

Providing equipment at the polling station that enables or makes voting easier for disabled voters | Electoral Commission Guidance for Returning Officers - Assistance with voting for disabled voters You are in the Ensuring that voting is accessible section Home Guidance for Returning Officers - Assistance with voting for disabled voters Ensuring that voting is accessible View the navigation tree Go to main guidance section: Guidance for Returning Officers - Assistance with voting for disabled voters Ensuring that voting is accessible Understanding the barriers to voting for disabled people Providing equipment at the polling station that enables or makes voting easier for disabled voters Making decisions about providing additional support and equipment for voters Ensuring those working to support the poll are aware of accessibility needs Raising awareness about the voting process and support available Reviewing the election 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:

- 1 a notice inside and outside the polling station providing instructions on how to vote at the election
- 2 a notice in each polling booth providing information on how to mark the ballot paper at the election
- 3 at least one large sample copy of the ballot paper must be displayed inside the polling station, 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