

Polls Apart access checklist

Improving access is not as difficult as it might seem. In many cases small changes can make a world of difference. This checklist is for officials who want to ensure polling stations are accessible to disabled voters.

Getting there:

- Is there designated or reserved parking for disabled and older people close to the polling station?

If the parking is on the road, a dropped kerb close by will allow a wheelchair user access to the pavement. If there is no parking, providing temporary parking just for polling day, for example, opening up a school playground, or suspending the usual parking restrictions for disabled people would improve access.

- Is the polling station and parking for disabled people clearly sign-posted from all possible approaches?

Black, lower case lettering in a sans serif font such as Arial or Helvetica on a white background is easiest to read.

- Is the approach to the polling station unobstructed and in good condition?

Broken paving slabs, gravel, potholes, parked cars and other obstructions make access considerably more difficult.

Getting in:

- If your polling station has steps up to the entrance, is there a suitable ramp?

Steps, even a small single step, can make a polling station inaccessible to many disabled or older people with mobility difficulties. A ramp should be appropriately designed for the job. A badly designed ramp can be dangerous and does not improve access. A good ramp should have a low gradient (about 1:20), be strong and level, with raised sides or railings either side. If the ramp is not permanent it should be securely attached to the steps so it cannot slip or wobble.

- If the main entrance to your polling station is inaccessible is there a clearly sign-posted alternative accessible entrance?

If there is an accessible entrance, it would be better to use this as the main entrance. You don't need to use 'accessible entrance' signs if there is one entrance for everyone.

Is the door into the polling station wide enough for a wheelchair user to pass through easily?

If the doors are heavy, awkward to open or have handles that may be out of reach have you propped them open? If you do prop them open make sure you don't obstruct the entrance. Portacabins and other types of temporary hut are usually inaccessible so try to avoid their use until they have been redesigned to take access needs into consideration.

Inside the polling station:

Is there level access from the entrance of the polling station to the voting area?

Internal steps are just as much of a problem as external ones and will need ramps to make them accessible. Ensure doormats are level with the floor. If they are not, remove them.

Is the flooring non-slip, even and level?

Highly polished surfaces can be slippery while thick carpeting and loose rugs or mats can cause people to trip or get stuck.

Is the polling station well lit?

Even on a sunny day some visually impaired people may need the lights switched on to vote independently.

Are there seats available for people to rest if they need to?

Is there enough space inside the polling station and the corridors for a wheelchair user to move about easily?

Obstructions such as stacked furniture or piles of boxes can cause difficulties for visually impaired people as well as people with mobility difficulties.

Voting:

Is there a polling booth that is low and wide enough so a wheelchair user can vote unaided and in secret?

- Is there a low-level ballot box that a wheelchair user can reach unaided?

Putting the ballot box on a chair achieves this.

- Is there large print ballot papers, notices and a support to help visually impaired people post their vote?

Having a white stripe around the slot of the ballot box helps visually impaired people post their vote. Display large print notices of the ballot paper close to the polling booth and where it is easily visible for someone who needs to use it. Putting it in the polling booths is one good option — it needs to be low down on the wall and not obscured by other notices or signs. Ballot papers in large print should have party symbols on them.

- Is there a tactile template to help visually impaired people vote unaided?

Staff at the polling stations need to know how to use it and explain it to someone.

General access issues:

- Have the polling station staff received Disability Equality Training to ensure that they can support disabled people if required in an appropriate manner?

Some disabled people may need assistance but everyone is an individual so ask before you assume someone wants help.

- Have you put access details on the polling card and made sure someone in the Electoral Services Department knows about the issues and can advise people?

Many disabled people expect to encounter problems when going to vote. If you have thought about all the issues, make sure you let people know.

- Are you unsure about any other issues to do with access?

If you are unsure about any issue, your local disability group should be more than happy to advise you about how to ensure your polling station is accessible to disabled voters.

For further information visit www.pollsapart.org.uk
email info@pollsapart.org.uk or call the Scope campaigns team on 020 7619 7245