

Consultation on draft guidance for Returning Officers: Assistance with voting for persons with disabilities | Electoral Commission Search

Consultation on draft guidance for Returning Officers: Assistance with voting for persons with disabilities You are in the Our consultations section Home Our consultations Draft guidance for Returning Officers: Assistance with voting for persons with disabilities On this page Summary How to respond How we developed the draft guidance What the draft guidance includes Background First published: 5 September 2022 Last updated: 7 December 2022 Consultation closed The consultation has now closed. The feedback provided during this consultation was used to inform the further development of the guidance, in advance of our statutory consultation which is running from 5 December 2022 until 16 January 2023. Summary Summary There should be no barriers to voting for people with disabilities. Everyone should have the right to vote on their own and in secret. The Elections Act 2022 includes provisions relating to assisting people with disabilities to vote, and introduces a duty on the Commission to provide guidance to Returning Officers (ROs) on the requirement to provide reasonable equipment to assist voters with disabilities in polling stations. ROs must have regard to this guidance, which will support them to make accessibility arrangements for the May 2023 elections and beyond. In requiring this, the Act has provided a timely opportunity to review our existing guidance to help ensure everyone can vote independently and confidently. We want the updated guidance to help ROs and their teams to understand the barriers to voting faced by those with disabilities and make informed decisions on what they can do to help make voting accessible for all. Your views will play an important role in ensuring that the guidance (that we will publish for formal consultation from late November 2022) sets out actions that can have a real and positive impact for voters with disabilities, and help to inform ROs with planning for future elections. This consultation is also available in easy read and BSL formats . How to respond This consultation is open from 5 September 2022 until 17 October 2022. You can respond by: filling in our online form emailing your views to EAConsultation@electoralcommission.org.uk or writing to us at: Electoral Administration Guidance Team The Electoral Commission 3 Bunhill Row London EC1Y 8YZ Your feedback will inform the further development of the guidance, in advance of our statutory consultation which we expect to run from 28 November 2022 until 10 January 2023. If you have any questions or require any help to be able to respond, please get in touch on 0333 103 1928. How we developed the draft guidance To help inform the guidance, we have engaged with a range of civil society, charity and third-sector organisations across the whole of the UK. These represent people with physical and learning disabilities, mental health conditions, and invisible disabilities. We asked them about: the barriers voters with disabilities experience at the polling station possible solutions to make voting more accessible how the changes made by the Elections Act could be used to improve the accessibility of elections We also shared information via Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Community (DLUHC) officials with members of their Access to Elections working group. This provided the opportunity for members to get in touch with us directly and be involved in developing the guidance. In addition, we discussed the changes introduced by the Elections Act and the development of the guidance with representatives of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace) and members of the Elections, Registration and Referendums Working Group (ERRWG), which includes the Association of s (AEA), electoral administrators and government officials. What the draft guidance includes The draft guidance covers: Understanding and identifying the barriers to voting faced by those with disabilities or specific accessibility needs

Providing accessible information about what to expect in the polling station, how to vote in a polling station and what support is available The equipment that should be made available as a minimum at the polling station, and what other equipment or support may also be helpful to provide Providing specific accessibility training for polling station staff, and what that training should cover Working with civil society, third sector and charity organisations to raise awareness of accessibility measures among voters Some groups we engaged with also raised points about how voter information could be made more accessible, such as about different types of elections and how to register to vote and apply for an absent vote. Whilst this is not in the scope of this specific guidance, we are considering how we can address this in our wider guidance and resources for voters. Also raised consistently by those we spoke to was early and accessible information before elections about the candidates and parties standing, and their policies and manifestos. Whilst the management of this information is the responsibility of political parties and candidates, we have previously called for action in this area. We have recommended that political parties make sure their information is easy to read and understand; ensure they send their information in good time so everyone can read it; and publish accessible manifestos at the same time as other versions. We will continue to encourage parties and candidates to do this and we will highlight this feedback in our continued engagement with political parties in particular. View the draft guidance [Opens in new tab](#)

Background Who we are . We provide comprehensive guidance for ROs, which covers information about what they should be doing to help support voters with disabilities to participate. It includes specific resources to help and support voters with disabilities at polling stations. For example, we produce a polling station accessibility checklist to highlight practical accessibility considerations, and a handbook for polling station staff with information on how to ensure voting at the polling station is accessible. We have also worked with RNIB and Mencap to create videos for use during polling station staff training, to help staff better understand the challenges voters with disabilities may face when going to a polling station. You can find out more about our role and responsibilities on our website. Elections Act 2022 The UK Elections Act 2022 includes provisions relating to assisting people with disabilities to vote whether they are blind, partially sighted or have another disability. 1 These provisions will require ROs to provide such equipment as is reasonable for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for, relevant persons to vote independently and in secret. 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. Independently refers to voting without assistance from another person, not without any form of assistive device. These provisions will apply to: UK parliamentary general elections Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales Northern Ireland Assembly and local elections Local elections in England ROs are personally responsible for the conduct of elections. In Northern Ireland, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) is the RO, so references to 'ROs' throughout this document and the guidance should be read to include the CEO. 1. Elections Act (legislation.gov.uk) ■ [Back to content at footnote 1](#)