



**Disability
Advice
Project**

125 The Highway, New Inn, Pontypool. NP4 0PH
tel: 01495 763778
fax: 01495 762231
email: info@dapwales.org.uk



www.dapwales.co.uk

Election Control Section
Chief Executives Department
Torfaen County Borough Council
Civic Centre
Pontypool
Torfaen

Dear Sir

On the Accessibility of Polling stations

At the recent election for the Welsh Assembly Government, members of the Disability Advice Project took the opportunity to assess the accessibility of some of Torfaen's polling stations.

A member of your section had provided us with the complete list of Polling Stations. We had also been instructed that we would not be allowed to enter into the rooms where voting takes place.

The purpose of this letter is to tell you of the main themes and issues that came out of our visits.

The polling stations that we visited were

- ▶ Henllys Church in Wales School
- ▶ Coed Eva Infants School
- ▶ Hollybush Primary School
- ▶ The Salvation Army premises in Wesley Street
- ▶ Two Locks Nursery School
- ▶ The Pavillion Cwmbran Park
- ▶ Hollybush Village Hall
- ▶ Panteg Church Hall
- ▶ New Inn Primary School Nursery

The key issues that we paid attention to were

- ▶ The identification of the entrance to the site containing the polling station
- ▶ The identification of parking spaces suitable for disabled people
- ▶ Any Information at Main Entrances
- ▶ The identification of the entrance route into the building and specifically that designated as being suitable for disabled people
- ▶ The route through to the voting area and specifically that designated as being suitable for disabled people
- ▶ The equipment available within the voting area
- ▶ The preparedness of staff to cater for the needs of disabled people

The identification of the entrance to the site containing the polling station

Generally we found that once we were outside of a polling station there were adequate signs confirming this. However the locations of polling stations when viewed from a distance along approach roads was not always obvious.

We would therefore suggest that all election officers are instructed to place polling station notices in positions visible from approach roads.

The identification of parking spaces suitable for disabled people

This was one of the areas where we felt that the greatest degree of improvement could be made.

At some locations such as at Hollybush village Hall, there was an unused car park immediately adjacent to the polling stations. This was used by all car drivers during our visit. We noted however that there were no parking bays clearly marked as being for disabled people.

However most of the other locations visited did not give guidance as to where car parking, and particularly car parking for disabled people could be found.

For instance at Coed Eva Infants School, all car parking on the school grounds was used by staff etc from the Junior School which had not closed for the day. The school car park therefore became quite cramped. Facilities for reversing were limited. We felt that there could have been Health and Safety implications for voters arriving during the lunch-time break.

At Hollybush Primary School, there is a car park outside of the school gates which was some distance from the polling station itself.

At the Salvation Army premises, the nearest car park was on the opposite side of a road used as a bus route. Although disabled people could park on the double yellow lines outside of this polling stations, there may be some reluctance especially when disabled people have been transported by non-disabled people without blue badges. Additionally, the car park opposite the

Salvation Army premises is clearly marked as being only available to those in the Army.

The car park at Two Locks Nursery also requires the crossing of a bus route.

However at Panteg Church Hall, the parking spaces for non-disabled and disabled people were easily identified and clearly laid out.

We suggest that additional signs are prepared for the next election clearly pointing out where car parking is permitted on the day of the elections and more importantly where disabled people can park / be dropped off.

Information at the Main Entrance

A large amount of information was displayed at the entrance doors to most of the buildings. Generally this was in a serif font and of small point size (typically 12pt). Some information was also in bold script.

We would suggest that such information is displayed in future in the appropriate style. Such style would

- ▶ use a sans serif font type
- ▶ have a font size of at least 16 pt
- ▶ have all text weighted similarly, preferably in bold

The identification of the entrance route into the building suitable for disabled people

Generally the entrance routes were well defined. However a common criticism relates to the standard sign used to indicate the route for disabled people.

This sign shows arrows pointing in 2 directions. In only 1 instance had the staff manning the polling station thought to blank out one of the arrows. Particular at the Two Locks Nursery, this led to confusion over the appropriate route.

We therefore suggest that staff are provided with a roll of white sticky tape in order to blank out one of the arrows on the disabled persons route signs.

A different problem presented at the Pavilion in Cwmbran Park. The pavilion has 2 possible entrances. One of these is from the cross roads side of the building. This requires the use of the permanent short ramp which is provided with a handrail. This entrance was closed on the day of the recent elections. The entrance in use required the use of steps or a steep, long ramp without handrails.

We therefore suggest that in all locations where more than a single entrance is available for use, that the one most easily accessed by disabled people is chosen as the access route for everyone.

The route through to the voting area

Generally this did not present a problem. This was mainly due to the short distance from the building main entrance to the voting area.

This was not the case at the Two Locks Nursery where disabled people were directed to a different entrance to that used by non-disabled people. Once inside the premises, all signage ceased. The internal corridor had many obstacles that would have restricted access for wheel-chair users. These were mainly items used by the nursery staff and children.

At Panteg church Hall, there were effectively 2 polling stations in the one hall. The name of each polling station was poorly displayed being only written in biro and taped to the back of a chair.

We would therefore suggest that signage is continued inside buildings used as polling stations and that particular attention is paid to routes which may only be used by disabled people. In all locations effectively serving as 2 polling stations we would suggest that better signage indicating the 2 stations is pre-prepared for issue to polling officers

The equipment available within the voting area

We identified the equipment that would make the voting process easy for disabled people as being

- ▶ Wide, low-level voting booths
- ▶ Induction loops
- ▶ A way of enlarging text on the voting form

By looking through windows etc, it appeared that all of the polling stations visited had been equipped with wide, low-level voting booths. This is good practice .

None of the polling stations visited displayed a sign informing visitors of the availability of induction loops for people with a hearing impairment. However at Panteg Church Hall, an induction loop has been installed by the Church. It was unclear as to whether polling staff were in a position to operate this facility.

At Henllys Church-in-Wales Primary School, one member of the Disability Advice Project was registered to vote. He asked to be shown any devices that were available for sight-impaired voters. 2 devices were brought forward but due to the use of 2 voting forms, the wrong device was offered for the wrong form. This issue was speedily resolved by discussions where the various polling clerks.

We applaud the seemingly universal use of wide low-level voting booths. Of concern though was the absence of anything that could have been used to communicate with people with a hearing impairment.

We would suggest that a pencil / pen and paper should be available at the "desk" in order that written communication could take place with someone with a hearing impairment.

We would also suggest that all polling staff are encouraged to trial all or any specialist equipment and signage provided at polling stations prior to the election in order that they can be practised and efficient in their use before being asked for help by a disabled person.

The preparedness of staff to cater for the needs of disabled people

Not only at Henllys Church-in-Wales I Primary School but also at 2 or 3 other sites, election staff came to ask what our members were doing. Once the nature of our survey was explained, all staff provided a great deal of help and assistance illustrating a good deal of preparation by the election team.

However staff at Panteg Church Hall volunteered the fact that they had had no disability awareness training specifically relating to elections. However at New Inn Primary Nursery such training had been given.

Generally and in conclusion we feel that it is fair to say that we felt that there has been an inconsistency of approach across the County borough relating to

- ▶ Aspects of and the provision of signage
- ▶ The provisions of and training in the use of equipment
- ▶ Disabled awareness training of polling staff
- ▶ Training in key aspects relating to individual polling stations

We also found areas where the needs of some disabled people had been well catered for

We hope that you have found the comments made in this letter to be helpful and constructive. Please contact us directly if you require any more information regarding our survey or if you would be interested in carrying out a joint survey at the time of the next election

Yours faithfully

P. Jones.