

Accessibility support in polling stations

Introduction

This document is a supporting resource for Returning Officers (ROs). It sets out examples of successful approaches taken by ROs to support disabled voters, as well as links to additional resources and websites that ROs may find useful in carrying out their work to make elections accessible for everyone.

This resource will be continuously developed as more examples are shared with us. Please can we ask you to share any examples you would like included by [contacting](#) your local Electoral Commission office.

Communication

Request for Reasonable Adjustments

The Commission has produced a [template request](#) form for electors to use to let ROs know about any reasonable adjustments they might need. Providing a form for electors to complete can help to ensure you receive requests in a consistent way with all of the information you need.

This form can be used in hard copy and also can be used as a basis for an online form on your local authority website.

Website

Lots of elections teams now have specific pages on their websites with information for disabled voters or voters who require additional support.

Points that could be covered include:

- Electors being able to bring their own assistive equipment, to the polling station to assist them when voting such as text to speech apps, and magnifiers (Useful examples include [Edinburgh City Council](#); [London Borough of Lambeth](#) and [Southend City Council](#))
 - Links to videos about the voting process in accessible formats, such as BSL or closed captions (Useful examples include [Cardiff City Council](#), [Southend CC](#) and [Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council](#))
 - Accessibility information about polling stations including location and facilities available to support voters
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- Equipment to be provided in the polling station to support voters. This could be a generic list of equipment available, or could be listed specifically for each polling station.
- Information about reasonable adjustments and how an elector can make a request (email/template form/e-form)
- Linking to [resources provided](#) by the Commission, which are provided in different formats, such as easy read and large print.
- Information on who can support disabled voters in the polling station

Communication Planning

Southend CC have a year-round communications plan which is managed by the Accessibility Officer/Engagement Officer. This involves working with other teams in the Council, such as in the Sensory and Adult and Social Care teams, Specialist Educators teams as well as with local charities, such as Southend in Sight and the Essex Sight Loss Council.

To ensure that all voters receive timely and accessible information, they use a variety of communication channels, including:

- Publishing updates in the local sight loss charity newsletter
- Providing information through the local talking newspaper service

This approach helps reach individuals with different communication needs and ensures that important election information is widely available.

Communication training for staff

Southend CC use the VOTE commitment for training staff about communication with disabled voters:

V-Voting and Voice

Introduce yourself clearly and ask if help is needed – never assume or act without consent

O-Offer your arm

If guiding is requested, offer your arm (not your hand) and walk at their pace

T – Talk

Use clear, specific directions and avoid vague phrases like ‘over there’.

E – Etiquette

Guide dogs and assistive aids are working tools. Do not touch or distract.

Easy read guides The My Vote My Voice campaign has produced [easy read guides](#), including a [practice ballot paper](#) with support from the Electoral Commission

Voting Passports The My Vote My Voice campaign has produced a [voting passport](#) people can use to help polling station staff to easily understand any reasonable adjustments they require.

Other local authorities have created their own version of these cards, which enable electors to complete to be able to tell polling station staff what support they need.

[Polling Station Information Card](#) (Cardiff CC)

[Voter passport](#) (Southend CC)

Southend CC are also developing a digital voter passport, which can either be printed out or shown directly on a device screen.

[My Vote Matters - polling station passport](#) (Sandwell MBC)

[Online form for a polling station passport](#) (Warwick DC)

Working with local charities

Working with local disability charities will provide insight into your local circumstances.

Local workshops The RNIB have advised that they can co-facilitate accessible voting workshops with electoral services teams, which will enable local electors to share their voting experiences directly, learn about what provision is available and how to request reasonable adjustments, and to test out different accessible voting solutions.

Working with Cardiff People First, (an organisation that is run for and by people with learning disabilities), Cardiff CC hold monthly accessibility workshops for adults with learning disabilities to talk about voting and elections.

[Your Vote, Your Voice](#)

Audio recordings Sandwell MBC have worked with the Sandwell Visually Impaired Talking Newspaper team to create audio versions of candidate details on ballot papers.

Use of equipment

Bristol City Council provides combined audio tactile devices in polling stations. They engaged with Sight Support West Charity through the RNIB and provided demonstrations to voters, to increase confidence in using the devices.

Creation of resources

Cardiff CC have worked with Mirus, an organisation that supports people with learning disabilities, mental ill-health, autistic people and their families, to provide easy read guides and videos about polling stations.

Sandwell MBC worked with local partners to create a local [polling station passport](#), to help people with learning disabilities and autism to vote. It includes advice about voting and how to ask for help at the polling station, as well as allowing voters to set out what support they need.

Sandwell worked with Autism West Midlands and Adult Social Care Team to distribute the passport.

Supporting blind and partially-sighted voters

Audio versions of ballot papers

Providing access to audio versions of candidate details on ballot papers can support blind and partially sighted voters.

These can either be accessed in the polling station or in advance.

Cardiff CC, Sandwell MBC and Southend CC provide audio versions of the ballot paper.

Cardiff CC provide:

- an audio ballot paper poster which includes a QR to access a read out of the ballot paper
- a poster with a contact telephone number for electors to phone for a read out of the ballot paper, provided by contact centre colleagues.

Southend CC provide audio versions of the ballot papers on their website, which can also be accessed via QR codes in the polling station.

Combined Audio tactile devices

Southend CC provide combined audio and tactile devices in polling stations.

Bristol CC used combined audio and tactile devices at the UK Parliamentary General Election in July 2024 and again in the May polls in 2025.

Polling station inspectors (PSI) were issued a device, to be used on an on-call basis for the polling stations allocated to each PSI.

Bristol CC put plans in place for electors to pre-book the use of the device and also produced a simple video for PSIs to refer when setting up the devices at a polling station.

Supporting deaf or hard of hearing voters

BSL videos Sandwell MBC provide links to videos with BSL on their website and YouTube channel detailing the need for photo ID, how to apply for free photo ID, and what to expect at the polling station

Information in Makaton [Warwick District Council](#) provide a booklet setting out information about the polling station process in Makaton.

[Elections Symbol Book - Download - Warwick District Council.](#)

Portable Hearing Loops Southend CC have portable hearing loops that can be provided at polling stations when requested.

BSL Interpretation service [The Highland Council](#) provide a link on their website to Scotland's national British Sign Language video interpreting relay service (VRS). [Accessibility at Elections | Voting Information | The Highland Council](#)

Manchester City Council provide British Sign Language interpretation in polling stations. This can be accessed by voters via the [council's website](#) or by asking the Polling Station staff for assistance with accessing this service.

Providing support and equipment in the polling station

Accessibility pack Cardiff City Council separate all equipment provided to support electors in the polling station into an accessibility pack.

The contents of the pack are: TVD, A4 magnifier; 4x Pencils - 4 with grips and 4 x triangular; extra light; polling station information cards; Accessibility statement; large BPs; Audio BP poster with QR code

Polling station staff are also provided with a [video explaining the contents](#) of the pack.

Southend CC also provide an accessibility pack, which also includes coloured overlays, large print ballot papers, chunky pencils, additional lighting and a reminder of the VOTE principles – a guide to communicating clearly with electors.

Coloured overlays [Newcastle City Council](#) provide coloured overlays at polling stations which can be used to improve clarity in reading and writing, which can support voters with learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

Accessibility signposting Bristol CC use pop up banners to indicate accessibility areas in each polling station which also provided a quieter / private area with seating and a desk along with additional equipment such as torches, magnifier, large print signage and pencil grips.

Polling station staff stickers and posters You can [download 'Ask me for help' sticker sheets and posters](#) for use in polling stations to encourage voters to ask staff for support if they would like to.

Equipment Checklist The Commission has produced a [checklist](#) setting out the equipment that should be provided as a minimum at each polling station, as well as any additional equipment provided as a result of a request for reasonable adjustments or as part of their pre-poll planning.
