voters to take into the polling booth with them. If these are laminated, it helps to prevent them getting torn or dirty. Make sure it is not placed in the ballot box. Any laminated samples should be cleaned regularly

Device to enable voters who are blind or partially sighted to vote without assistance

- It is a legal requirement to provide a tactile voting device at every polling station. The tactile template is a device that allows someone who is blind or partially sighted to mark the ballot paper themselves once the details on the ballot paper have been read out, either by their companion or by the Presiding Officer.
- In many cases, voters who may find the template useful may not be aware that it is available for them to use. It should be in full view of voters attending the polling station. It may also be helpful for polling station staff to explain to visually impaired voters that the device is available for them to use if they wish. However, a sensitive approach is important to avoid causing offence. The tactile voting template(s) must be checked to ensure that they are suitable for the ballot paper(s) being issued. The template should be cleaned regularly.

Seating

Chairs should be provided in polling stations for anyone who needs a rest, ideally a mix of chairs with and without armrests. However, chairs should not be placed so that they get in the way of other voters, nor should they overlook people casting their votes. They should be positioned to encourage people to keep their distance and limit close contact with others

General

- Providing a good service to voters is a very important part of the job of the polling station staff. If you think someone needs assistance, ask them first, rather than make assumptions.
- Presiding Officers could set up a table in the polling station with all the materials for disabled voters, so that they or their companions can see everything that is available to assist them.
- Presiding Officers or companions to disabled voters should, as far as possible, follow public health advice.
- The attached appendix has been designed for polling station staff to test the layout before they open the station to the voters. Completing this checklist will provide the necessary confidence that the polling station layout has been set up to meet the needs of all the voters.

Polling station set-up checklist

This checklist should be used prior to the poll opening to ensure that the polling station is set up correctly.

Outside the polling station

Checked

Entrance, exit and approaches

Is the approach signage clear and are electors able to easily identify where the polling station is?

☐

Are there parking spaces reserved for disabled people?

☐

Check there are no hazards between the car parking spaces and the entrance to the polling station.

☐

Signage

Have you ensured good signage for any alternative disabled access, and can it be read by someone in a wheelchair?

☐

Is the appropriate 'Guidance for voters' notice (including any supplied in alternative languages and formats) displayed outside the polling station and accessible to all voters?

☐

Is any signage providing public health information displayed inside and outside the polling station and accessible to everyone attending the polling station?

☐

Level access

Is there a suitable ramp clear of obstructions at both the entrance and exit?

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Is the ramp stable? If not, contact the elections office immediately.

☐

Are doormats flush with the floor? If not, remove them.

☐

Entrances

Have double doors been checked to ensure good access for all?

☐

Is the door for any separate disabled access properly signed?

☐

Have you ensured that any signage and/or other notices do not

obstruct wheelchairs or visually impaired voters? ☐

Inside the polling station

Is the polling station set up to make best use of space and enable people to keep their distance? ☐

Is any hand sanitiser available at the entrance to and exit from the polling station accessible to wheelchair users? ☐

If the layout is establishing a one way flow of voters around the polling station is it accessible for wheelchairs? ☐

Walk through the route the voter will be expected to follow, and check that the layout will work for voters, taking into account how they will move through the voting process from entering to exiting the polling station. ☐

Would the layout work if there was a build-up of electors waiting to cast their ballots and does it prevent voters from leaving the polling station without placing their ballot paper(s) in the ballot box(es)? ☐

Is there an induction loop available? If so, is it switched on? ☐

Is best use being made of the lights and natural light available? ☐

Is there adequate ventilation? ☐

Is there a seat available if an elector needs to sit down? ☐

Official notices

Is the appropriate 'Guidance for voters' notice (including any supplied in alternative languages and formats) displayed inside the polling station and positioned so that it can be read by all voters? ☐

Is the notice that provides information on how to mark the ballot paper(s) (including any supplied in alternative languages and formats) posted inside all polling booths and positioned so that it can be read by all voters? ☐

As you walk through the route that the voter will be expected to follow, are the posters and notices clearly visible, even for wheelchair users and those who may have a visual impairment? ☐

Have you ensured that the notices/posters are not displayed among other posters, where electors would find it difficult to see them? ☐

Public health notices

As you walk through the route that the voter will be expected to follow, are any public health notices clearly visible, including for wheelchair users and those who may have a visual impairment?

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Have you ensured that the notices/posters are not displayed among other posters where electors would find it difficult to see them?

☐

Polling booths/ballot box

Are the ballot box(es) placed immediately adjacent to the Presiding Officer?

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Are the ballot box(es) correctly sealed?

☐

Can a wheelchair user gain easy access to the ballot box(es)?

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Can a wheelchair user gain easy access to the polling booth?

☐

Are polling booths correctly erected and in such a position so as to make best use of the lights and natural light?

☐

Have you ensured that the polling booths are positioned so that people outside cannot see how voters are marking their ballot paper(s)?

☐

Can the Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk observe them clearly?

☐

Large-print display and hand-held sample ballot papers

Are the large-print ballot paper(s) displayed so they are clearly visible to all voters?

☐

Are laminated copies of the hand-held sample which can be cleaned between uses, or several single use copies, available and visible to voters?

☐

If the hand-held sample ballot papers are laminated, are there cleaning materials ready to clean them regularly?

☐

Tactile template(s)

Are the tactile template(s) available and in full view?

☐☐

Do all staff know how to use it/them?

Are there cleaning materials ready to clean the template(s) between uses?

☐

Ballot papers

Are the ballot papers the correct ones for the polling station and are they numbered correctly and stacked in order?

☐

Corresponding number list(s)

Are the ballot paper numbers on the corresponding number list printed in numerical order?

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Do the ballot paper numbers printed on the corresponding number list match those on the ballot papers?

☐

Register

Do you have the correct register for your polling station and does it include the expected number of electors?

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