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Member Support Project – polling station booking – Elections Act 2022

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The [Elections Act 2022](#) introduces changes which impact the voting process at polling stations.
- 1.2 This resource helps you plan your polling station arrangements by seeking information about the suitability of premises.

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2 Background

- 2.1 The Returning Officer (RO) decides on the provision of polling stations for an election and must allot electors to them in such manner as they think most convenient.¹
- 2.2 The polling station allotted to electors from any polling district must be in the polling place for the district.
- 2.3 One or more polling stations may be provided in the same room.
- 2.4 It is good practice before every election to assess the suitability of your polling stations in terms of:
 - accessibility
 - location
 - capacity
- 2.5 The RO has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to anticipate the needs of people with disabilities and consider reasonable adjustments that may remove any substantial disadvantage.²
- 2.6 There is also a duty to consider the accessibility of a polling station within a polling place.³
- 2.7 The location of the polling station within a polling place should be convenient for voters. When assessing the suitability of a room or area for use as a polling station, the RO should consider how its location and layout would allow for the most effective flow and processing of voters.
- 2.8 Each polling station should provide suitable conditions for the elector to vote in private, for staff to conduct elections in an efficient and effective manner and for those entitled to observe the voting process to do so without compromising the secrecy of the ballot.
- 2.9 Polling stations should also be large enough for the number of electors you are expecting to allocate to it. The Electoral Commission previously recommended that no more than 2,500 electors were allocated to a polling station. However, this has changed and the recommendation now is that each polling station should not have more than 2,250 electors allocated to it. (See also paragraphs [3.13](#) - [3.14](#))

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- 2.10 Between elections changes could affect the suitability of polling stations, such as:
- a particular room being unavailable
 - building works or refurbishment
 - population change
 - different projected turnout
 - other local factors
- 2.11 In addition to the RO's duties in relation to polling stations, the council has a duty to keep polling places (and districts) under review.⁴
- 2.12 The council should ensure that, as far as is reasonable and practicable, all electors have reasonable facilities for voting, and polling places are accessible to electors who are disabled.
- 2.13 Compulsory reviews of polling districts and polling places are carried out every five years. Interim reviews may be necessary where issues have arisen about particular polling places, or as a result of boundary changes, or population changes.
- 2.14 The [Electoral Commission guidance](#) on polling place reviews states the following factors need to be considered when reviewing existing polling places or when assessing new polling places:
- **Location:** Is it reasonably accessible within the polling district? Does it avoid barriers for the voter such as steep hills, major roads, rivers, etc.? Are there any convenient transport links?
 - **Size:** Can it accommodate more than one polling station if required? If multiple polling stations are required, is the polling place capable of accommodating all voters going into and out of the polling stations, even where there is a high turnout?
 - **Availability:** Is the building readily available in the event of any unscheduled elections? Is there any possibility that the building may be demolished as part of a new development?
 - **Accessibility:** Is the building accessible to all those entitled to attend the polling place?

3 Impact of Elections Act

- 3.1 The Elections Act 2022 introduces additional factors to consider when assessing the suitability of polling stations and places.

Accessibility

- 3.2 You and your polling staff will need to understand the barriers to voting faced by disabled voters. The Act requires 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 to vote independently and in secret.
- 3.3 Relevant persons are defined as individuals who find it difficult or impossible to vote due to blindness, partial sight or another disability.
- 3.4 You are required to have regard to the EC's guidance on the equipment to provide at polling stations.
- 3.5 The EC have published [draft guidance for ROs: Assistance with voting for persons with disabilities](#). The draft guidance suggests the following equipment should be provided as a minimum at polling stations:
- Chair/seating – for voters to rest
 - Magnifiers
 - Tactile voting device
 - Polling booth at wheelchair level
 - Staff name badges
 - Pencil grips
 - Ramps
 - Temporary alerters or doorbells
 - Appropriate lighting
 - Disabled parking bays
- 3.6 The EC also suggest additional provision that ROs could consider to further support voters to participate including:
- Hearing induction loop
 - Audio devices
 - Information in easy read format

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3.8 As part of your planning, you could find out if your current polling stations have, or can accommodate, the items listed above. If they do not, you could start putting plans in place to supply it, where appropriate.

Voter ID

3.9 The Elections Act also require voters to show photo ID before receiving their ballot papers.

3.10 You should check your polling stations are **large enough** to avoid the risk of congestion or queues that a lengthened voting process may bring

3.11 Polling staff will need to complete additional paperwork throughout the day, including the ballot paper refusal list and voter ID evaluation form. Polling stations will need to have sufficient workspace to enable the paperwork to be completed efficiently.

3.12 Your polling stations will also need to accommodate an additional statutory notice which will need to be displayed. The additional notice must include:

- relevant identification details¹
- a statement that further proof of identity may be required to resolve any discrepancy between the name of the holder of a form of identification and the name of the elector or proxy that the voter claims to be.

3.13 You may also be appointing more polling station staff than in previous years. To increase capacity at polling stations, the Electoral Commission has revised recommended polling station staff ratios in light of the changes.

¹ "Relevant identification details" means details of the documents the voter needs to produce when applying for a ballot paper, namely in the case of an elector (other than an elector with an anonymous entry) or a proxy, any of the forms of identification for the time being referred to in rule 37(1H) of Schedule 1 to the 1983 Act (parliamentary elections rules)(1); or in the case of an elector with an anonymous entry, the elector's official poll card and an anonymous elector's document showing the same electoral number as the electoral number shown on the official poll card.

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3.14 The EC have recently revised polling station staff ratios to the following:

Electorate (excluding postal voters)	Recommended number of polling staff
0 – 1,250	1 PO & 2 PCs
1,250 – 2,250	1 PO & 3 PCs

The EC also recommend that a polling station should not have more than 2,250 electors allocated to it due the additional requirements imposed by the Elections Act.

3.15 **The ratios are recommended minimum levels, THEY ARE NOT MANDATORY.**

3.16 Your polling stations will need to be large enough to accommodate any additional staff.

3.17 Polling stations will need to have **private areas** for voters who want to show their photo ID in private, or to remove a face covering or mask, or have a confidential conversation.

3.18 The RO can meet this requirement by providing a privacy screen, but the polling station will need to be able to accommodate this additional equipment.

3.19 If there is any CCTV in operation in the polling station, you should take care that this does not compromise privacy nor the secrecy of voting.

3.20 We have produced a template letter and questionnaire in the [Appendices](#) which you can adapt and send in advance of booking your polling stations.

3.21 Alternatively, you could include the additional questions in your provisional booking communications.



4 Recruitment opportunity

- 4.1 If you are looking to expand your pool of potential polling station staff, you could include information on applying for roles with your polling station booking enquiries.
- 4.2 It can be useful to have someone at the polling station who is a keyholder and knows the building.

5 Key Statutory References

Key statutory references

- [Elections Act 2022](#)
- [Equalities Act 2010](#)
- [Representation of the People Act 1983](#)

Other useful guidance sources

- [Polling district and places reviews](#) – Electoral Commission
- [Key considerations for the implementation of the Elections Act 2022](#) – Electoral Commission
- [Draft guidance for ROs: Assistance with voting for persons with disabilities](#) – Electoral Commission

Appendix A

Template communication to polling station booking contacts

Dear [\[insert name\]](#)

I am contacting you in advance of our next scheduled elections on [\[insert date\]](#), because your premises have previously been used as a polling station.

We want to tell you about some changes to the way elections will run in future.

The Elections Act 2022 is now law, and will bring in the following measures [\[from May 2023 at local elections and referendums \(in England\)\]](#) [PCC elections \(in England and Wales\)\]](#) and for any UK Parliamentary general elections from October 2023:

- voters will need to show valid photographic identification before being issued with a ballot paper
- additional support/equipment to be made available to make it easier for people with disabilities to vote

These changes mean polling stations will need to:

- be big enough for any additional polling staff and equipment
- be able to allow voters to show their ID in private - by having a private area, or by accommodating a privacy screen supplied by the elections office
- have, or be able to accommodate, any special equipment or devices to support disabled voters

We are anticipating we will continue to use most of our usual polling stations. But there may be some polling stations which are no longer suitable due to the new requirements.

We would be grateful if you could complete this short survey, to help us to assess the suitability of your premises for [\[May / future elections\]](#).

Please complete the short questionnaire [\[by clicking on this link insert link\]](#) / [\[attached to this email\]](#) / [\[enclosed with this letter\]](#).

Please respond by [\[date\]](#) at the very latest.

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Completing this survey does not commit you to making the premises available in May 2023, and a further booking letter will be sent at a later date.

If you have any questions, please get in touch as soon as possible [\[insert contact details\]](#).

Yours sincerely

[\[Electoral Services Manager/Returning Officer\]](#)

Did you know...?

We employ about [\[insert number\]](#) staff to work at elections every year. Have you ever thought of putting yourself forward to work at a polling station?

Our Elections Team is always looking to recruit motivated and enthusiastic staff. We would love to hear from you if you're interested in becoming involved.

For more information about the roles and how to apply, see our [elections staff webpage](#) [\[insert link\]](#) or ask us for further details.



Appendix B

Template polling station questionnaire

- 1. Name and contact details of person responsible for bookings at the premises

- 2. What is the approximate usable space in the room currently used as a polling station?

- 3. What is the occupant capacity for the room?

- 4. Is there an alternative room available in the building of a similar or larger size to the one currently used? If yes, please give details.

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5. Is there an additional room available in the building which could also be made available as a polling station or for checking ID in private? If yes, please give details.

6. What is the approximate usable space in additional room which could be used as a polling station or for checking ID in private?

7. Where would voters queue while waiting to vote?

	Tick (✓) box
Inside the room	
Inside the building but outside the room	
Outside the building but under cover	
Outside the building but uncovered	

8. Is there wall space for additional notices in the polling station?

Yes/No (*circle answer*)

Please give details

9. How big, approximately, are the tables which you can provide for polling staff?

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10. How many [adult sized] chairs can you provide for polling staff?

11. How many [adult sized] chairs can you provide for voters who may need to rest?

12. Are there dedicated parking bays for disabled voters?

Yes/No (*circle answer*)

Please give details

13. Does the building have level access?

Yes/No (*circle answer*)

14. If not,

	Tick (✓) box
Has a permanent ramp been installed?	
Can you provide a temporary ramp?	
Do Electoral Services need to provide a temporary ramp?	
Is there an alternative disabled access?	
Does the building have a doorbell to alert staff that someone needs help accessing the polling station?	

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15. Is there adequate lighting in the polling station and corridors?

Yes/No (*circle answer*)

Please give details

16. Is there a hearing induction loop?

Yes/No (*circle answer*)

Please give details

17. Is there CCTV in the polling station?

Yes/No (*circle answer*)

Please give details, e.g. where does it point?

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Endnotes

¹ Rule 25 Schedule 1, Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983); Rule 23 Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (PAR 2006); Rule 23 Local Elections (Parishes and Communities) (England and Wales) Rules 2006 (PCR 2006); Rule 29 Local Elections (Principal Areas) (Wales) Rules 2021 (PAR 2021); Rule 29 Local Elections (Communities) (Wales) Rules 2006 (CR 2021); Rule 22 Schedule 1, Scottish Local Government Elections Order 2011 (SLGEO 2011)

² Section 10, Equalities Act 2010

³ Section 18B (4) (c) RPA 1983

⁴ Section 18, RPA 1983