

## Guidance for Returning Officers - Assistance with voting for disabled voters

Assistance with voting for disabled voters Every person should be able to register and vote without facing barriers. This guidance provides information and advice on the actions you and your staff can take to help remove some of the barriers and challenges disabled voters face when voting at the polling station. It aims to support you in: identifying and providing equipment at polling stations which will enable or make it easier for disabled voters to vote independently and in secret ensuring those working to support the poll are aware of accessibility needs of disabled voters and the steps they should take to support them We have consulted with a wide range of organisations representing disabled people when drafting this guidance. The responses received informed us about what the voting experience at polling stations is like for disabled voters and the practices and equipment that could help to improve their experience. The guidance reflects the feedback received from those individuals and organisations as far as is possible within the scope of the guidance and the relevant legislation. How to use this guidance Throughout this guidance we use the word must to refer to a specific legal requirement and the word should for recommended practice. As Returning Officer (RO), you must have regard to the guidance on equipment to be provided in polling stations 1 as part of your wider duties to consider the needs of disabled voters at polling stations, make reasonable adjustments and provide equipment. We will keep this guidance under regular review, including in relation to the equipment that should be provided as a minimum and any additional equipment and support. We will ask for feedback from voters and electoral administrators on the equipment provided to support disabled voters as part of our reporting on elections and to support the identification and sharing of good practice. Book traversal links for Guidance for Returning Officers - Assistance with voting for disabled voters Ensuring that voting is accessible 1. Rule 29 (10)

Schedule 1 Representation of the People Act 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 1

Ensuring that voting is accessible Every voter should have the right to vote independently and in secret. However, we know that disabled people including blind and partially sighted people face barriers to voting which include: their voting rights not being communicated in an accessible way not having the support they need when registering to vote or voting physical, psychological and information barriers when voting at a polling station the method of voting - making a cross in a specific location on a piece of paper - being a principally visual exercise The Equality Act defines having a disability as having a physical or mental condition which has a substantial and long-term impact on the ability to do normal day to day activities. A disability can be as a result of a medical condition: for example, someone with arthritis in their hands may have difficulty gripping things without the use of an auxiliary aid. But a disability does not have to be a diagnosed medical condition and can include physical or psychological impairments that can be visible and invisible. For example, if a person experiences depression, they may have difficulty concentrating - as well as physical impairments, such as extreme tiredness. This guidance will help you to consider barriers to voting, how you can ensure you and your staff are aware of them, and how you can identify and provide support and equipment at polling stations to enable, or make it easier for, disabled people to vote independently and secretly. The requirement in the Elections Act 2022 for Returning Officers to provide reasonable equipment to enable or make it easier for disabled voters to cast their vote independently and in secret replaces the previous limited and prescriptive requirements. This requirement also sits within the broader legal framework of rights and protections for disabled people and specific provisions

in electoral law to help to safeguard and improve the experience of disabled voters.

**Equality Act 2010** Under the Equality Act 2010, ROs in Great Britain have had a duty to anticipate the needs of disabled voters and make reasonable adjustments to remove substantial disadvantage for those voters. This means ROs must take steps to understand and anticipate on an ongoing basis the needs of disabled voters – with different types of disability, support and access requirements within their area so that they can make informed decisions about how best to meet these needs by making reasonable adjustments, including providing appropriate equipment and support. This is known as the anticipatory duty. Section 149 of the Equality Act also requires public authorities and those exercising public functions to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity by encouraging participation in public life, which would include voting. The Equality and Human Rights Commission have published information on the anticipatory duty and criteria for making reasonable adjustments, and guidance on meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. While this information is not written specifically for Returning Officers, it offers some helpful guidance on: what the anticipatory duty and making reasonable adjustments means practical examples of making reasonable adjustments the steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions, to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty

**Northern Ireland Act 1998** Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires all government bodies, which includes the Chief Electoral Officer, to promote equality of opportunity between those with a disability and those without when carrying out their functions. This duty applies to policy development, policy implementation and the provision of services (including the running of elections).

**Disability Discrimination Act 1995** In Northern Ireland, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires that public authorities, which includes the Chief Electoral Officer, make reasonable adjustments to remove any substantial disadvantage for disabled people.

**Representation of the People Act 1983** There are specific provisions in the RPA 1983 which support the accessibility of elections for disabled voters.

**Section 199B of the RPA 1983** You must, when you consider it appropriate to do so, ensure election notices are translated or provided in alternative formats. You may produce them:

- 1 in braille
- 2 in languages other than (or, in Wales, and Welsh)
- 3 using graphical representations
- 4 in audio format
- 5 using any other means of making information accessible

**Schedule A1 to the RPA 1983** You must consider the accessibility of potential polling stations when considering designating or reviewing a polling place.

- 6 The relevant authority
- 7 must seek representations from those who have a particular expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for persons who have different forms of disability.
- 8 Our polling district review guidance contains more information about this duty and includes an accessibility checklist that can be used to assess the suitability of each polling place and polling station.

**Elections Act 2022** The Elections Act 2022 introduced provisions to assist blind, partially sighted and other disabled voters at polling stations. The Act:

- creates a requirement for you to provide each polling station with such equipment as it is reasonable to provide for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for, relevant persons
- 9 to vote independently and in secret
- requires you to have regard to the Commission's guidance on the equipment to provide at polling stations.
- 10 This guidance can be found in

**Providing equipment at the polling station** that enables or makes voting easier for disabled voters extends the rules about who can act as a companion to include anyone who is over the age of 18

- 11 The wording of the provisions recognises the variations in what people need to be able to vote, so

that they may access the most appropriate support for each of them, ensuring the widest possible assistance, support, innovation and accessibility. The terms used reflect that the duty is for ROs to both enable voting for those who find it impossible, and make it easier for those who find it possible but difficult. These provisions apply to the following polls: UK Parliamentary elections Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales Local elections in England and Northern Ireland Mayoral elections in England GLA elections Assembly elections in Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Planning Referendums Council Tax Referendums The requirements under the Elections Act do not apply to elections to the Scottish Parliament or the Senedd, or to local elections in Scotland and Wales. However, the duties under the Equality Act 2010 which relate to ensuring that voting is accessible to disabled voters do apply to those elections.

1. Section 199B(2)(a) Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) ■ Back to content at footnote 1
2. S.199B(2)(b) RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 2
3. S. 199B(2)(c) RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 3
4. S.199B(3) RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 4
5. S.199B(2)(d) RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 5
6. S.18B(4(c)) Sch A1, RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 6
7. S.18E RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 7
8. S.4(1) Sch A1 RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 8
9. Relevant persons are defined in the legislation as those who find it difficult or impossible to vote due to blindness, partial sight or another disability ■ Back to content at footnote 9
10. Rule 29(3A)(b) Sch1, RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 10
11. Rule 39(2)(b)(i), Sch 1, RPA 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 11

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Book traversal links for Ensuring that voting is accessible

Guidance for Returning Officers - Assistance with voting for disabled voters

Understanding the barriers to voting for disabled people

Understanding the barriers to voting for disabled people

By identifying and understanding the physical, psychological and information barriers disabled people may face when voting, you will be better able to make appropriate arrangements to help support them. Some of the barriers and challenges disabled voters face include:

- not having accessible information about the voting process
- written instructions not being available in plain or easy read format
- lack of information about a companions assisting with voting
- lack of information about the experience of voting at a polling station
- causing anxiety about things such as: travelling to the polling station, especially if it is for the first time
- being able to find and access the polling station
- knowing what will happen once there
- knowing what the process for voting is
- the possibility of lots of people being there at the same time
- the possibility that there will be lots of noise
- feeling rushed to make decisions quickly
- queueing the building/polling station not being accessible for example, if there are steps or the layout inside is unsuitable for wheelchairs to access
- instructions not being provided in a format that is accessible to assist people with: visual impairments or blindness
- hearing impairment or hearing loss
- dyslexia
- learning disabilities
- cognitive impairments
- polling station staff not having the skills, training or experience to communicate effectively
- support or auxiliary aids not being easily accessible or available to help voters to vote independently and secretly
- seating or other arrangements not being available to support those unable to stand in a queue
- polling station staff not having the skills, training or experience to support voters with neurodivergence and hidden disabilities to vote independently and secretly.

Additional barriers for blind and partially sighted people

The method of voting – by making a cross in a specific location on a piece of paper – is principally a visual exercise. For this reason, blind and partially sighted people face additional barriers that other people without sight loss do not

face: absence of additional equipment or sufficient light can make it difficult or impossible for blind or partially sighted people to: read the names on the ballot paper make a mark in a specific location on the ballot paper verify their vote independently after making their mark on the ballot paper polling station staff being unaware that blind and partially sighted people may experience barriers when navigating the polling station environment polling station staff not having the skills, training or experience to support voters with sight loss to vote independently and secretly. For example, being unfamiliar with accessible voting equipment polling stations not having the equipment or polling station staff being unaware of the equipment that can support blind and partially sighted people – for example, the handheld copy of the large print sample version of the ballot paper and the correct tactile voting device polling station staff not having sufficient awareness about sight-loss and not knowing how to appropriately interact with someone with sight loss

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[Book traversal links for Understanding the barriers to voting for disabled people](#)

### Ensuring that voting is accessible

#### Providing equipment at the polling station that enables or makes voting easier for disabled voters

Providing equipment at the polling station that enables or makes voting easier for disabled voters

This section outlines the information for voters that must be provided at the polling station as well as a list of equipment that we advise should be provided at polling stations to help reduce or remove known barriers and ensure that voting is as accessible as possible for disabled voters. It also highlights further additional equipment that it may be appropriate to provide if you identify or are made aware of specific needs of disabled voters.

To help voters understand the voting process and how to mark their ballot paper you must provide:

- a notice inside and outside the polling station providing instructions on how to vote at the election
- 1 a notice in each polling booth providing information on how to mark the ballot paper at the election
- 2 at least one large sample copy of the ballot paper must be displayed inside the polling station,
- 3 ideally in a well-lit location where voters can easily see it before being issued with their ballot paper.

Large print sample ballot papers displayed clearly in the station will assist voters who are partially sighted and also voters who would like some time to look at the ballot paper before entering the booth an enlarged hand-held copy of the ballot paper. This can be given to voters who are partially sighted or on request to any other voter who would find it useful to take into the polling booth for reference when marking their ballot paper. You must consider whether it is appropriate to make notices more accessible to a wider range of voters

- 4 by providing them in alternative languages and formats, e.g. in Braille, languages other than or Welsh, in pictorial formats
- 5 or in audible form.

6 The Government Communication Service provide guidance on their website about making communications accessible. As well as meeting the minimum statutory requirements set out above, you should also make any additional sample copies and enlarged copies of the ballot paper resources easily available and visible in the polling station – keeping them in full view and clearly marked will help to make sure that voters can access them easily.

Equipment to support voters to participate

You have a duty to provide each polling station with such equipment as it is reasonable to provide for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for, relevant persons to vote independently and in secret.

7 We have a duty to give guidance in relation to your duty to provide this equipment.

8 You must have regard to this guidance when discharging your duty to provide appropriate equipment but it is ultimately for you as RO to decide the arrangements and equipment that are reasonable to enable or make it easier for disabled voters across your area to cast

their vote independently and in secret. This guidance aims to support you by highlighting the types of equipment that may help to remove barriers to voting for disabled voters. Factors unique to your local area - relating to the size and scale of polling stations, or specific requirements of your local electorate, may shape the approach you decide to take. Decisions about appropriate equipment should be carefully considered, transparent and regularly reviewed. More information about this can be found in Making decisions about providing additional information and support for voters . Additional funding will be provided to you by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to support the delivery of accessible elections. The UK Government has provided details and guidance on the funding available, including for national polls. Through our work with civil society organisations and charities we have identified a range of equipment that can help to overcome the known barriers faced by disabled people. Many of these items are readily available at limited cost and can have a real and positive impact on the experience of voters in the polling station. The following equipment should, as a minimum, be provided in all polling stations to support disabled voters: chairs/seating – this provides a place to rest for voters who cannot stand for long periods and a seat for voters who would like to take some time to think before entering the polling booth magnifiers – these can provide support for voters who are visually impaired to vote independently by increasing the size of the text on a document. The strength of magnifier needed will vary depending on the amount of vision a voter has. You may need to provide more than one strength of magnifier depending on the needs of the voters at a particular polling station tactile voting device – tactile voting devices provide support for voters who are visually impaired to mark their vote on the ballot paper in the correct place, provided it is placed on the ballot paper correctly. They have been found to provide assistance in completing the ballot paper once visually impaired voters know the position on the ballot paper of the candidate for whom they wish to vote. They do not allow blind voters to vote independently unless they also have accessible information about the order of the candidates on the ballot paper polling booth at wheelchair level – helps to ensure that voters who use a wheelchair are able access a lower writing surface to ensure they can cast their vote in secret in a booth that is accessible badges identifying polling station staff – these help voters more easily identify who is a member of staff in the polling station and can therefore be approached for assistance. The type of badge and text used can be tailored to suit individual local circumstances. For example, you could provide polling station staff with a badge stating their first name and making clear their role and that they are happy to help pencil grip – these can help voters with dexterity impairments to more easily hold and use a pencil independently ramps (for buildings with steps) – these support access to a polling station for voters who use a wheelchair or have difficulty using steps temporary alerters or temporary doorbells for any doors that are required to remain shut during the day (for example, fire doors) – these provide a way for voters to let polling station staff know that they need assistance to open the door so they can access the polling station. These do not need to be permanently fixed or installed in a building used as a polling station but can be temporarily placed at an accessible level on a table or chair next to any doors that must remain closed appropriate lighting – some polling station venues have good lighting but others may need additional lighting at the desk; to ensure that voters can clearly see the faces of staff, and in the polling booths; to support voters with visual impairments to be able to read and complete the ballot paper parking spaces reserved for disabled voters (where parking is available at the venue)

– this ensures that disabled voters can park as close as possible to the polling station. You are not limited to providing only the equipment shown in the list above, and you should not reduce or remove any equipment that you have previously provided to support disabled voters at polling stations in your area. There is other equipment that it might also be appropriate to provide in polling stations where you have been able to identify that it would enable or make it easier for blind, partially sighted or disabled voters to vote independently and in secret. Examples of other equipment you could provide include the following:

- Hearing induction loop – these provide support to voters who wear hearing aids to communicate in the polling station. Some buildings have an induction loop installed as standard, in which case you should make use of it, and where this is not one available then a portable hearing loop could be used.
- Audio devices – audio devices are pieces of equipment that reproduce, record or process sound. An audio device can be used together with the tactile voting device enabling blind and partially sighted voters to listen to candidate lists and then mark their ballot paper independently.
- Information available in easy read format - easy read refers to the presentation of text in an accessible, easy to understand format. It is often useful for people with learning disabilities and may also be beneficial for people with other conditions affecting how they process information.
- Information available in large print formats – Large print is defined as being 16pt Arial or bigger and conform with clear print guidelines concerning layout, use of fonts and images. It is often useful for voters who have a visual impairment and may also be beneficial to elderly voters, dyslexic voters and voters who have dementia.

The equipment and resources you provide to support disabled voters should be kept in full view and clearly marked so that they can be identified and accessed easily.

1. Rule 29(4) Sch 1 Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983); Rule 26(4) Sch.5 Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 – prescribed notice ■ Back to content at footnote 1
2. Rule 29(5), Sch 1 RPA 1983; Rule 26(4) Sch.5 Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 – prescribed notice ■ Back to content at footnote 2
3. Rule 29(3A)(a), Sch 1 RPA 1983; Rule 26(3A(a)) Sch.5 Electoral Law Act (NI) 1962 ■ Back to content at footnote 3
4. S 199B(2) of the RPA 1983; s.199B RPA 1983 applies to NI in accordance with s.2 Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Commencement No.7) Order 2008 ■ Back to content at footnote 4
5. S 199B (2) of the RPA 1983; s.199B RPA 1983 applies to NI in accordance with s.2 Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Commencement No.7) Order 2008 ■ Back to content at footnote 5
6. S 199B (3) of the RPA 1983; s.199B RPA 1983 applies to NI in accordance with s.2 Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Commencement No.7) Order 2008 ■ Back to content at footnote 6
7. Rule 29(3A)(b) Sch.1 RPA 1983 (as amended by s.9 Elections Act 2022) ■ Back to content at footnote 7
8. Section 9 (8), Elections Act 2022 ■ Back to content at footnote 8

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Book traversal links for Providing equipment at the polling station that enables or makes voting easier for disabled voters

Understanding the barriers to voting for disabled people

Making decisions about providing additional support and equipment for voters

Making decisions about providing additional support and equipment for voters

As RO, you can proactively use local data that may be available to inform your decisions about the additional support and equipment you provide at polling stations to enable or make it easier for blind, partially sighted or disabled voters to vote independently and in secret. More information on accessing and using data held by your local authority about disabled residents can be found in our guidance on Communicating information directly to disabled voters . You may receive requests for additional support or equipment to be provided, beyond those that you already have or are planning to put in place. For example, you may be informed by a

voter with a particular type of impairment that they remain at a substantial disadvantage (i.e. a disadvantage that is more than minor or trivial) despite your adjustments, as they have additional needs. In such instances, as part of your duty under the Equality Act 2010 you must consider the request and decide if it is reasonable to provide additional support and/or equipment to remove the substantial disadvantage the voter has identified and brought to your attention. There is no set process in law for how you will determine what equipment is reasonable. The Equality and Human Rights Commission publish advice about making reasonable adjustments in the workplace . While not written specifically for Returning Officers, it may be useful in helping you determine whether it is reasonable to make an adjustment. Each request must be considered on its merits and with a view to continuing to support the right of every voter to be able to cast their vote. When making your decision about whether it is reasonable to make an adjustment, there are a range of factors you should take into account, including: whether providing the additional support or equipment that has been requested will enable or make voting easier for disabled voters? how easy or practical is it to provide the additional support or supply the equipment requested? For example: is the equipment readily available for purchase? are the cost implications reasonable? are there any more cost-effective or readily available alternatives? is the equipment single-use or can it be used for future polls? is the requested equipment portable and can it be transferred to another polling station if required (for example, due to a last-minute polling station change)? are there any training implications to consider in order for staff to provide the required support or to support the use of the equipment? have you engaged with individuals at your local authority with expertise in equality, diversity and inclusion for advice? You are not required to grant every request for additional support or equipment, but you must be able to demonstrate that you have met your anticipatory duty under the Equality Act 2010 and given every request proper consideration using fair and consistent criteria. You should keep sufficient information about requests for future planning purposes and to enable you to review the effectiveness of your provision for disabled voters. Retention of information when contacted by a disabled voter for additional support or equipment Where you are contacted by a disabled voter asking for additional support or equipment, you may receive sensitive special category data about that individual and their specific needs. You will be considered the data controller for this sensitive data and it is your responsibility to ensure that you manage the processing of that data in line with data protection requirements including ensuring that the individual is aware of how their data will be processed. You should take advice from your Data Protection Officer about what to do with the data once processed and whether you need to update any relevant privacy notices. Our data protection guidance for Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers contains more information on managing special category data. Last updated: 29 March 2023

[Book traversal links for Making decisions about providing additional support and equipment for voters](#)

[Providing equipment at the polling station that enables or makes voting easier for disabled voters](#)

[Ensuring those working to support the poll are aware of accessibility needs](#)

[Ensuring those working to support the poll are aware of accessibility needs](#)

To help ensure that all voters are provided with equal access to voting and receive appropriate support, it is important that all of those who work to deliver the election or provide information to voters are aware of the needs of disabled people. You should provide accessibility awareness training for all staff who interact with voters, including staff who support electoral services, to help improve their understanding of the needs of disabled voters and the importance of

clear communication. Working with external partners, we have developed resources that could help your staff to understand barriers to voting and experiences of disabled voters at the polling station including: RNIB video which shares the experiences of voting in the polling station for those with sight loss Mencap videos which share the experiences of Charlotte and Harry of voting in a polling station with a learning disability You can take advice from your Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) officer or HR department on other accessibility awareness training that you could access. Staff should also be made aware of the resources we have available on our website and YouTube channel to assist disabled people with particular impairments to help with understanding about voting and what to expect at the polling station. For more information and updates about our resources we create you can subscribe to Roll Call our voter registration newsletter and your guide to supporting voter registration and participation. In addition you could think about sourcing or developing evergreen resources that are not election specific and so can be used year round over multiple years in partnership with civil society organisations that advocate for and support their stakeholders on issues surrounding the accessibility of voting. Training for polling station staff to support accessibility It is also vital that your training for polling station staff addresses the importance of being aware of the accessibility needs of voters at the polling station and what steps they should take to support them. The actions and behaviours of polling station staff are key to making voters' experience in the polling station a positive one. Simple things like offering assistance and listening to voters' questions can make a real difference. In addition to general awareness raising of accessibility needs, it is important that your training for polling station staff covers: the barriers faced by disabled voters at the polling station and how polling station staff can help reduce them awareness that there are no legal barriers to prevent disabled people from voting, including voters with any learning disability or cognitive impairment awareness that not all disabilities are visible or obvious, and that polling station staff should not make assumptions about what equipment voters might need the importance of considering the needs of the person, not a specific disability awareness that some voters may have more than one impairment – for example, a visual impairment and dementia the importance of clear communication about the voting process the importance of clearly communicating that assistance is available if required awareness of the equipment provided at the polling station to enable or make easier voting in the polling station for disabled voters, and how to use it including in particular equipment that polling station staff may be less familiar with, such as hearing loops awareness that a companion assisting a voter can be anyone over the age of 18 and if they have completed the declaration, can accompany a voter into the booth to assist them awareness that disabled voters may have an assistance animal with them and that assistance animals should not be prevented from entering the polling station awareness that voters with sight loss may use apps on their mobile phones or carry pocket-sized assistive equipment, such as video magnifiers, to help them read documents in the polling booth or in conjunction with a tactile voting device awareness that the use of text to speech apps are acceptable for use in polling stations awareness of alternative methods of communication that voters may use such as Makaton and British Sign Language (BSL) In our core guidance for Returning Officers for each type of election , we link to resources for training polling station staff which contain information about the role polling station staff have in ensuring that voting is accessible and the equipment that is available to support disabled voters on accessibility which you should highlight when briefing



polling station staff. Last updated: 29 March 2023 Book traversal links for Ensuring those working to support the poll are aware of accessibility needs Making decisions about providing additional support and equipment for voters Raising awareness about the voting process and support available Raising awareness about the voting process and support available This section of the guidance covers the actions you can take to raise awareness of the voting process and the support that is available for voters. It is important that you have a clear communications strategy to help tackle the barriers some voters face, as well as to ensure voters are aware of the support available to enable or make it easier for them to vote independently and in secret. This is equally important for by-elections or unscheduled polls, which may take place at short notice, as for scheduled elections. You should update your public awareness strategy by identifying how and when you will: identify and communicate with relevant partners and disability organisations to explore opportunities to work together to raise awareness promote and communicate information to disabled voters about the process of voting at a polling station and the support and equipment available ask for feedback on the support and equipment provided – for example, by proactively inviting comment via your website or social media To support you in planning and developing your public awareness activity we will provide a suite of template social media assets and web copy templates which will be available on our website. We will update this guidance with a link to the new resources once they are available. Last updated: 29 March 2023 Book traversal links for Raising awareness about the voting process and support available Ensuring those working to support the poll are aware of accessibility needs Communicating information directly to disabled voters Communicating information directly to disabled voters Communicating directly with disabled residents can be a useful way to find out more about the types of provision disabled voters need as part of your anticipatory duty under the Equality Act. Engaging with electors is an opportunity to provide information about the type of support that could be given to assist them to participate in elections and to ask about their preferred format for accessible communications, which is particularly beneficial for blind or partially sighted people who are digitally excluded. You should explore how you can work with others across your local authority who may be able to assist you with identifying disabled electors in your area, to enable you to communicate with them directly. Sight loss registers list people in the local area who have a certification of vision impairment. In England, under The Care Act 2014, sight loss registers can be used by the local authority to ensure that information about services is made accessible to that person for example to ask if support could be given to assist them to participate in electoral events. 1 The access you have to this information may vary depending on whether you have been appointed by a district or unitary authority. In Wales and Scotland you can contact the relevant adult social care departments and in Northern Ireland, the relevant Health and Social Care Trusts for advice on how you can access information from the sight loss registers held by them. Proactively using local data by seeking information from the sight loss register or by using a resource like the sight loss data tool provided by the RNIB can help you find out how many electors in your area are affected by sight loss. Knowing more about the number of electors affected can help you: anticipate the needs of blind and partially sighted people in your area for example, ensuring poll cards are sent in individuals' preferred formats enabling them to access the information on them independently comply with your duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to assist individuals on the register to participate in elections 1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-statutory->

guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance ■ Back to content at footnote 1 Last updated: 29 March 2023 Book traversal links for Communicating information directly to disabled voters Raising awareness about the voting process and support available Communicating the voting process and support available Communicating the voting process and support available There are a range of ways that you can provide and promote information about the voting process and support available to voters. The communications work you carry out can help to overcome some of the known barriers for disabled voters and can make a real difference to helping them participate with confidence. We will provide a suite of resources which can support you to promote information about the voting process and support available, including resources which will signpost to guidance on accessible communications. We will be working directly with disability organisations nationally to inform the resources we provide, and will look to build on these resources year-on-year as part of our ongoing evaluation and improvement work. We will update this guidance with links once the resources are available. Providing information on the location of polling stations Feedback from organisations representing disabled people is that some voters find it difficult to access information on polling station locations. We provide, in partnership with Democracy Club, a postcode look-up tool on our website . To increase the visibility of this information, you should promote the postcode search tool as widely as possible. You could embed the tool on your own website, using the widget we've made available, or add a link to our website. You could also share the link with existing internal networks or external organisations you are working with and encourage them to share it with their stakeholders. Additionally, you could include the link on the notice of situation of polling stations. Should you need any further information or support in using the search tool, please visit Democracy Club's website . Providing advance information on voting at the polling station To help overcome concerns and anxiety about what voting at the polling station will be like, in addition to any information you display on public notice boards, you could provide a dedicated page on your website that contains accessible content to help voters who want to know more about voting at the polling station. Your accessible web content could include: information about the assistance and support available at the polling station including: awareness that a companion assisting a voter can be anyone over the age of 18 and if they have completed the declaration, can accompany a voter into the booth to assist them that a Presiding Officer is able to help a voter the type of equipment that will be available and how to make a request for additional equipment to be provided to meet a particular need information about what to expect when voting at the polling station including: links to videos about voting in BSL and Makaton easy guides to voting videos by Mencap when the station is likely to be busy and when it is likely to be quiet availability of quiet space We will be developing a resource presenting information about voting written in an accessible way. You can use this resource to develop your own accessible web content to engage and raise awareness with voters. We will also host a range of voter facing resources and information about the voting process on our website which you can point electors to via a link to on your web pages. We will update this guidance with links to the resources once they are available. Including additional information on poll cards and making the information accessible Although the content that must be included on poll cards is prescribed in legislation, you may also add further information that you think is appropriate. 1 The only exception to this is for Northern Ireland local elections where the poll card is prescribed exactly and makes no allowance for any other information to be included. 2 The Elections Act 2022 introduces other changes to the

electoral process that need to be communicated to voters in advance of the poll. This will mean that for relevant elections the poll card may need to become a letter to enable the relevant information to be included. Using a different format of the poll card would also provide an opportunity for you to include additional information to voters about their polling station and the accessibility of the voting process. You could include a link to an accessible web page or provide a QR code on the poll card letter that takes the voter directly to a web page that provides information about the voting process or the equipment that will be available. As some voters find the information provided on the poll card inaccessible, you should also think about how you can make the information contained on the poll card more accessible by additionally publishing it in an alternative way. For example you could: put the poll card information on your website in an accessible format, compatible with screen readers make easy-read or large print versions available on request, and publicise this via the poll card itself and on your website send poll card and other information directly to an elector in their preferred format as well as by post, for example if you know that they need information to be communicated electronically in an accessible format More information about proactively using local data to contact individuals about their preferred formats for poll cards can be found in

Communicating information directly to disabled voters Sending these additional communications could also provide an opportunity to raise awareness about what will happen on polling day, what to expect in the polling station and the equipment that will be available. Providing accessible sample ballot papers Some voters may find it useful to look at the ballot paper in advance of going to the polling station to help them to prepare for the process of voting. You could provide sample ballot papers on your website to support this, and ensure that any you do provide are accessible to electors who use screen readers. Providing information to political parties, candidates and agents about accessible voting at polling stations You should include information in the briefings you provide for candidates and agents about the support and equipment available at polling stations as well as how to make a request. Candidates and agents may know individual voters who require support or specific equipment and can help ensure that they are aware of the support that is available for them and how they can access it. 1. Rule 28(3)(e) Sch.1 Representation of the People Act 1983 ■ Back to content at footnote 1 2. Rule 25(3) Sch.5 Electoral Law Act (NI) 1962 ■ Back to content at footnote 2 Last updated: 29 March 2023 Book traversal links for Communicating the voting process and support available Communicating information directly to disabled voters Working with local networks and civil society organisations in your area Working with local networks and civil society organisations in your area You may have existing relationships with networks of disability groups and civil society organisations. If you do not have these relationships, you may need to work with others who do, for example: teams across your local authority who may have contact with disabled people social care providers, including the likes of care homes and day centres equalities officers communications teams housing officers partnership/Community Engagement officers County Voluntary Councils/People First Groups (Wales) Establishing relationships with disability groups and civil society organisations that are active in your local area can be beneficial as they can advise you on specific steps you can take to improve the accessibility of voting at polling stations in certain locations. They can also provide advice on the types and methods of communication you should use to promote the equipment and support available at polling stations as well as information on elections more generally. Some teams within your local authority or other local

organisations may also be able to provide advice to you about how to determine whether any particular equipment should be provided in specific polling stations to enable or make it easier for disabled voters to vote. They may also have access to specialist equipment which may benefit disabled voters locally with particular impairments and needs which you could borrow or hire. Local organisations and partners may also be able to advise you on the types of resource or support you could provide to reduce barriers to voting for disabled voters. Last updated: 29 March 2023

[Book traversal links for Working with local networks and civil society organisations in your area](#)

[Communicating the voting process and support available](#)

[Reviewing the election](#)

After each election you should evaluate the equipment and support provided in polling stations and how you communicated with voters about their needs and what they could expect. To help with your evaluation activities, we have provided a template survey for use with polling station voters who required additional assistance when voting. The survey can be used to gather their feedback on their experience of voting and the support that was made available. [survey \(DOCX\)](#)

[survey - easy read \(DOCX\)](#)

You should invite feedback from voters and accessibility groups on their experience of voting in polling stations, about what worked well and what didn't, to help inform what you do to support disabled voters at future polls. Mechanisms you could use to gather feedback include: providing an easy read survey at the polling station about the voting experience inviting voters and partnership organisations to attend focus groups to discuss their experiences of voting in the polling station inviting polling station staff to discuss their experience working in a polling station where specific equipment was provided, how they dealt with any difficult situations on the day, and their feedback on the training they received reviewing any feedback provided in reports returned by Presiding Officers and polling station inspectors monitoring the use of the equipment you provide in polling stations by asking polling station staff to keep a record in the polling station log book or via post poll surveys or feedback To ensure you get a wide range of external feedback you should consider providing a range of options for gathering views. A good way of finding out the most appropriate approach to reaching specific groups of voters would be to ask the partnership organisations you work with what would work best for the voters they support. The Elections Act requires the Commission to report on the implementation of the new accessibility provisions. In order to meet that requirement, we will ask you for data on the provision of equipment and support in polling stations which should be information you already have available to support your own planning processes. We will use our engagement and reporting work to highlight examples of good practice that emerge and reflect these in future versions of this guidance to support your work in ensuring voting is accessible. Last updated: 5 April 2023

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