

Accessibility Audit

**Polling Stations located in
Dungannon Leisure Centre and Howard
Primary School, Dungannon**

August 2015

Aisling Irvine
BSc (Arch) BArch (Queens) RIBA NRAC Consultant

All In Access Consultancy
4 Sherbourne Park
MAGHERAFELT
BT45 6JR

T: (028) 7963 1025
E: info@allinaccessconsultancy.com
M: 07730031985

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Abbreviations

c.o.w – clear opening width
 e.c.o.w – effective clear opening width
 TBR – Technical Booklet R NI 2012
 TBH – Technical Booklet H NI 2012
 TBV – Technical Booklet V NI 2012
 BS 8300: 2009 – British Standard BS8300:2009 +A1:2010
 FFL – finished floor level
 GL – ground level
 DDA – Disability Discrimination Act

1 Introduction

This access audit report has been prepared for The Electoral Commission by All In Access Consultancy. This audit reports on the accessibility of polling stations located in:

1. Dungannon Leisure Centre, Circular Road, Dungannon BT71 6BH.
2. Howard Primary School, 2 Main Road, Dungannon BT71 7QR.

1.1 Scope of audit

Each building has been inspected from a first user's perspective and only with regards to use as a location for polling; therefore only facilities directly relating to electors' voting are considered. As requested by The Electoral Commission, inspection follows a natural sequence of approach, parking, access to the building, access through the building to rooms used for polling and the accessibility of polling rooms. The audit is modelled on the access needs of a broad range of potential users.

1.2 Building descriptions

1.2.1 Dungannon Leisure Centre

Leisure centre facility located within close proximity to Dungannon town centre.

Entrance into the building, depending on direction of approach can be made using ramped access, stepped access or level access therefore alternative means are available to facilitate the easiest method to suit a variety of needs, including the needs of people with disabilities. Access to polling rooms is either on a single floor level or on two floor levels, depending on elector allocation to either the minor hall or main sports hall polling stations. Internal stairs and passenger lift provision is made to address the change in level between ground and lower ground floor for those electors allocated to main sports hall polling stations.

A tour of the areas relating to polling activity was given by the leisure centre manager. Building works were carried out in two stages, during the 1970's and in 1994. In 2014 external ground works at the entrance were carried out and automatic entrance doors installed.

1.2.2 Howard Primary School

Primary school facility located at the junction of Main Road and A29, Dungannon, on the edge of Moygashel village approximately two miles south of Dungannon town centre.

Entrance into the polling centre and access to all polling rooms/polling stations is on a single floor level only. There are no internal steps, ramps or lifts to be negotiated.

Howard PS was opened in September 1997, therefore building design would have been approved under Northern Ireland Building Regulations 1994; and specifically Part R of the Building Regulations (NI) 1994 Access and facilities for disabled people, with respect to the incorporation of disability access.

A tour of the areas relating to polling activity was given by the school caretaker.

1.3 Audit details

Auditor: All In Access Consultancy

Report author: Aisling Irvine

Date of audit: 10th August 2015

Weather conditions: Wet and overcast (brief sunny spells)

1.4 Information provided by client

Instructions for accessibility audit.

Maps of Dungannon Polling Districts.

Photographs of Dungannon Leisure Centre and surrounding area.

Complaints received on polling day at Dungannon Leisure Centre.

Article from Tyrone Courier dated 20th May 2015.

1.5 Criteria for assessment

The principal documents used as criteria for assessment in the access audit include, but are not limited to:

- BSI (2010); British Standard BS8300:2009 +A1:2010 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people – Code of Practice.
- Department of Finance & Personnel (2012); The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. Technical Booklet R, Access to and use of buildings. The Stationery Office.
- Department of Finance & Personnel (2012); The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. Technical Booklet H, Stairs, ramps, guarding and protection from impact. The Stationery Office.
- Designing for Accessibility 2012 Edition. Centre for Accessible Environments and RIBA Publishing 2012.

- Access Audit Handbook. Centre for Accessible Environments.

1.6 Legislation

In Northern Ireland, public authorities have to comply with equality and good relations duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the disability duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 brought in measures to prevent discrimination against disabled people. The DDA defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

People who satisfy the definition of disability are covered by the DDA and this includes people who have had a disability in the past.

1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland has a disability.

Part II is based on the principle that disabled people should not be discriminated against in employment or when seeking employment. It also protects disabled people engaged in a range of occupations. Employers have a duty not to treat a disabled person less favourably than others for a reason relating to their disability, unless this can be justified. They have a duty to make adjustments to assist disabled employees or applicants. This may involve changing physical features if these put a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to others who are not. There is no general or anticipatory duty under Part II to make provision for disabled person. It is recommended that specific needs and requirements are discussed directly with election centre staff eg reasonable adjustments required to meet their needs on polling day.

Part III places duties on all those providing goods, facilities or services to the public and those selling, letting or managing premises. It enforces the provision of auxiliary aids and equipment and reasonable adjustments to policies, practices and procedures, whilst the 2004 provisions introduced new legislation, which may require the physical alteration of premises.

In general, from October 2004 once a service provider has identified the physical features that make it difficult for a disabled person to use their service, the law gives them a choice: remove the feature, alter it, find a way of avoiding it or provide the service in a reasonable alternative way.

A service provider must consider what is reasonable according to the type of service provided and the following factors: whether taking particular steps

would be effective in overcoming the difficulty; the extent to which it is practical to take the steps; financial and other costs of making the adjustment; the amount of disruption this would cause; money already spent on making adjustments and the availability of financial or other assistance.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments in terms of the provision of services and physical adjustments is a continuing duty.

The measure of reasonability will not always be measured in financial terms. The DDA 2004 provisions also introduced the concept of “**dignity**” in that, in an assessment of “impossible or unreasonably difficult”, a service provider should take account of the time, inconvenience, effort, discomfort or loss of dignity entailed in using the service.

In 2006, the **Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006** (DDO) was introduced in Northern Ireland and made some changes to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The DDA was updated as a result of the DDO to extend protection from discrimination to people and situations that were not previously covered. From 1 January 2007, the DDO placed a new duty on public authorities to have due regard when carrying out their functions to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and the need to encourage participation by disabled people in public life. Importantly, this includes participation in elections.

- Section 75 Northern Ireland

Section 75 and Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 came into force on the 01 January 2000 and placed a statutory obligation on public authorities in carrying out their various functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine equality categories (which include **age, persons with a disability and persons without**).

The promotion of **equality of opportunity** entails more than the elimination of discrimination. It requires proactive action to promote equality of opportunity and encourages public authorities to take action to address inequality among the nine equality categories. All registered electors should be given the same opportunity to exercise their right to vote in a suitable location.

1.7 DDA ongoing duty

Creating inclusive environments is an ongoing process of creative problem solving, not an event ie facilities, policies and procedures need to be assessed, change and evolve over time.

All In Access Consultancy advocates the application of best practice in relation to accessing facilities, therefore anticipating any future improvements in standards. However, there is no assurance that the best practice guidelines will be sufficient to protect service providers from the Disability Discrimination Act as the guidelines could be exceeded by higher standards as a result of case law. Service providers should keep the duty under regular review in light of improved technical standards and to ensure the continued efficiency of the provision made.

All In Access Consultancy recommends that this audit is reviewed on a regular basis and that continued advice is taken from a suitably qualified Access Consultant.

1.8 Disability Equality/Awareness Training

Training in disability equality/awareness helps election centre staff (including volunteers) to assist and communicate properly with disabled electors. It is essential that election centre staff know what facilities are available and appropriate to people with various disabilities, and where eg specific measures or reasonable adjustments in place on polling day which will assist disabled electors to cast their vote. A member of election centre staff with the ability to use sign language is very advantageous, particularly amongst frontline staff who communicate directly with visitors.

Attitude of election centre staff is crucially important; therefore the importance of training cannot be understated in order to ensure suitable care of electors. Such training is also of relevance with the duties imposed by the DDA.

Training, management and operational issues will be central to any Action Plan to improve access now and moving forward.

1.9 Confidentiality

All In Access Consultancy shall treat this audit report as confidential and safeguard it accordingly. All In Access Consultancy shall not disclose the contents of the audit to any other person or body without the prior consent of the client, The Electoral Commission.

1.10 Disclaimer

The recommendations set out in this audit report cannot guarantee compliance with duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (as amended) in Northern Ireland. At present there is only limited case law on which to base 'reasonable adjustments'. The audit report does not constitute legal advice and is not a Health and Safety report.

All In Access Consultancy cannot be held responsible for any action taken against the client. It is imperative that the client conducts regular assessment and review of disability access in relation to the buildings it uses for polling and to the policies and procedures adopted with regards to polling activities taking place at polling station locations.

2 Summary (including Checklist)

NOTE: It is essential that this Summary section is read in full conjunction with the detailed analysis contained within the main body of this audit report, to ensure full understanding of the issues involved and the conclusions reached.

As part of this audit report remit, the auditor has been tasked with providing a view on which building provides the best access to polling stations for electors - Dungannon Leisure Centre or Howard Primary School. There are a broad range of factors/design features considered relevant to disability access, which have been assessed for the purposes of this audit. Establishing which accessibility is best has proved challenging, as the auditor recognises that both have merit; and both evidence excellent accessibility in many elements across this range. In various respects, there is little or no difference between the provisions available at each to enable good disability access to polling stations; there are also some advantages to one over the other, and vice versa. However, as a comparison must be drawn in order to assist the client (The Electoral Commission) in determining the way forward, the auditor has compiled the Checklist below. This indicates existing provisions and briefly outlines the issues, to aid client decision-making. The auditor's views are expressed within Conclusions.

Accessibility Feature	Howard Primary School (Yes/ No)	Dungannon Leisure Centre (Yes/No)	Comment
The polling centre is within one mile for electors	Yes/No	Yes/No	Depending on Coolhill or Moygashel ward electors' addresses. In very basic terms, DLC is further away from the farthest Moygashel ward location than HPS is from the farthest away Coolhill ward location (note: details provided in Section 4).
Bus stop(s) in the vicinity of polling centre	Yes	Yes	Routes of travel to and from polling centres using public transport can often dictate accessibility for people with disabilities (Section 3).
Accessible route from bus stops to polling centre entrance	Yes/No	Yes/No	Some convenient stops are available depending on bus route and stop location. Steep inclines from Busby's Shop stop in Moygashel to HPS. At DLC, steep inclines along Circular Road from FE College stop; lengthy route from Perry Street stop.

If arriving by car is the route in the vicinity of the polling centre congested	No	Potentially	<p>HPS is located off a busy main arterial route A29, which is generally free-flowing in this location; traffic control helps to ease traffic movement and reduce the likelihood of congestion and allow elector traffic to move from the A29 onto Main Road from which the site is accessed.</p> <p>DLC is located on Circular Road (A29), a busy arterial route and due to its town location generally considered more vulnerable to traffic congestion in the immediate vicinity of the polling centre. The Circular Road is often congested due to close proximity of a main town junction and traffic control which can result in traffic queues. This is coupled with further potential for congestion as first-time electors to DLC may be trying to locate suitable parking areas, availability of drop-off or the entrance.</p>
Polling centre building is easy to locate	Yes	Potentially	<p>At DLC, this depends on what direction electors are coming from, familiarity and signage. There are no apparent signs coming from the direction of Moygashel or Killyman Road. With a carefully planned polling signage schedule it should be possible to make the location of the polling centre clear to electors who are unfamiliar with the surrounding area; different directions of arrival and approach have to be taken into account and signage planned and installed accordingly to make this work, including complementary signage relating to different parking zones to avoid electors arriving at the wrong access road/access point for parking – management issue. Stewarding to complement required.</p>
Parking areas are easy to locate	Yes	Potentially	<p>At DLC, this depends on what direction electors are coming from, familiarity, signage, stewarding. See above.</p>
Designated parking available	Yes (4)	Yes (13)	<p>At DLC, there are factors to consider which impact accessibility. There</p>

for disabled electors (how many)			<p>are 12 bays positioned on level ground, therefore 1 bay in the chapel car park will be too difficult for some people who need to transfer (may suit people with other types of disability).</p> <p>For DLC, consider the scenario: accessible parking bays and parking areas with less onerous routes of approach are not locatable, or available on arrival and a person with mobility difficulties, or a person with a disability who does not possess a blue badge, parks in the rear leisure centre car park or upper council car park unaware of the route they are required to take (or they start the route but are unable to complete it), whether they have the same opportunity to vote as other electors. DLC polling stations are accessible (particularly if an option to avoid the use of stairs and lift is further explored internally), provided disabled people can find, avail of and use accessible parking bays (permanent or temporary) and that they can approach the polling centre safely and easily using an accessible route from parking areas, or from points of arrival using alternative methods of travel eg on public transport, on foot or in a taxi. If they cannot locate or avail of accessible provisions, there may be a risk that they could be unable to vote, as routes to the polling stations may not be suitable for them.</p> <p>If on arrival at HPS there is no availability of accessible parking at that particular time, or a person does not possess a blue badge, although not ideal (as transfer space may be required for some people depending on their disability) at least electors can make their way to the entrance unassisted and using a level route.</p>
Scope to make temporary provision for use	Yes	Yes	Explore feasibility of designating front council car park for sole use of electors with disabilities, including

on polling day			<p>those who do not have a blue badge and older people (steward training essential). Note: the lower section of the front council car park although not suitable for some people, may be an option for others who could negotiate an inclined path and one flight of steps, as this offers a shorter route than the rear leisure centre car park given a path joins onto it along the latter part of the route.</p> <p>Temporary provision will reduce the number of standard bays, however discretion could be exercised if and when required at HPS based on steward assessment of fluctuating elector numbers, where there are less standard bays than at DLC.</p>
Designated parking easy to locate	Yes	Yes/No	<p>At DLC, this is dependent on: provision of advanced information, provision of polling day signage to clearly direct disabled electors to the various accessible parking zones (3 car parks in total to be considered) and any temporary signage to denote temporary bays designated for sole use on polling day eg through allocation of 2 no. standard bays per accessible bay. Will require careful stewarding.</p> <p>At HPS, if provided, temporary signage required to denote temporary bays designated for sole use on polling day eg through allocation of 2 no. standard bays per accessible bay.</p> <p>At DLC, steward training in disability equality is essential in gaining an understanding of issues re: types of disability, hidden disability, older persons needs etc.</p>
Standard parking bays provided for non-disabled people (how many)	Yes (73)	Yes (157)	<p>At DLC, there are more parking bays available for electors' use, including more designated accessible parking bays. This cannot however be considered in isolation as there are factors to consider which impact use of bays eg suitability of routes/features when accessing the polling centre from the parking</p>

			provisions; awareness of available parking provisions particularly for electors who are not familiar with the polling centre building or its surrounding streets/area; any potential for confusion arising from this.
Tail loading available to accessible parking bays	Yes/No	No	2 bays at HPS may be suitable. All other bays do not have rear safety zones marked out.
Accessible parking is convenient to the polling centre entrance	Yes	Yes	At DLC, bays at the chapel car park are located further away than the rest, not marked out at ground level, 1 bay positioned on an incline, route from chapel car park in poor condition in places on the same side of Circular Road as DLC (crossings are available on Circular Road adjacent to the chapel and adjacent to DLC should people prefer to use the opposite side, but may take longer).
Formal drop-off provided eg to enable disabled persons' arrival by taxi, or to facilitate assistance	Yes (2 areas)	No	At DLC, access slip road off Circular Road not suitable as a drop-off point on polling day as it provides access to designated parking bays, due to close proximity at rear of accessible bays and zebra crossing, and as pulling in and out could add to congestion on polling day along Circular Road. The facilitation of designated drop-off for disabled people and older people/people with mobility difficulties could be explored within the front council car park whereby the polling centre entrance is within 50m and the approach route is level - in conjunction with designated parking provisions, careful consideration to turning and traffic flow.
Accessible route from designated parking bays to polling centre entrance	Yes	Yes/No	Vehicular and pedestrian traffic share the same surface from some accessible parking at both centres. Yes from front leisure centre car park. Note: some people may find the ramp difficult. Yes from front council car park.

			Some surfaces difficult on route from chapel car park.
Level access to polling centre entrance from designated parking	Yes	Yes/No	Ramped access from front leisure centre car park. Section of sloped (1 in 17) access from front council car park accessible bays, then level beyond. Ramped access when coming from chapel parking.
Convenient access to polling centre entrance from standard parking	Yes	Yes/No	Convenient from front council car park. Lengthy routes from rear parking and could prove difficult in parts. Lengthy route from upper council car park and could prove difficult in parts. Some ground surfaces uneven on route from chapel car park to access ramp.
Lighting to site and on approach routes	Yes	Yes	
Rest seating on long or inclined approach routes	N/A	Yes	Rest seats adjacent to front leisure centre car park (designated accessible bays) - assists people approaching from chapel car park or left side rear leisure centre car park. Bench seats at intervals along the lengthy stepped route from right side rear leisure centre car park.
Signage to aid orientation to the polling centre entrance	Yes	Potentially	At HPS, entrance point is logical and prominent on approach. At DLC, with a carefully planned polling signage schedule it should be possible to make the point of entrance clear to electors who are unfamiliar with the building layout eg on approach via the access ramp - different directions of arrival and approach have to be taken into account and signage planned and installed accordingly to make this work effectively – management issue. Stewarding required to complement
External steps and ramps	No	Yes	At HPS, approach and access to the polling centre building is level.
If there are steps and ramps are	N/A	Yes/No	Tapered steps to upper council car park and right side rear leisure

they suitably designed			centre car park access route (particularly difficult for some people to negotiate). Final straight flight of steps suitably designed. Steps on left side rear leisure centre car park route generally suitably designed, but steep incline on intermediate path and to reach Circular Road. Access ramp gradient steeper and longer than standards (approx. 1 in 17/1 in 14 over 16m length). Handrails on steps; contrasting nosings; handrails on ramp.
If there are steps and ramps, is there complementary provision	N/A	No	Access ramp at front does not have complementary steps. Rear leisure centre car park steps do not have a complementary ramp or additional means of access eg lifting device.
Level access to and into the building	Yes	Yes/No	At DLC, there is ramped access from the front leisure centre car park (designated accessible) and chapel car park. Stepped access from rear leisure centre car park (and steep intermediate incline paths). Stepped approach from upper council car park to reach leisure centre site.
Level entrance threshold	Yes	Yes	
Entrance visible on approach	Yes	Yes/No	At DLC, this is dependent on which direction electors are approaching from. Not immediately evident to electors using the access ramp.
Entrance doors automatic opening	No	Yes	All doors held open at all times during polling day, so both considered acceptable.
Entrance doors wide enough	Yes	Yes	All doors held open at all times during polling day. (Note: e.c.o.w of entrance doors is greater at HPS).
Weather mat fixed and flush	No	No	Loose mats should be avoided.
Adequate circulation space in entrance foyer	Yes	Yes	Potential use as polling station at DLC – several factors to consider in terms of circulation to minor hall polling station(s).
Polling stations	Yes	No/	At DLC, two polling stations at lower

at one level		Potentially	ground floor; option for one polling station in entrance foyer therefore all polling stations would be on one level (preferred).
Horizontal circulation along corridors to reach polling rooms	Yes/No	Yes/No	One polling room at each polling centre accessed off the entrance foyer; others accessed using corridors. Potentially no requirement to use corridors at DLC if both polling rooms located at ground floor level (minor hall and entrance foyer – preferred).
Circulation routes/corridors are bright	Yes	Yes/No	At DLC, the stairwell is well lit; the entrance foyer appeared dark inside the entrance doors, as did corridors at the lower ground floor.
Vertical circulation required to reach polling rooms	No	Yes	At DLC, lift and stairs provided. At HPS, polling rooms on one level. Option for relocation of polling room at DLC to facilitate all polling stations on one level, which would be beneficial if retaining this polling centre.
If there are stairs and/or lifts are they suitably designed	N/A	Yes	The lift will accommodate one wheelchair user and one other person. The lift should have a mirror to assist reversing, given car size. The floor of the lift should be lighter in colour to assist people with anxiety issues or partially sighted people; and firmly fixed down. Continue policy of providing lift engineer on hand to repair, if retaining this polling centre.
If there are stairs and/or lifts are they prominently located on arrival	N/A	Yes	At DLC, a sign is required to denote the lift location at both levels. Stewarding also assists in this regard on polling day.
Polling rooms are easy to locate	Yes/No	Yes/No	One polling room at each centre close to entrance and easy to locate. Others at both centres reliant on signage and stewarding.
Polling rooms are well lit	Yes	Yes/ Potentially	Combination of natural and artificial light sources in all existing polling rooms. At DLC, if using entrance foyer as

			polling room enhance lighting levels.
Level access into polling rooms	Yes	Yes/No	Raised threshold strip into minor hall polling room; could present slight trip hazard. Fix temporary hazard tape on polling day to highlight junction.
Internal doors are wide enough	Yes	Yes	All doors held open at all times during polling day (ensure this is both leafs of double or asymmetrical door). At DLC, supervise doors at foot of staircase as one leaf opens close to the bottom landing area.
There is good circulation space in the polling room	Yes	Yes	At DLC, consider layout to enable free movement to and from the minor hall if using the entrance foyer as a polling station location.
Contrast provided between surfaces	Yes/No	Yes/No	At DLC, contrast limited in main sports hall polling room. At HPS, contrast limited in circulation corridor leading to Classroom 1 & 2 polling rooms. Temporary hazard tape to door edges on polling day would further distinguish them on approach.
A hearing enhancement system is available in polling rooms	No	Yes/No	A wired loop system is available in the minor hall.
If there is a hearing enhancement system it is clearly signed	N/A	No	Provide sign for existing induction loop in minor hall. Provide signs for all future portable systems.
Rest seating is available inside the polling centre	Yes	Yes	Provide a range of styles, including seats with armrests to offer support to people with reduced upper body strength.
Toilets are available, including an accessible WC	Yes	Yes	Observed only.
The edges of door leafs are distinguishable when open	Yes	Yes	Could be further enhanced using temporary means on polling day eg removable hazard tape.
Toilets are clearly signed	Yes/No	Yes	At HPS, symbol sign needed on accessible WC door.
Floors are slip-	Yes	Yes	Should be regularly inspected on

resistant			polling day eg in inclement weather.
It is easy for electors to find their way to the exit	Yes/ Potentially	Yes/ Potentially	At HPS, the assembly hall is close to the exit. Signage and stewarding may be needed to assist some people allocated to Classroom 1 & 2 polling rooms. At DLC, the minor hall is close to the exit. Signage and stewarding may be required to assist some people allocated to the main sports hall polling room. At DLC, if option of polling room relocated to entrance foyer is adopted, exit is easy to locate.
There is level egress to the Fire Assembly Points	Yes/No	Yes/No	Observed only. At HPS, egress from Classroom 1 & 2 polling rooms is ramped, but suitable. At DLC, level egress provided if exiting through the entrance foyer and minor hall polling room; not from main sports hall polling room. Observed, fire signage is provided in both buildings.
There are flashing beacons to assist people who are deaf or have hearing loss	No	No	
The polling centre is accessible	Yes	Yes	Both centres have merits in terms of their accessibility, particularly internally. There are factors to consider relating to overall accessibility and quality of voting experience by disabled electors: At DLC, the provision of clear pre-election day access information relating to directions of approach, location of parking provisions and routes of travel for people with disabilities (range of disabilities considered) and people with mobility difficulties/older people. Ease of access in this regard will be reliant on thorough and careful pre-election day planning, stewarding (including disability equality training) and signage. Use of ground floor polling rooms only will avoid the use of

			stairs/lift and circulation corridors; At HPS, the number of accessible parking bays, clear unobstructed routes of travel through the school on polling day and classrooms allocated as polling rooms cleared out.
Polling centre has capacity to facilitate elector numbers in polling rooms	Yes	Yes	Polling stations at the two polling centres would have an allocation of 2581 electors on polling day. At DLC, two halls are used as polling rooms to accommodate 3 ballot boxes. They are large and spacious. The designation of more rooms (two classrooms <i>and</i> an assembly hall) at HPS means that, whilst smaller than those rooms designated at DLC, rooms should not become too overcrowded. It is prudent to add that the nature of elections means that people can vote at any time during the hours of 7am and 10pm, helping to stagger numbers throughout the day and evening, albeit there may be peak times when larger numbers may be expected. Overall, the auditor feels that numbers could be accommodated at either polling centre and this did not render one better than the other in this regard, other than more signage will be required to denote polling rooms at HPS.

Conclusions

Some facilities can be designed in such a way as to incorporate access for people with disabilities. The introduction of additional features such as ramps, handrails, lift, etc may be needed to create an accessible environment in other instances, ie to create a facility that is capable of being accessed and used by disabled people and to help service providers to create an environment that is compliant with the duties of DDA. It is clearly understood by the auditor that having such features does not make a building less accessible or constitute a barrier for disabled people necessarily, and is accepting that these are reasonable and acceptable solutions in many building situations given restrictions in terms of site, topography, building age etc. If however, a comparison must be drawn it could be argued by some that not having such additional features makes access to and/or use of a building less complicated

and/or more efficient for a disabled person than if a disabled person did have to use them.

The auditor recognises the efforts and measures put in place on polling day to reduce the impact should difficulties arise at Dungannon Leisure Centre eg presence of a lift engineer throughout polling hours. Whilst these are pro-active and could for many be reasonable to ensure less favourable treatment, there is no guarantee that a person with disabilities will not be inconvenienced, require increased time and effort, or suffer loss of dignity in the event that a difficulty were to arise.

As such, in trying to establish some comparatives between the two buildings, the auditor has had to think about matters such as potential for confusion, dignity, inconvenience, increased time and effort and the reliance on management solutions to address potential access issues over incorporated accessibility within building context and/or design.

Based on detailed assessment of *all* the factors and design features relevant to disability access at these polling stations, it is the auditor's view that overall Howard PS offers the most straightforward. Dungannon Leisure Centre has a very many positive attributes and excellent facilities to offer as a polling centre, including the number of potential permanent parking bays allocated for disabled persons use and to non-disabled persons. (In addition, the option of relocating a main sports hall polling station to the ground floor entrance foyer would further enhance the internal accessibility of polling stations within Dungannon Leisure Centre). There are, however, several aspects of disability access which are open to uncertainty, simply because there are several directions of approach and provisions are spread over a wider surrounding area, which to some disabled people may seem sporadic and complicated if they are unfamiliar with the town centre street layout, or building location and its entrance.

That is not to say that Dungannon Leisure Centre does not constitute an accessible polling centre, but success with regards to its external context will be heavily reliant on management factors such as the provision of clear pre-polling day access information to enable disabled electors to make an informed choice, a high level of proficient stewarding on-site at each relevant location (including their understanding of the need for discretion) and the installation of logical and comprehensive signage. Some of these measures, such as stewards at access points to offer information regarding parking locations, have been implemented on polling day to good effect at Dungannon Leisure Centre. Importantly, however the success of many management solutions will come down to an individual elector's experience on the day, how easily they have found the voting process, how they have been given information to make exercising their vote simple etc.

Feedback from disabled people, carers/companions and election centre staff is a key aspect in decision-making and the implementation of further improvement. Where difficulties are encountered, this relates to peoples' real experiences and reacting in a pro-active way to address those concerns or negative experiences is paramount.

The client may decide to implement further improvements based on previous experiences and feedback (which is an essential part of the continual review of disability access provisions) and on the information provided within this audit report. The client may ultimately decide that they wish to ensure accessibility within the context of Dungannon Leisure Centre through enhanced management solutions. This is indeed an acceptable and effective way to adopt change and improve the overall experience of disabled people when they are accessing and using facilities and services; provided that it is successfully implemented eg on polling day.

The use of Howard PS lends for a less complicated overall elector experience and for many people with and without disabilities, including older people, its use could reduce the need for enhanced assistance. It has one way in, one way out and car parking self-contained within the curtilage of the site, hence reducing the need for heavy reliance on additional measures which may not guarantee avoidance of confusion of polling day.

Pre-election access information can be particularly helpful for a first-time elector or an elector who is not familiar with the location or layout of their polling centre. It can help to alleviate anxiety eg for people with autism, if they can pre-plan their journey, and reduces the likelihood of unexpected barriers on arrival. Lack of information or uncertainty can influence a disabled person's decision to turn out at all should they have concerns/fears around not knowing exactly where to go, how to get there if they are unfamiliar, where to park, how far they may have to walk or how easy/difficult their route of approach to the polling centre may be; or if they have difficulty reading signs or maps.

In Northern Ireland, people with disabilities can choose to vote at another polling centre in their local area eg should they feel that the polling centre allocated to them does not fully meet their access needs.

- Recommendations

There are several matters that could be considered and addressed going forward. These are provided for the information and assistance of The Electoral Commission if they are considering these buildings in terms of retention or reinstatement as polling station locations in future elections. These matters have been highlighted in the relevant sections of the report below, denoted as '**Recommend**'. In the context of this report,

recommendations are provided only to offer information to The Electoral Commission if it intends to use a particular centre for polling. Some in relation to management are to encourage the development of procedures and that good practice is adopted in relation to the needs of people with disabilities; and to ensure that the existing provisions in each case could be used as widely and safely as possible. All recommendations should be read in conjunction with detailed comments, to ensure full understanding of the issue.

3 Public transport as a factor

Electors will choose to arrive at their allocated polling centre by car, on foot or using public transport. Public transport may be the only way some electors with disabilities can travel, therefore the availability of public transport to serve the polling centre and proximity of bus stops to a polling centre is essential. The auditor has considered this in terms of electors' arrival and approach to each building, but it should be noted that the following does not constitute a full assessment of bus routes and all stops relating to the broad range of electoral ward locations; it is meant only to offer some basic useful information to demonstrate that electoral wards are served in some way through public transport).

Bus services with relevance to the polling station locations and electoral ward locations are Town Service routes 377A and 377B and Ulsterbus services 67, 72, 75 and 80A/B.

Note: not all ward locations are served by direct routes and/or bus stops, therefore some form of travel eg on foot or by car/taxi may be required to reach a stop where a bus can then be boarded. This is applicable for travel in both directions depending on where electors live. As an example: Empire Avenue to Milltown stop on foot, boarding 377A (low floor bus) to Howard School stop.

- Low floor buses

As far as the auditor is aware, low floor buses are available on Town Service routes; not on all routes relevant to polling station locations eg 67, 72, 75.

Travelling the entire route using a low floor vehicle may mean set-down at a stop further away from the polling centre and where the route to the polling centre difficult eg Moygashel ward electors travelling the 377A route which drops at Perry Street, Dungannon.

For ease of access along approach routes, an interchange may be required to take people with disabilities to the stops closest to the polling centre, however one or other of the buses may not have a low floor. As example:
Coolhill to Moygashel – 75 bus to Dungannon Bus Station, boarding 377A (low floor) to Moygashel PO/Busby's Shop stop or Howard School stop;
Stangmore to Dungannon – 72 route to Perry Street (difficult route for some to Dungannon Leisure Centre); or interchange on A29 stops for 67 route dropping at FE College close to Dungannon Leisure Centre (or Northland Row – Royal School stop close to chapel, whereby access is less steep than Circular Road from the FE College).

- Howard PS bus stops and approach

There are two bus stops in the vicinity of Howard PS:

1. The closest, Ranfurley Heights, is along the A29 approximately 152m from the main site entrance of Howard PS

The approach to Howard PS from this bus stop is level. There is a crossing point, including dropped kerbs and buff blister paving (as recommended) and a further controlled crossing, including dropped kerbs, red blister paving and rotating cones to assist blind and partially sighted people (as recommended). Note that blister paving is broken/cracked in places – this is beyond the client's control. Path widths are suitable and comprise a firm bitmac surface.

2. Moygashel PO bus stop/Busby's Shop

Steep inclines and reduced path width are evident along parts of the pedestrian route leading to and from Howard PS.

There are no formal crossing points to enable electors on the Linen Green side to cross onto the Howard PS side. However, a bus (67) serving this stop also serves the next A29 stop, whereby there is a less onerous route of travel to and from the polling centre site boundary (as noted in 1. above).

There are dropped kerbs at the site entrance points to Howard PS to assist wheelchair and mobility scooter users approaching or leaving the polling centre in either direction ie towards the A29, or towards Moygashel.

A Town Service bus route (377A) also serves these stops which would enable electors in some relevant ward locations to access this polling centre by bus.

Note: the auditor has observed that post names and/or route numbers relevant to Howard PS do not appear to correspond with bus timetables. It is likely that posts may be older or timetables/routes updated:

- Ranfurley Heights stop - referred to as Howard School on relevant route timetables and the post denotes 377F (does not serve the Moygashel area), as opposed to 377A which drops/picks-up here.
- Moygashel PO stop - Moygashel Busby's Shop on relevant timetables.
- Northland Row/Royal School stop.

Recommend: to avoid confusion, especially for electors who may not be familiar with the immediate local areas and people with learning disabilities, this should be discussed with Translink.

- Dungannon Leisure Centre bus stops and approach

There are three relevant bus stops in relation to voting at Dungannon Leisure Centre:

1. Dungannon Leisure Centre stop

Immediately adjacent to the polling centre and close to the entrance point. Controlled crossing, including dropped kerbs, red blister tactile paving and rotating cones (as recommended), is available across Circular Road to reach this stop either side.

2. FE College stop

This stop is served by bus (67) and Town Service bus (377B) relevant to electors and is approx. 280m to the polling centre via the leisure centre access ramp. Approach to the leisure centre along Circular Road entails steep inclines and uneven bitmac surfaces adjacent to council offices site boundary.

There are no dropped kerbs (and associated tactile paving) at the junction of the council offices access road, which could be problematic for some people with mobility difficulties. Steep inclines are also evident on routes to and from the polling centre entrance along Circular Road ranging from approx. 1 in 8 to 1 in 18, which would prove too difficult and onerous over this distance for many people.

Another bus stop along the 67 route is available on Northland Row/Royal School, a greater distance away from the polling centre than the FE College stop, but with less steep inclines overall eg inclines along Northland Row from the junction of Killyman Road leading to the bus stop are in the range 1 in 15 to 1 in 64.

On route from the FE College stop, a firm bitmac surface pathway runs diagonally off Circular Road approx. 32m in length leading to a level paved area and avoiding use of the leisure centre ramp. The path has sloped gradients ranging approx. 1 in 11 to 1 in 14. A low level concrete bollard is evident, which could be hazardous for people with sight loss as it is lower than the minimum recommended standard height 1000mm from GL. The bollard contrasts with the bitmac path in dry weather (less so when concrete is wet).



Diagonal route from Circular Road to paved leisure centre entrance area
(concrete bollard in distance off Circular Road)

3. Perry Street bus stop (Town Service – set down).

This is the closest stop to the polling centre if using the 377A Town Service route (set-down) from Moygashel, but it is a significant distance away comprising an approx. 7 mins direct walk from the stop to the leisure centre (this will be take longer for people with mobility difficulties). In addition, there are no accessible crossing points across Perry Street in the vicinity of the bus stop (with dropped kerbs on either side), therefore, if not getting off at a stop before Perry Street, approaching the polling centre may be safest for some by travelling to the controlled crossing near to Treetops and Royal School on Ranfurley Road. This is however, a significant distance away, approx. 160m from the Perry Street stop. Concrete paving slabs on Perry Street from the bus stop are in poor condition in places and could constitute a tripping hazard, or be problematic for wheelchair users.

On crossing Ranfurley Road, travel in the opposite direction back towards Circular Road is then required, with an approx. distance of 130m to reach the traffic lights adjacent to the chapel and a further distance in excess of 100m to reach the top of the polling centre access ramp. In all, this route is onerous, lengthy and would prove too difficult for some people with disabilities, including hidden disabilities such as a heart condition, and older people. Surfaces are rough and uneven in places and there are steep inclines in part. It may be easier to get off at a stop previous to reduce overall distance if crossing at Perry Street is an issue, however inclines would still have to be negotiated. Alternative use of the 67 service avoids set down at Perry Street, but vehicles are not low floor.



Route if required to use controlled crossing to reach polling centre from Perry Street bus stop on 377A Town Service

The 377A will set down at Perry Street. The route is relevant to electors in both wards close to stops Old Eglish Road, Sylera Road, Moygashel PO/Busby's Shop, Stevenson's Avenue, Ranfurley Heights/Howard School, Ballynorthland Park and Cunningham's Lane. Electors could use 67 or 377B routes and hence stop at Dungannon Leisure Centre (except for those at Old Eglish Road and Stevenson's Avenue stops, therefore it may be possible for them to avoid Perry Street by getting off the 377A at Ballynorthland Park, Cunningham's Lane and getting the 67 or 377B to Dungannon Leisure Centre). This would of course be dependent on corresponding bus times and would require some knowledge of stops and suitable bus routes.

The 377B Town Service route will pick up some Coolhill ward electors directly outside the polling centre at the Dungannon Leisure Centre stop, with stops at Killyman Road, Cunningham's Lane, Gortnasaor, Belvedere Park, Gortmerrion Link Road, Northland Village (possibly also serving electors in nearby areas).

The 67 serves some Coolhill ward locations to Moygashel Howard School stop, including Wellington Road. The 67 from Moygashel will stop at Royal School/Northland Row or FE College, but picks up at Dungannon Leisure Centre and drops at Moygashel stops, including Prince Andrew Crescent stop (which may take in some Sylera Road and Mullybrannon Road electors).

The 75 will serve some Coolhill ward electors with stops at Coolhill, Gortmerrion Link Road, Northland Village (pick-up only) stopping at FE College whereby electors would take the route down Circular Road and cross over to reach the polling centre. The 75 will pick-up at Wellington Road and stop outside Dungannon Leisure Centre.

The 80B will drop Wellington Road electors (if applicable depending on house number) to Dungannon Leisure Centre stop, but there is a significant wait for a return bus which will also entail going to Dungannon Bus Station, waiting 5/10mins and getting on the 80A/80C.

Note: the information above is based solely on the auditor's interpretation of nearby stops and timetable information.

4 Distance to polling stations as a factor

A polling centre would generally be considered most convenient and accessible to electors if it is located within 1 mile, wherever possible. Often for public buildings, a town centre location will offer a more accessible location as it can enable convenient travel on foot or provide good transport links. In this instance however, the accessibility of locations is very much dependent on where electors live within electoral wards and how far they are from their allocated polling station.

The auditor has considered this in terms of the polling district maps provided by The Electoral Commission and has looked at examples to demonstrate approximate distance and travel time relating to either polling station from nearest and furthest addresses within the Coolhill and Moygashel electoral wards (based on internet map searches). These are simply to enable the auditor to gauge how far people could expect to travel from addresses furthest away within the ward if they are allocated to either Dungannon Leisure Centre or Howard Primary School polling stations. Basic examples as follows (based on arrival by car):

Coolhill Ward:

Distance from Parkwood Court to Dungannon Leisure Centre is 0.8 miles, with an approx. travel time of 3 mins by car; whereas 1.1 miles from Howard Primary School, with an approx. travel time 4 mins by car.

Distance from Killyneill Road to Dungannon Leisure Centre 1.4 miles, whereas 1.6 miles from Howard Primary School; both with the same travel time by car.

Moygashel Ward:

Distance from Empire Avenue to Dungannon Leisure Centre is 0.5 miles, with an approx. travel time of 4 mins by car; whereas 1.3 miles to Howard Primary School, with an approx. travel time 5 mins by car.

Distance from an address on Syerla Road within the ward boundary to Dungannon Leisure Centre is 2.6 miles, with an approx. travel time of 9 mins by car; whereas 1.1 miles to Howard Primary School, with an approx. travel time of 4 mins by car.

Distance from an address on Mullybrannon Road within the ward boundary to Dungannon Leisure Centre is 3.1 miles, with an approx. travel time of 10 mins by car; whereas 1.6 miles to Howard Primary School, with an approx. travel time of 5 mins by car.

Times will also be affected by traffic and if there is congestion on route to, or outside of polling centres.

Regardless of location, the polling station will still be further than 1 mile away for some electors based on the polling station closest to them. The auditor acknowledges too that some electors will be closer than 1 mile from their polling station.

Overall, considering the numerous and varying address locations within the two wards served by Dungannon Leisure Centre or Howard Primary School polling stations, it is the auditor's understanding that Howard Primary School is closer for the majority of electors. It could therefore be argued that it is the most convenient for most, with an approx. maximum distance of less than 2miles from some electors, as opposed to an approx. maximum distance of over 3miles when considering Dungannon Leisure Centre. Without exact knowledge of how many people with disabilities are registered to vote in each ward and where they live, it is not possible to confirm if more live closer to Howard PS than Dungannon Leisure Centre, however this may be a valid consideration for the Electoral Commission when reviewed polling station locations.

Assessment of Existing Access Provisions at Dungannon Leisure Centre

5 Arrival

5.1 Building location

Located on Circular Road, close to Dungannon town centre. This is a busy two-way arterial route through Dungannon, which can be subject to congestion and queues in the vicinity of the polling centre, given the volume of traffic which uses this route and traffic lights nearby at the junction of Circular Road/Northland Row and Killyman Road.

6 Car parking and Approach

Note: routes from bus stops are outlined in Section 3.

6.1 Parking provision

There are 5 no. car parking areas allocated for electors' use on polling day:

- Leisure centre car parking (2 no. areas):
 1. Front leisure centre car park (designated accessible parking area only)



5 no. accessible parking bays to front of polling centre off Circular Road

Accessible parking only is provided at the front of the building off Circular Road. 5 no. designated accessible bays are marked out with suitable side transfer zones (rear zones are not provided). There are no accessible parking

bays with rear transfer zones enabling use by disabled people with vehicles adapted with built-in rear ramps or lifts away from vehicular traffic.

All bays are clearly signed for disabled badge holders use only.

A section of dropped kerb is provided to one end of the accessible parking zone only. A pathway 1400mm wide (suitable) leads from bays to the top of an access ramp leading in turn to the centre entrance (distance of 27m from the furthest accessible bay to the top of the ramp and total distance of approx. 55m from the entrance).

2. Rear leisure centre car park



Rear leisure centre car park – approach routes to the polling centre entrance are available to the left and right

A car park to the rear of the centre off Killymeal Road is large with 77 no. standard bays. There are no designated accessible parking bays, as the approach to the building entrance would not be suitable for many people who have a range of disabilities. A dropped kerb leads from the car park onto the approach route path on the right side.

Defined pedestrian pathways are not provided to separate vehicle and pedestrian traffic within the rear leisure centre car park eg this could be problematic for partially sighted people who may be parked here if they do not possess a blue badge to avail of accessible parking bays (stewarding and management of this discussed in checklist and other relevant sections below).

- Council offices car parking

3 no. council offices parking areas can be used by electors on polling day, all approached using an access road off the Circular Road.

3. Upper council car park

Note: during council offices opening hours on polling day, this car park is used primarily by council staff/visitors, however is available for electors' use from 5pm until 10pm.

39 no. standard bays provided (excluding two hatched areas); there are no designated accessible parking bays. Access from the car park to the polling centre entrance is via steps or using pathways within the curtilage of the council site, which would not be suitable for many people who have a range of disabilities.

The car park has a bitmac surface and in the direction of the access road it rises at inclines of 1 in 36 and 1 in 20, then levels out before sloping down at 1 in 18.5 towards the access road. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic share the same surface, as there are no defined pathways leading to the steps or back towards the access road. There are no dropped kerbs to cross the access road throughout its length within the site or at the junction of Circular Road. This has an impact of people using the public footpath along Circular Road eg when approaching from the FE College bus stop.

Paving slabs are broken and uneven in places, which could present a tripping hazard and very steep inclines are evident leading down from the upper car park towards the polling centre entrance at the front of the council offices. For people who find using steps difficult, or who may be uncomfortable or unsteady underfoot on steep slopes, this car park is not suitable.

A road gully at the corner of the upper car park and access road has wide slots, which could trap long canes or walking aids.

If using the Circular Road public footpath to approach the polling centre entrance from the upper car park, the distance of travel is approx. 137m from the access road to the entrance via the access ramp, or approx. 42m to the start of diagonal pathway leading directly to a paved entrance area.

4. Front council car park (located at council offices building)

19 no. standard bays are provided in front of council offices (including designated mayor and councillor parking bays). 5 no. designated accessible bays are marked out with suitable side transfer zones on the polling centre side (rear zones are not provided) and this parking area proves very accessible for disabled electors approaching the entrance doors.



Front council car park accessible bays and level approach leading to polling centre entrance (bays clearly marked out and signposted; excellent firm paved pathway showing entrance point in background)

A sloped gradient of approx. 1 in 17 leads from the 3 no. bays closest to the polling centre to a level paved pathway, which leads in turn to the entrance doors. The distance of travel from the nearest accessible bay to the polling centre entrance doors is 49m.



View from entrance back towards front council car park area and steps leading to rear leisure centre car park route

Standard bays are designated for sole use of electors on polling day, however during council offices opening hours accessible bays are available to electors and to council office visitors accessing the polling centre, therefore availability of the 5 no. accessible parking bays within the council car park with the most

accessible approach route to the entrance cannot be guaranteed for electors' use when they arrive, particularly during busier times and when the council offices are open.

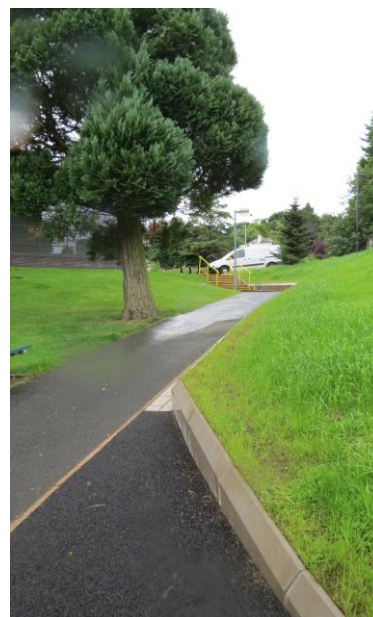
Accessible bays are clearly signed (for use of disabled badge holders only).

Disabled people using council offices accessible bays are required to share the same surface with vehicular traffic on approach to the polling centre entrance as there is no defined separate pathways for pedestrians, however the 3 no. bays closest to the polling centre entrance are less likely to be impacted as vehicles will not require use of the area to the rear of bays (may even help to facilitate tail loading).

Recommend: explore feasibility of designating front council car park for sole use of electors with disabilities, including those who do not have a blue badge and older people. It is often considered acceptable to adopt a management solution which allows the use of 2 no. standard bays to be designated to address anticipation that there may be larger numbers expected for a one-off event and this can be done through appropriate signage and stewarding (and even temporary markings). Note: temporary provision will reduce the number of standard bays, but there are other options for non-disabled people.

Collapsible black bollards adjacent to council offices accessible bays are of suitable height, but do not have a contrasting band at the top to assist partially sighted people on approach, however some visual contrast is provided between these and the lighter block paving ground surface.

4b. Front council car park (lower section)



View towards front council car park from lower section; path from lower section joins rear leisure centre car park route (one flight of steps only)

A lower section of the front council car park is accessed through barriers at the rear of the council offices (barrier was open on the day of inspection). 19 no. standard bays are marked out. This car park has been designated for council offices use only on polling day. There are no designated accessible parking bays in this lower section as the approach to the accessible entrance is too steep using the roadway (1 in 7) and a pathway ranging in gradient from approx. 1 in 16 to 1 in 7 joins the stepped only approach route from the rear leisure centre car park. Distance of travel is 35m to the final flight of steps on that route from the nearest parking bay in the lower section.

Recommend: consider that if this section was to be used on polling day for electors use, it may be suitable for some electors who would find the final flight of steps less problematic than using the route from the rear leisure centre car park (which joins onto the path from the lower section car park) and travel distance is shorter leading to the polling centre entrance.

5. St. Patrick's Chapel car park

Located off Circular Road. 53 no. parking bays are provided in total. 3 no. accessible bays are denoted only through signage, they are not marked out using symbol signage at ground level or side and rear transfer zones. Paving design at ground level is used to mark out bays within the front entrance car parking area fronting onto Killyman Road, all as standard-sized bays. One of the three bays is positioned on a steep gradient 1 in 9.5, which some wheelchair users will find problematic when trying to transfer. Being designated to offer convenience for chapel goers at the main entrance doors, these bays are the furthest away from the polling centre. Standard bays are marked out on a bitmac surface car park off Circular Road.



View from Northland Row towards chapel showing inclines at junction, and gates close to accessible parking bays

Access to the polling centre from the designated bays is through the front gates where inclines of 1 in 8 or 1 in 15 (less steep) are evident; or by travelling along the side of the chapel within the chapel site, through the circular road car park (vehicular and pedestrian traffic share the same surface) and through wide vehicular gates onto Circular Road public footpath.

Path surfaces leading from the chapel car park off Circular Road are in poor condition in many places and this would make the route of travel on approach to the polling centre difficult for some people. This is beyond the control of the client, but it is an important consideration when assessing allocated parking provisions where a route of travel is required to reach the polling centre entrance from allocated parking provisions.

Slabs are cracked and undulate in places; tactile paving is broken and in poor state of repair (being red, it is the incorrect colour of paving for this type of crossing and is only installed to one side); vegetation overhangs in places which could be hazardous for blind and partially sighted people; there is a dished channel evident on part of the route, which can be a tripping hazard for amputees; bollards do not have contrasting bands incorporated to assist partially sighted people. Chains across bollards can be hazardous to blind and partially sighted people, evident on the leisure centre access adjacent. A road gully close to the bus stop has wide slots in the direction of travel, which could trap long canes or walking aids.

In all, the chapel does lend itself to parking for electors' use on polling day, but the suitability of the route of travel for people with disabilities has to be a factor taken into account by the client. It is possible to use controlled crossing points to access bitmac footpaths on the opposite side of the street, crossing again at the polling centre, however this may involve extra time and some slopes at junctions with residential access points are steep.

It is possible that a wedding or funeral service will take place on polling day. Whilst such services will only be for a limited period of time it could still render the car park and use of the designated accessible parking provisions in place for electors unavailable. In addition, mass services and confessions take place at the chapel daily during polling hours. On the day of inspection a wedding was taking place and the car park was occupied to full capacity during this time. This could also impact the scope to provide temporary accessible bays through the allocation of standard bays and effective management/stewarding.

Recommend: there is scope to increase the number of bays designated for disabled electors' use on polling day in the chapel car park area should The Electoral Commission anticipate the need for this requirement and these would also offer an option closer to the polling centre entrance than the existing chapel designated bays. It is often considered acceptable to adopt a

management solution which allows the use of 2 no. standard bays to be designated to address anticipation that there may be larger numbers expected for a one-off event and this can be done through appropriate signage and stewarding. Given that this site and parking area is not sporadic, this should be possible to execute without difficulty. Adopt and implement management procedure to enable this, including use of clear temporary signage. Consider that the chapel car park may not be available if services are taking place.



Public footpath surfaces from chapel to Dungannon Leisure Centre along Circular Road (and showing proximity of Dungannon Leisure Centre bus stop)



View on footpath back towards chapel from polling centre

Recommend: temporary warning of hazards may be possible to put in place on polling day, as well as assistance available when required along the route, in the form of stewards.

6.2 Drop-off/pick-up points

There is no formal drop-off area marked out or signed at the polling centre within the site curtilage. The site is restricted at the front, given its site boundary meets Circular Road and the building perimeter is close to the site boundary.



Zebra on slip road leading to controlled crossing on Circular Road

On the day of inspection the auditor observed several cars pulling in to drop-off at the slip road (adjacent to the ramp), which accesses the designated accessible parking bays.

A zebra crossing is provided across this access road to enable safe crossing of pedestrians onto the public footpath on Circular Road. It is not feasible, therefore to use the slip road for drop-off or temporary parking, being immediately to the rear of the bays; especially as disabled people parked in the four bays closest to the polling centre have to move around behind the vehicle to reach the dropped kerb or the zebra, which has a dropped kerb. The zebra has red tactile paving although on one side it is an uncontrolled crossing (adjoins the formal controlled crossing on the other).

Note: if provided, marked drop-off areas can allow disabled or older electors arriving by taxi or car to be dropped off and picked up again, or to allow a driver to park on a temporary basis and provide assistance to a disabled or older person to get in and out of the vehicle, without utilising a designated bay should they prefer to do so.

6.3 Approach routes and pathways, including external steps and ramps

Some Coolhill ward electors are situated a minimum distance of approximately 0.5 miles from the leisure centre. It is probable that some electors arriving by car or on foot from addresses closest to the leisure centre will do so along Killyman Road leading up to its junction with Circular Road. To reach the entrance doors using the access ramp and avoiding stepped routes from the rear leisure centre car park, entails use of public footpaths on Killyman Road (which have good surface finish and width), however steep inclines ranging from approx. 1 in 10 to 1 in 15 are evident.



Junction of Northland Row, Killyman Road and Circular Road
(no signs for leisure centre and associated parking areas)

Controlled crossing points in the vicinity of the polling centre have red tactile paving, dropped kerbs and rotating cones to assist people who are blind or partially sighted arriving on foot (as recommended). Crossings on Circular Road, Northland Row, Killyman Road and Killymeal Road are provided, which also helps to serve people coming to and from nearby bus stops.

Structural columns supporting the building roof/overhang are marked with contrasting yellow bands to assist partially sighted people on approach, as is recommended.

Generally in technical standards, as far as possible the means of access from a site boundary and from designated parking should be level, or if unavoidable a gentle gradient over a long distance or shorter distances with a steeper gradient with level areas ie suitably constructed ramps. Due to site restrictions and difficult topography in what is effectively a town centre location, some approach routes are stepped only.

- Access ramp from Circular Road leading to entrance doors

A ramp is available to provided access for disabled people using the front leisure centre car park accessible bays off Circular Road.



Access ramp from accessible parking to entrance doors

Ramp features:

16m in length and approx. 1 in 17 and 1 in 14 gradient, which is longer and steeper than the maximum recommended standard for a ramp providing access to a building (ie maximum 10m, where a maximum gradient of 1 in 20 is provided; including requirement for intermediate landings).

Contrasting handrails are provided both sides to assist, offering good grip, as is recommended. Handrails are 870mm high, slightly lower than recommended standards. They are cold to the touch.

A level landing area is provided at the bottom of the ramp, but not at the top.

A suitable clear width of 1785mm is available.

Offer a useful alternative means of access to the entrance doors as opposed to steps, however some people with disabilities may find the ramp problematic on ascent and descent due to the length and gradient.

Note: further guidance on ramped access and gradient is provided in TBH 2012, Section 2.3, p.15 and Table 4.1.

- Leisure centre rear car park

Two routes are provided from the rear leisure centre car park to the front of the building and entrance:

1. Right side (on entering rear leisure centre car park)

A series of steps and graded pathways (bitmac surface in good condition) are constructed to address the change in level between ground at the rear of the leisure centre off Killymeal Road and the centre entrance adjacent to Circular Road. This route is constructed to provide electors' access to the entrance if

parked in the rear car park. Note: accessible parking for disabled persons use is provided elsewhere, therefore there is no requirement for them to use the rear car park, perhaps unless they do not possess a blue badge, or cannot find an empty accessible bay on arrival.

A distance of approx. 170m is required to reach the entrance doors from the rear car park using this route (excluding distance on steps). Coupled with inclines of 1 in 12, 1 in 9, 1 in 10 on graded pathways (constitutes paths steeper than ramped access and are not fitted out as ramps ie including handrails to both sides) this is an onerous route and some non-disabled people could find it problematic.

This route is not suitable for older people or people with a wide range of disabilities, including mobility disabilities, heart conditions, people with sight loss may find it problematic (although some features have been incorporated to steps on the route to assist them), people with epilepsy, people who may suffer from anxiety. It is not immediately evident if embarking on the route for the first time how far it is and what it entails, meaning some people may start the route and find they are unable to complete it. Rest bench seats (without armrests to offer support) are positioned at intervals along the route to provide some respite which is very beneficial, but this route may prove too difficult for some people regardless.

The path leading from the rear car park has a good clear width of 1930mm and is level in part before sloping upwards before the first set of steps at a gradient of approx. 1 in 12. The first set of steps is 27m from the nearest standard car parking bay.



Start of route from rear car park to leisure centre entrance (may not be evident to first-time electors what this entails unless they are informed by stewards)



Steps and graded pathways on route



Final set of tapered steps; pathway from front council car park lower section joins this route



Final flight of steps (straight flight) and approach to entrance doors

Steps comprise curved flights with tapered treads, which are considered exceptionally difficult for many people and are not recommended for general public use. People with sight loss find these particularly hazardous and confusing; it can be difficult for an assistance dog and their owner to know where to place the foot. They are also unnerving for people who are unsteady underfoot, or can lose their balance easily.



Tapered steps on route

Typical features include:

Contrasting handrails offering good grip are fitted to both sides at a suitable height of 940mm high and with turned down end to prevent clothing getting caught.

Contrasting nosings are painted on tread and riser.

Risers are 180mm (higher than current standards on a stepped approach).

Suitable width 1700mm.

Recommend: provide deeper nosings to provide recommended 50-60mm on tread and riser.

The final set of steps is a straight flight, approx. 49m from the entrance doors and incorporating corduroy warning surface to the top landing only (top and bottom generally recommended in standards), contrasting painted nosings to concrete tread and riser (some edges are worn and rough) and contrasting yellow handrails offering good grip, on both sides. Handrails are cold to the touch.

Comprising 7 no. risers 145mm high (slightly below minimum standards 150-170mm) and treads in the range 295-305mm, which is suitable.

Suitable width 1770mm.

The Electoral Commission should explore whether there is a potential risk of excluding some people, eg older people, if they are not eligible or prevented from parking in accessible bays; whereby they may have no choice but to use the rear car park or council car parks which entail lengthy and/or onerous routes of travel to reach the polling centre entrance. Everyone should be afforded equal opportunity ie given the same opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

Note: not all people who may meet the definition of disability will possess a blue badge.

Recommend: steward training and adoption of policy to ensure that people with a range of disabilities eg hidden disabilities, such as heart conditions and older people with mobility difficulties, are not prevented from using accessible parking provisions.

2. Left side (on entering rear leisure centre car park)

A series of three straight step flights lead towards Circular Road. As these are not tapered, some people may find them easier to use than those on the right side route, however steep inclines are evident on the intermediate pathways between flights (approx. 1 in 5, 1 in 15) and on the access to Circular Road (approx. 1 in 12, 1 in 6.5, 1 in 7 and 1 in 9 along its length). The total distance of travel from the polling centre entrance to the top of these steps is 147.5m. Steep gradients do not have grabrails to offer support.



Stepped route leading to Circular Road; view back towards rear Leisure centre car park when returning from polling centre

Typical features include:

Galvanised handrails offering good grip are fitted to both sides, with turned down end to prevent clothing getting caught.

Contrasting nosings are painted on tread and riser. These are worn.

Risers are 145/150mm and treads 270mm.

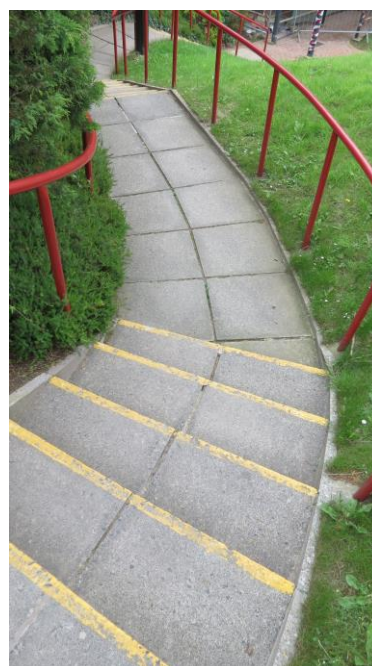
Suitable width in range 1500-1600mm.

Corduroy warning surface to top and bottom landings of flights, as is recommended.

Recommend: repaint nosings (deeper nosings to provide recommended 50-60mm on tread and riser).

- Upper council car park

Steps or graded pathways lead from council offices upper car park area to reach the polling centre entrance. Steps comprise three flights, one curved and two straight flights. Curved steps considered exceptionally difficult for many people and are not recommended for general public use. People with sight loss find these particularly hazardous and confusing; it can be difficult for an assistance dog and their owner to know where to place the foot. They are also unnerving for people who are unsteady underfoot, or can lose their balance easily.



Steps from upper council car park leading to council offices access road, front council car park area and onwards to polling centre entrance

Typical features include:

Contrasting and continuous red handrails offering good grip are fitted to both sides, with turned down end to prevent clothing getting caught.

Contrasting nosings are painted on tread and riser (worn in places).

Treads are 380mm, with a profile which comprises a 40mm overhang, which is not generally recommended in standards as they can cause a fall should a person catch their foot on the underside on ascent.

Suitable width.

Corduroy warning surface to top landings of flights.

Recommend: provide deeper nosings to provide recommended 50-60mm on tread and riser. Discuss elimination of overhang to reduce risk (this is beyond the control of the client).

Note: where access to the polling centre is ramped or stepped externally, there is no adjacent complementary stepped or ramped access to the building (or additional means of access eg lifting device if the rise is over 2000mm), which is generally recommended in standards.

Recommend: ideally flights of external steps should have corduroy warning to top and bottom landings.

Polling takes place early morning and into the late evening, therefore site lighting to assist on access routes is essential. The audit was carried out during daylight hours, however it was observed that council car parks are lit, as is the rear leisure centre car park and routes of approach. Wall-mounted lighting is installed to the perimeter of the building.

Note: further guidance on the design of stepped access to a building is provided in TBH 2012, Section 2.4-2.11, p.15-17 and Diagram 2.3.

Further guidance on access routes to and around buildings is available to reference in BS8300: 2009, Section 5 and in TBR 2012, Section 2.

7 Entrance

7.1 Entrance

There is one point of entrance, which is beneficial. Given the nature of the site and its various parking provisions on polling day, this may not be located in an obvious position for some people depending on the direction of approach eg when using the access ramp on approach from the chapel car park. The entrance point is contained within curtain walling that wraps around the perimeter of the building on this corner, helping to identify it within the remaining brickwork façade. However, as there are also egress doors within the glazed façade when approaching from the on-site accessible parking and ramp, there is potential for confusion if people do not know the entrance doors are around the corner. They may not be able to locate them immediately or

easily eg people with dementia, people with sight loss and people with learning disabilities may find this problematic.



Entrance doors in glazed façade; roof overhang with columns marked with contrasting bands to increase visibility

Recommend: clear direction to, and identification of, the entrance doors is essential to assist first-time electors and people with disabilities. It was not possible to assess the effectiveness of temporary polling signage on the day of inspection as the building was not set up as a polling centre.

7.2 Entrance doors

The auditor has been informed that all doors, including entrance doors, are held open at all times during polling hours to enable unassisted and free flow. Although observed and noted as part of the site inspection, some of the important physical access features normally considered essential with regards to overall door accessibility are therefore deemed surplus to this report remit (external and internal doors). These include: how doors are operated; design of ironmongery; leading edge dimensions; height of vision panels; direction of door swing eg impacting on available clear space in lobbies; entry systems; manifestation to glass door leafs; Push/Pull signage on manually operated doors; and opening force of doors. The visibility of door openings and clear widths are assessed however, and are essential to good accessibility on polling day.

There is a slope of 1 in 12.4 at the entrance doors, however this is only over a very short distance. Level threshold is provided, as is recommended.

Good transitional lighting will reduce the effects of glare or silhouetting, which can be disorientating for partially sighted people when moving from outside to inside; particularly where large areas of glazing are evident as is the case where curtain walling is used to the entrance lobby and foyer. Artificial light sources are provided in the entrance lobby area.

Recommend: ensure on polling day that all lights are switched on in the lobby and in the foyer to reduce the impact of glare and maximise transitional lighting levels.

Entrance doors in the lobby are double leaf automatic sliding doors (outer doors held open on the day of inspection) which provide good accessibility and offer a suitable effective clear opening width of 1160mm.

7.3 Election centre staff assistance

Recommend: as good practice, consider procedures at any polling centre in the event that a disabled elector or older person may still find entering unassisted problematic, including how this can be monitored on site by election centre staff eg if a person has difficulty locating the entrance doors on approach from the ramp.

7.4 Matwells

Loose mat is evident in the entrance lobby and in the entrance foyer. Loose mats can be problematic for people who have difficulty walking, people using mobility aids and blind and partially sighted people, as they constitute a trip hazard and wheelchair users can overturn if wheels get caught on a loose mat eg if turning 90°.

Recommend: remove loose mats on polling day. Note: fixed flush matwells help to reduce trip hazard, whilst avoiding moisture being carried into a building.

8 Horizontal circulation

Current guidance denotes a minimum corridor width of 1200mm; generally, 1800mm will permit wheelchair users to pass each other comfortably. Horizontal circulation routes can present difficulties for people who use wheelchairs or mobility aids. It is therefore important that all circulation routes are as wide as possible and kept free from obstruction and hazard.

Access to polling rooms from the entrance is via the main entrance foyer. The minor hall polling room is located a short distance away from the entrance doors, directly off the entrance foyer space. A staircase and lift within the

entrance foyer and close to the entrance doors take electors down to the polling room at lower ground floor level (main sports hall). On leaving the stairwell and lift, two corridors lead to the polling room. The direction of travel is as simple as possible, the auditor having been informed that once on this level the corridor left on leaving the stairs/lift and the corridor beyond the sports hall access corridor are blocked off.

If a polling station was located within the entrance foyer area, as opposed to lower ground floor level, this would avoid the need to use any access corridors to polling rooms in the polling centre. It would be essential though that layout of the space does not restrict width or clear movement of electors accessing and leaving the minor hall polling room at all times.

The entrance foyer is a large spacious area. Despite lights being switched on and the extensive use of glazing, the foyer appeared dark inside the entrance doors. This could be due to the roof canopy overhang around the building in this area or dependent on weather conditions.

Recommend: ensure lighting levels are maximised on polling day in the foyer area to assist horizontal circulation and in the event that a polling station may be located here, with additional light sources if required.

On the day of inspection it was observed that there can be significant echoing and noise transfer in the foyer space if it is busy, however it is noted this may be due to the area being used as a reception and gathering point, including for children, therefore on polling day this may be quieter in general.

Recommend: consider acoustics if using this space as a polling room, especially given that it also acts as the main circulation through to the minor hall polling stations and as electors may be asking election centre staff for assistance and directions on arrival ie there may be some background noise whilst electors allocated to this polling room are communicating with election centre staff in relation to the process of casting their vote.

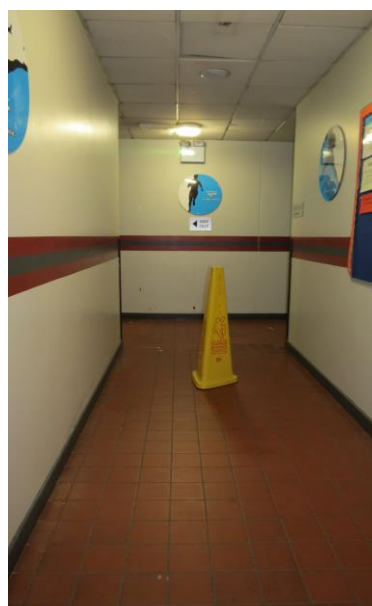
Contrast is provided between the floor and walls in the entrance foyer area through the use of grey floor tiling and black skirting and light coloured walls. Red doors and contrasting black architraves help to denote doors in the space and therefore assist in determining the spacial characteristics of the space.

Rest seating is provided in the foyer, without armrests to offer support. There are seats available in the centre with armrests eg in minor hall on the day of inspection. The allocation of rest seating is important on arrival to enable a disabled or older person to rest; as even short distances of travel can present the need for respite.

Recommend: provide a range of seating style to offer respite, carefully positioned in obvious locations but where they will not cause obstruction to electors.

- **Corridors**

Corridors from the stairs and lift to the lower ground floor polling room (main sports hall) have a suitable clear width of 1670mm and 1740mm (note: 1800mm enables people to pass each other comfortably, including wheelchair users).



Circulation corridors relevant to main sports hall polling stations

- **Doors**

The only doors required within circulation routes leading to polling rooms are within the stairwell. See Section 9 below.

- **Internal finishes**

Red clay tile flooring is installed in lower ground floor corridors leading to the polling room. Contrasting stripes on the light coloured walls helps to provide visual awareness of the space and act as a useful wayfinding tool. There is visual contrast between the floor and walls, and between walls and door openings in the corridors.

- **Lighting**

Corridors are lit only using artificial light sources comprising ceiling mounted pendants and appeared slightly dark on the day of inspection having come to and from spaces which are lit by natural light also.

9 Vertical circulation

The use of stairs or lift is required to access the lower ground floor polling room (main sports hall).

9.1 Stairwell from entrance foyer to lower ground floor polling room (main sports hall)

Overall, the stairwell is bright, lit naturally and artificially. The staircase has many accessible features to make using the stairs easier. Some disabled people cannot negotiate stairs, but passenger lift provision is also available. Note: if polling takes place at ground floor level only, stairs and lift access to the lower ground floor polling room is not required, meaning polling stations are on one internal floor level only.



Staircase to reach polling stations at lower ground floor

Staircase design features include:

Firm surface finishes which contrast with the wall, as is recommended.

Firm nosings which wrap around both tread and riser (75mm and 55mm), as is recommended. Contrast is provided on tread only.

Risers 175/180mm and treads 275/280mm ie risers are slightly higher than recommended standards (150-170mm).

Suitable clear width 1700mm.

Contrasting handrails offering good grip are fitted to both sides, as is recommended; ends prevent clothing from getting caught.



Staircase design features

The stairwell is open to the entrance foyer at ground floor level, whereby background noise from vending machines and people within the foyer area was evident on the day of inspection. This is applicable also with respect to the minor polling room.

Recommend: to reduce impact of background noise and echoing, consider whether it is feasible to turn vending machines off on polling day. As blind or partially sighted electors allocated to the minor hall polling station may not be aware of the staircase, ensure stewards are positioned at the top to reduce potential hazard as electors make their way to the minor hall. Consider temporary contrasting nosings on riser also on polling day eg using band of tape.

Double doors lead out into a corridor at lower ground floor level towards the polling room, with a clear opening width of 825mm to one leaf. The auditor was informed that the doors were held open at all times and stewarded on polling day. Doors open into the stairwell at the bottom landing area. Pull signage is not fitted.

Recommend: ensure door swing adjacent to the staircase does not impede flow when held open. Red door edges are distinguishable against the background wall which is important to assist all electors, including electors with sight loss when approaching open doors. Retain stewarding as per last polling day to assist and monitor.

9.2 Passenger lift

A full passenger lift is installed to take electors from the entrance foyer to polling stations at lower ground floor level within the main sports hall. This is very beneficial for electors who cannot negotiate stairs.



Lift in entrance foyer (good contrasts provided, but requires sign at both floor levels)

The auditor was informed that a lift company engineer was on hand at all times during polling hours to provide quick repairs in the event of lift failure. Despite this carefully considered measure put in place to reduce the impact of potential lift breakdown on polling day, it cannot guarantee that the impact on a disabled person in the event of breakdown will not result in a potentially stressful situation or poor experience eg additional time it may take for a person to complete their vote whilst the lift is repaired, during relocation and set-up of a polling station at reception, loss of dignity or inconvenience caused whilst they have to wait when non-disabled people do not, or should they be trapped within the lift. The absence of stairs and lifts means that access to the polling room can be quicker, easier and eliminates the potential for complaint.

Lift features include:

Reachable call button contrasting with the background.

Contrasting red doors to highlight the lift in the foyer area, however additional signage would be beneficial at both floor levels.

Slip-resistant flooring contrasts with the walls, as is recommended. It is however, dark in colour which can be unnerving to partially sighted people or people who can get anxious as it can be interpreted as an open lift shaft. It was observed that the floor covering is warped slightly within the lift car, therefore could prove a trip hazard or difficult for wheelchair users.

A mirror is not fitted and as the lift is to minimum standard size only, it will not be possible for a wheelchair user to turn within the lift car, meaning they have to reverse on exit. A mirror assists this manoeuvre, especially if other people are waiting outside on the landing area to use the lift.

Sizeable clear landing in the entrance foyer and 1670mm wide corridor at lower ground floor enables turning to approach the sports hall polling room. Visual indication only, whereas audible indication is also recommended to assist blind and partially sighted people and people with learning disabilities. Door opening 775mm wide (800mm standard).

Lift car measures 1100x1400mm – this allows for one wheelchair user and one other person. If there are several people waiting to use the lift there is some potential for a delay and increased time required for people to cast their vote if they are reliant on lift access.

Recommend: if polling is allocated at lower ground floor level, hence requiring lift access, fit a mirror with its bottom edge no lower than 900mm from the floor of the lift car. OTIS to advise on retrofit to include audible indication of floor levels reached.

Although the lift is in a logical position within the main entrance foyer and adjacent to the stairs there is no signage to denote 'Lift'. It may not, therefore be immediately evident to some electors with disabilities on arrival; and without election centre staff assistance they may be unable to locate it, assuming perhaps that stairs are the only form of vertical circulation if allocated to the lower ground floor polling room.

Recommend: a large clear sign to accessible design standards to denote the location of the lift on arrival through the entrance doors and within the corridor at lower ground floor level. This avoids the need for some people to ask and rely on assistance to identify lift location.

10 Polling rooms

The leisure centre as a polling centre will contain three polling stations/ballot boxes (82, 84 and 85), situated in the minor hall (1 box) and the main sports hall (2 boxes); or option of location in the minor hall (2 boxes) and the entrance foyer (1 box).

Internal doors relevant to polling activity are manual operation, however the auditor has been informed that all such access doors are held open at all times on circulation corridors and in polling rooms.

10.1 Minor Hall

The route from the entrance to the polling room entrance is accessible.



Minor hall polling room at ground floor level

- Doors



Doors from minor hall polling room

There is one point of access through double doors, which are held open at all times on polling day. A suitable clear width of 1640mm is available. A timber threshold strip is evident at the doors, raised by approx. 18mm. There may be some potential for a trip hazard. The client should establish if this has been an issue previously.

Recommend: provide temporary hazard tape on polling day to highlight the threshold edge and stewards to be mindful of the threshold when directing or instructing electors.

- Circulation

The hall was not set up as a polling room on the day of inspection, however it is spacious and could easily accommodate one polling station, with the provision of clear and suitable circulation leading to and around a polling booth(s). The auditor was informed that only a portion of the hall was used for polling previously.

Recommend: extended use of the floor space in the event that two boxes may be located in this polling room. Careful siting of accessible polling booths readily visible on arrival, but allowing privacy to vote.

- Internal finishes

A firm and level timber floor is fitted throughout the polling room.

Visual contrast is provided between the floor and walls and between the walls and door surrounds/edges to assist partially sighted people.

- Lighting



The polling room is bright and well lit using a combination of natural and artificial lighting sources. Fluorescent lights with covers or diffusers are positioned to give an even distribution of light throughout the hall and diffusers help to reduce the effects of glare; whilst curtains enable control of natural light as and when required.

Recommend: in any polling room, provide task lighting to assist election centre staff and/or electors who may require enhanced lighting levels to carry out their administrative duties/to cast their vote.

- Hearing enhancement systems

There is a loop system fitted within the minor hall polling room, but there is no signage to denote this. The auditor was informed that use of the system was not requested on polling day. This could be because no one required it, or it could be because hearing aid users were not aware of it.

Recommend: provide clear signage to denote availability of the hearing enhancement system. Hearing aid users generally will switch the frequency of their aid to avail of the system without the need to ask a member of staff, if they know it is there. Ensure to test hearing enhancement systems to check for interference or suitability in different polling rooms so as not to cause inconvenience for hearing aid users.

10.2 Main Sports Hall

A level threshold is provided between the corridor and the polling room.

- Doors



Main sports hall polling room at lower ground floor level; showing doors and finishes and view back towards circulation corridor

Double doors are provided, which are held open on polling day. An e.c.o.w of 810mm is provided to one leaf; the second leaf was locked at high and low

level. It is critical that both leafs are open to allow free movement and clear passage at all times during polling hours.

As doors are held open, it is important that the edges of doors are distinguishable on approach to avoid hazard. Grey/brown polling room door edges and aluminium surrounds offer limited contrast against the background.

Recommend: fit temporary hazard tape to further distinguish the door edges on approach and to denote the opening in the wall.

- Circulation

The hall was not set up as a polling room on the day of inspection and was used for sports activities. The auditor was informed that the hall is completely cleared out in advance of polling day, therefore leaving a good-sized room to accommodate two polling stations. Careful siting of accessible polling booths readily visible on arrival and allowing privacy to vote is important within such a large space.

- Internal finishes

A firm sports flooring surface provides a slip-resistant and level surface. Being a sports hall, patterns on the floor are formed through various court markings. Patterns can be disorientating for some people with sight loss and lines on floors can often be interpreted as steps. In general, visual contrast is limited between the brown coloured flooring/doors and brick walls.

- Lighting

The polling room is well lit using a combination of natural and artificial lighting sources, through the use of high-level windows and industrial style light pendants. It did not appear dark even though curtains were pulled over on the day of inspection. Curtains enable control of natural light as and when required eg effects of pockets of glare on the floor.

Recommend: in any polling rooms, provide task lighting to assist election centre staff and/or electors who may require enhanced lighting levels to carry out their administrative duties/to cast their vote.

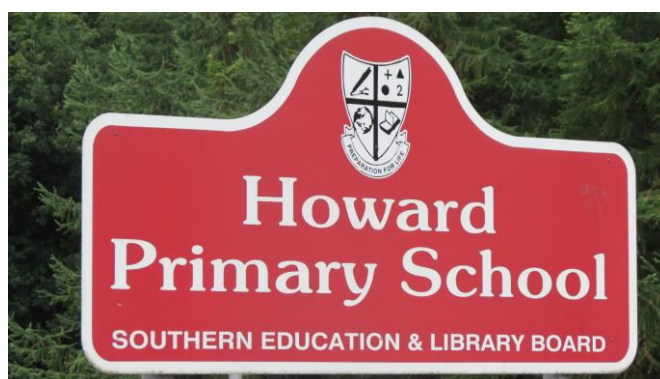
- Hearing enhancement systems

There is no system in the polling room to assist electors or election centre staff using hearing aids.

Recommend: provide a portable induction loop for use in the polling room at each polling station. Display clear signage to denote.

Recommend: ensure to test hearing enhancement systems to check for interference or suitability in different polling rooms so as not to cause inconvenience for hearing aid users.

Assessment of Existing Access Provisions at Howard Primary School



11 Approach

11.1 Building location

Located at 2 Main Road Dungannon, close to the junction of Main Road/A29 on the outskirts of Moygashel village, approximately two miles from Dungannon town centre.

11.2 Approach routes and pathways

Note: bus stops are outlined in Section 3.

There is traffic light control leading into Main Road off the A29, including controlled crossing points for pedestrians arriving on foot or pushing to the polling centre. The site is accessed directly off Main Road; pedestrian and vehicular access is provided.



Pathway adjacent to bus stop showing junction of A29/Main Road, controlled crossings and school in background; controlled crossings on A29



Access to polling centre site with view towards vehicular exit and Moygashel (dropped kerbs on approach routes)

There are 3 no. pedestrian gates leading into the site off Main Road, the gate closest to the junction of Main Road being the most suitable for wheelchair users with 1320mm clear width and dropped kerbs on the pathway leading to the polling centre entrance. The 2 no. pedestrian gates at the main vehicular entrance/exit points are 995mm wide, which is suitable in width, but there are no dropped kerbs to enable wheelchair users to dismount and remount the footpath on the direct routes leading to the entrance.



Pedestrian routes into and out of Main Road, showing firm surface pathways (no dropped kerbs)



Pedestrian gate with accessible pathway to polling centre entrance

Recommend: on polling day, a sign denoting the universal symbol for access could be provided at the corner pedestrian gate to encourage pedestrian wheelchair users to enter here when approaching from either the A29 or Main Road directions. Stewards could also be mindful of this.

Vehicular routes within the site incorporate zebra crossings, dropped kerbs and tactile paving, to assist safe pedestrian crossing on approach to the entrance.



Car park with one-way system and zebra crossings
(dropped kerbs and tactile paving)

A one-way system operates on site, including on polling day, to further enhance safety and minimise congestion. This is complemented by separate entrance and exit gates for vehicles.

The polling centre entrance is approximately 75m from the site boundary. All facilities are contained within the curtilage of the school site.

Pedestrian pathways are provided to separate vehicle and pedestrian traffic, which are level, or gently sloping. Site pathways are firm, level and in good condition, comprising bitmac surface and defined contrasting edge kerbing. There is a firm level block paved surface at the entrance area, contrasting with the vehicular road surface.

Polling takes place early morning and into the late evening, therefore site lighting to assist on access routes is essential. The audit was carried out during daylight hours, however it was observed that the Howard PS site is lit using lighting standards, lighting bollards provided off circulation routes in grass verges and façade lighting wall-mounted at the entrance.

11.3 External steps and ramps

Steps or ramps are not required to access the polling centre; level access is provided.

Note: further guidance on access routes to and around buildings is available to reference in BS8300: 2009, Section 5 and in TBR 2012, Section 2.

12 Car parking

12.1 Parking provision



View from polling centre entrance showing paved entrance area and car park (firm level surfaces and site lighting)

On-site parking is provided for electors' use, located in a single location to the front of the polling centre building, within close proximity to the entrance and on a firm, level surface. Defined pathways are provided within the car park for pedestrians approaching and leaving the building from parking bays or from the site boundary.

There are 76 no. standard parking bays and 4 no. designated accessible bays on-site. Given polling hours ie 7am-10pm it could be argued that capacity can be accommodated as all disabled electors are unlikely to arrive at the same time to vote and these designated parking numbers represent a suitable 5% percent of total capacity under Planning NI design guidance. It has to be considered that a one-off event such as polling day and use of the school as a public facility in this respect could mean there may be a requirement for a higher number of designated bays to accommodate electors. There are a potential 2581 electors allocated to Howard PS on polling day, however not all electors may choose to vote, choose to vote at a polling station, arrive at the same time or using the same method of transport.

Recommend: there is scope to increase the number of bays designated for disabled electors' use on polling day in the car park area should The Electoral Commission anticipate the need for this requirement. It is often considered acceptable to adopt a management solution which allows the use of 2 no. standard bays to be designated to address anticipation that there may be larger numbers expected and this can be done through appropriate signage and stewarding. Given that this site and parking area is not sporadic, this should be possible to execute without difficulty.



Accessible parking bays with side transfer zones

2 no. designated bays are marked out with side transfer zones (rear zones not provided) and 2 no. are marked out as 'on-street' style bays at the left side of the school building ie do not have side transfer zones, but have potential to enable use away from vehicular traffic by disabled people with vehicles

adapted with built-in rear ramps or lifts. Therefore, at Howard PS there is flexibility in terms of transfer options.



Side bays (on-street style) - potential as tail loading: showing access to rear playground

The auditor was informed that an unmarked area to the rear of the school is often used for parking by some staff and potentially by election centre staff on polling day, which enables full capacity of the formal car park to be given over to electors. This is useful to ensure that as many parking bays are available as possible, but results in potential vehicular traffic in the immediate vicinity of drivers/passengers alighting or approaching a vehicle at the 2 no. side bays.

Collapsible bollards are evident on approach to the main entrance from the side bays. Red paint has worn off and they may be less visible to people with sight loss.

Recommend: the provision of retro-fit bands (even temporary eg adhesive taping) to increase visibility of bollards.

3 no. accessible bays do not incorporate a dropped kerb to enable direct transfer onto the adjacent pedestrian footpath, therefore for people who cannot negotiate a raised kerb they are required to share the same surface with vehicular traffic along part of their approach route to the polling centre entrance. Caution is required and speed restriction signs are erected throughout the site for drivers' notice (5 mph).

All accessible bays are signed, either using vertical signage and/or symbol signage at ground level.

Recommend: on polling day, provide clear vertical signage to denote the two side bays currently marked out with ground symbols only.

Recommend: election centre staff using the rear area to park should be advised to exercise caution on approach and in the vicinity of designated bays on their approach, as part of training.

Recommend: consider any anticipated need for increased designated bay numbers (for disabled electors and disabled election centre staff); adopt and implement management procedure to enable this, including use of clear temporary signage.

12.2 Drop-off/pick-up points



Designated drop-off areas clearly marked at ground level;
firm level surfaces on pathways throughout the car park
to entrance and one-way traffic system

There are 2 no. formal drop-off areas marked out within the site curtilage, one close to the entrance doors and the other within 70m of the entrance. This is a very useful addition to the on-site car park, which already enables parking close to the polling centre entrance and includes designated accessible parking. These drop-off areas can allow electors, who are older or disabled arriving by taxi or car, to be dropped off and picked up again; or to allow a driver to park on a temporary basis and provide assistance to a disabled or older person alighting from or getting into the vehicle, without utilising a designated bay should they prefer to do so.

There is no section of kerb at the drop-off areas lowered to assist people transferring into and out of vehicles using fold-out ramps, however there is a dropped kerb and zebra adjacent to the drop-off close to the polling centre entrance.

13 Entrance

13.1 Entrance



Howard PS entrance point – prominent on approach, with firm level approach area

Level access is provided, as is recommended.

There is one point of entrance and, given the nature of the Howard PS site, this is located in a logical position on approach and on the front façade. This is helpful for all electors, including electors with learning disabilities and electors with sight loss. The large glazed entrance portico is visible within the otherwise brick façade of the building and projects above eaves level, which helps to make it more prominent and visible on approach.

13.2 Entrance doors

The auditor has been informed that all doors, including entrance doors, are held open at all times during polling hours to enable unassisted and free flow. Although observed and noted as part of the site inspection, some of the important physical access features normally considered essential with regards to overall door accessibility are therefore deemed surplus to this report remit (external and internal doors). These include: how doors are operated; design of ironmongery; leading edge dimensions; height of vision panels; direction of door swing eg impacting on available clear space in lobbies; entry systems; manifestation to glass door leafs; Push/Pull signage on manually operated doors; and opening force of doors. The visibility of door openings and clear widths are assessed however, and are essential to good accessibility on polling day.

The external doors open inwards and a through-route in the entrance lobby is created by these and the second set of lobby doors which open towards the elector when held open, as is the case on polling day (and vice versa on exit).



Entrance lobby

Good transitional lighting will reduce the effects of glare or silhouetting, which can be disorientating for partially sighted people when moving from outside to inside; particularly where large areas of glazing are evident, as is the case to the entrance portico of Howard PS. Artificial light sources are provided in the entrance lobby area.

Recommend: ensure on polling day that all lights are switched on in the lobby and in the foyer, to reduce the impact of glare and maximise transitional lighting levels.

Recommend: provide temporary markings on glazed side panels for safety and visibility at two levels. Ensure doors open to 90°.

Entrance doors provide a suitable e.c.o.w of 1470mm (ie accounting for 75mm handle projections).

Note: further guidance on suitable manifestation markings is provided in TBV 2012, Section 3, p14.

13.3 Election centre staff assistance

Recommend: as good practice, consider procedures at any polling centre in the event that a disabled elector or older person may still find entering unassisted problematic, including how this can be monitored on site by election centre staff.

13.4 Matwells

Loose mats are evident in the entrance lobby area (and egress points from polling rooms). Loose mats can be problematic for people who have difficulty walking, people using mobility aids and blind and partially sighted people, as

they constitute a trip hazard and wheelchair users can overturn if wheels get caught on a loose mat eg if turning 90°.

Recommend: remove loose mats on polling day. Note: fixed flush matwells help to reduce trip hazard, whilst avoiding moisture being carried into a building.

Carpet is fitted in the entrance foyer area, however is dense pile, which is recommended to reduce tripping hazard and reduce problems for wheelchair users pushing on it. Contrast is provided between the floor and walls in this foyer space.

14 Horizontal circulation

- **Corridors**

Current guidance denotes a minimum corridor width of 1200mm; generally, 1800mm will permit wheelchair users to pass each other comfortably. Horizontal circulation routes can present difficulties for people who use wheelchairs or mobility aids. It is therefore important that all circulation routes are as wide as possible and kept free from obstruction and hazard.

The auditor was informed that all circulation corridors and foyers are cleared in advance of polling day of loose school furnishings, kids' tables and chairs etc, which is essential.

Overall travel distance to polling rooms is short, outlined as follows:

From entrance to assembly hall approx. 13.5m;
From entrance to Classroom 1 approx. 33.5m; and
From entrance to Classroom 2 approx. 40m.

Note: rest seating is available in the building to offer respite should electors with disabilities and older electors require it, some including back and armrests eg in the entrance foyer. This is important to enable a disabled or older person to rest; even short distances of travel can require need for respite.

Recommend: provide a range of seating style to offer respite, carefully positioned in obvious locations, but where they will not cause obstruction to electors.

The circulation route from the foyer to the assembly hall polling room has a suitable clear width of 2670mm. This enables people to pass each other comfortably, including wheelchair users.



Direct approach to assembly hall from entrance foyer; showing lighting and finishes

Corridor width adjacent to the assembly hall polling room leading towards Classroom areas, where two further polling rooms are located, is 1670mm wide (reduced to 1545mm in the immediate vicinity of the radiator).

Recommend: radiator switched off on polling day in the corridor will reduce hazard from a potential heat source. Temporary edge markings could be put on the radiator to highlight its presence against the background wall.



Corridor adjacent to assembly hall polling room showing contrasting finishes, doors and lighting (accessible WC on right)

From here, through double doors, a spine corridor leading to classrooms is suitable at 1750mm wide, widening further where Reading Corner is normally located for school use (clear on polling day).



Corridor leading to polling rooms (Classroom 1 visible through double doors)

Corridor outside Classroom 1 and leading to Classroom 2 is suitable at 1750mm wide, opening into a large foyer space immediately outside Classroom 2.



Corridor and foyer area outside Classroom 2 (door on right)

The auditor was informed that this area is completely cleared for polling day of school equipment etc, maximising clear circulation and available space in these areas; this is essential.

Noted that this foyer contains large level egress doors to a rear playground area in the event of emergency.

- **Doors**

Corridor doors are double leaf and, as they are held open at all times during polling hours, clear width is suitable to enable unassisted and clear passage eg 1100mm to doors outside Classroom 1.

As doors are held open, it is important that the edges of doors are distinguishable on approach along corridors to avoid hazard. Red/green door surrounds/door edges are visible against light-coloured background walls.

- **Internal finishes**

Linoleum flooring is fitted in circulation corridors, providing a firm level surface throughout. Red linoleum with a black edging band offers visual contrast with lighter wall surfaces outside the assembly hall polling room and in this corridor, as is recommended to enable a partially sighted person to determine the spatial characteristics of a space. White skirting provides a band of contrast where brown carpet meets brick walling in the entrance foyer area.

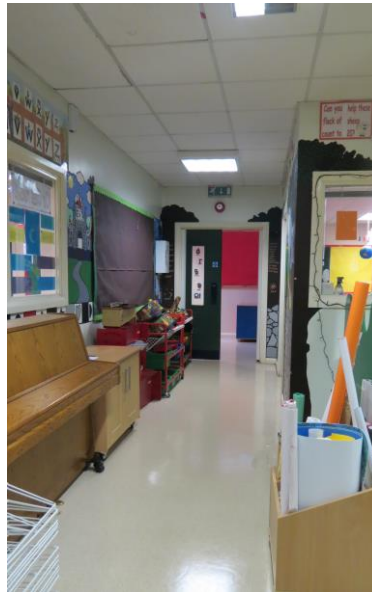


Cream linoleum in corridors leading to the classroom polling rooms offers less contrast with the wall/skirting finish, although noticeboards help in some way. Door surrounds provide contrast with the background wall surface, as is recommended and edges of doors held open are also distinguishable through use of contrasting colour.

Recommend: temporary bands of contrast at the junction of floors and walls, or wayfinding markings to distinguish the floor and assist wayfinding, where

contrast is limited in one corridor. Temporary hazard taping could further increase the visibility of door edges on approach.

Wall murals are painted on some walls within the internal foyer area adjacent to Classroom 1, therefore patterns are evident. Patterns can often be confusing or uncomfortable for partially sighted people. The colour used on the wall outside Classroom 1 however, does help to provide visual contrast between the floor and wall, and the door opening and wall.



View from classroom foyer back towards Classroom 1 polling room
(clear on polling day, which is essential)

Recommend: temporary covering of murals to reduce impact of patterns, whilst considering how visual contrast can be retained.

- **Lighting**



Skylight in corridor and diffuse fluorescent lighting

Corridors leading to the classroom polling rooms are lit using box fluorescent lights fitted with diffusers to reduce glare. In one corridor, additional natural lighting is available during the day via a large skylight.

15 Vertical circulation

There are no stairs or lifts within Howard PS.

16 Polling rooms

The school as a polling centre will contain three polling stations/ballot boxes (82, 84 and 85), which could be situated in some/all of the assembly hall and the two classrooms, which make up the polling rooms for this centre.

Note: all doors relevant to polling activity in Howard PS are manual operation, however the auditor has been informed that all access doors are held open at all times on circulation corridors and in polling rooms.

16.1 Assembly Hall



Assembly hall polling room, showing finishes and lighting

The route from the entrance to the polling room entrance is accessible. A level threshold is provided between the foyer and the polling room.

- Doors

There is one point of access through double doors, which are held open at all times on polling day.

A suitable e.c.o.w of 1390mm is available (1250mm if not fully open to 90° on each leaf).

Recommend: open doors to 90° to maximise opening width.

- Circulation

The hall was not set up as a polling room on the day of inspection, however it is spacious and could easily accommodate the polling station, with the provision of clear and suitable circulation leading to and around a polling booth(s). An accessible polling booth readily visible on arrival and allowing privacy to vote should not be problematic.

- Internal finishes

A firm and level timber floor is fitted throughout the polling room.

Visual contrast is provided between the floor and walls, and the walls and door surrounds to assist partially sighted people.

- Lighting

The polling room is well lit using a combination of natural and artificial lighting sources. Recessed fluorescent lights are positioned to give an even distribution of light throughout the hall and diffusers help to reduce the effects of glare; whilst curtains enable control of natural light as and when required.

Recommend: in any polling rooms, provide task lighting to assist election centre staff and/or electors who may require enhanced lighting levels to carry out their administrative duties/to cast their vote.

- Hearing enhancement systems

There is no system in the polling room to assist electors or election centre staff using hearing aids.

Recommend: provide a portable induction loop for use at each ballot box welcoming/administration desk in the polling room. Display clear signage to denote.

Recommend: ensure to test hearing enhancement systems to check for interference or suitability in different polling rooms so as not to cause inconvenience for hearing aid users.

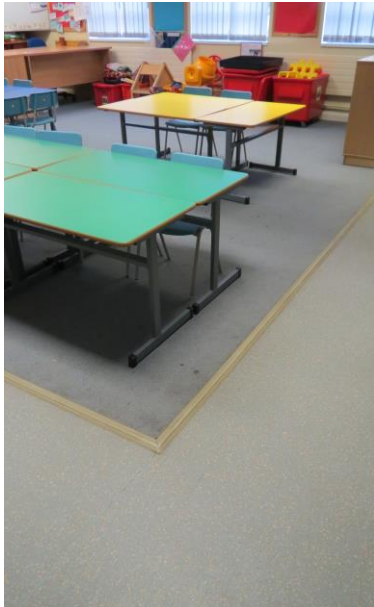
16.2 Classroom 1

- Doors

A level threshold is provided between the corridor and the polling room. Classroom 1 has an asymmetrical door arrangement with c.o.w of 745mm to one leaf, therefore it is essential that both leafs are open on polling day.

As doors are held open, it is important that the edges of doors are distinguishable on approach to avoid hazard. Green polling room door surrounds and door edges are visible against the lighter-coloured surrounding background walls.

- Circulation



Polling room (Classroom 1) showing finishes and lighting

The classroom was not set up as a polling room on the day of inspection and contained school equipment, kids' tables and chairs etc. The auditor was informed that the room is completely cleared out in advance of polling day, therefore leaving a good-sized room to accommodate one polling station; this is essential.

An accessible polling booth readily visible on arrival and allowing privacy to vote should not be problematic.

Recommend: there are internal windows overlooking the internal foyer so, for privacy, ensure careful siting of polling booths so they are not overlooked from the corridors.

- Internal finishes

A firm and level floor comprises blue-coloured linoleum and dense pile carpet, with a fixed level contrasting edging strip at the junction between finishes.

Visual contrast is provided between the floor and walls, and the walls and door surrounds to assist partially sighted people.

- Lighting

The polling room is lit using a combination of natural and artificial lighting sources. Recessed fluorescent lights are positioned to give an even distribution of light and diffusers help to reduce the effects of glare; whilst blinds enable control of natural light as and when required.

Recommend: in any polling rooms, provide task lighting to assist election centre staff and/or electors who may require enhanced lighting levels to carry out their administrative duties/to cast their vote.

- Hearing enhancement systems

There is no system in the polling room to assist electors or election centre staff using hearing aids.

Recommend: provide a portable induction loop for use in the polling room. Display clear signage to denote.

Recommend: ensure to test hearing enhancement systems to check for interference or suitability in different polling rooms so as not to cause inconvenience for hearing aid users.

16.3 Classroom 2

A level threshold is provided between the corridor and the polling room.

- Doors

All doors relevant to polling activity in Howard PS are manual operation, however the auditor has been informed that all access doors are held open at all times on circulation corridors and in polling rooms.

Classroom 2 has an asymmetrical door arrangement with c.o.w of 725mm to one leaf, therefore it is essential that both leafs are open on polling day.

As doors are held open, it is important that the edges of doors are distinguishable on approach to avoid hazard. Green polling room door surrounds and door edges are visible against the lighter-coloured background walls.



Design of doors to classroom polling rooms

- Circulation



Polling room (Classroom 2) showing floor finishes and lighting

The classroom was not set up as a polling room on the day of inspection and contained school equipment, kids' tables and chairs etc. The auditor was informed that the room is completely cleared out in advance of polling day, therefore leaving a good-sized room to accommodate one polling station, which is essential. An accessible polling booth readily visible on arrival and allowing privacy to vote should not be problematic.

Recommend: there are internal windows overlooking the internal foyer so, for privacy, ensure careful siting of polling booths so they are not overlooked from the corridors.



Internal windows overlooking classroom foyer

- Internal finishes

A firm and level floor comprises blue-coloured linoleum and dense pile carpet, with a fixed level contrasting edging strip at the junction between finishes.

Visual contrast is provided between the floor and walls, and the walls and door surrounds to assist partially sighted people.

- Hearing enhancement systems

There is no system in the polling room to assist electors or election centre staff using hearing aids.

Recommend: provide a portable induction loop for use in the polling room. Display clear signage to denote.

Recommend: ensure to test hearing enhancement systems to check for interference or suitability in different polling rooms so as not to cause inconvenience for hearing aid users.

- Lighting

The polling room is lit using a combination of natural and artificial lighting sources. Recessed fluorescent lights are positioned to give an even

distribution of light and diffusers help to reduce the effects of glare; whilst blinds enable control of natural light as and when required.

Recommend: in any polling rooms, provide task lighting to assist election centre staff and/or electors who may require enhanced lighting levels to carry out their administrative duties/to cast their vote.

17 Acoustics

- **General notes**

The auditor could not assess or replicate conditions on polling day during the inspection, however some general observations were made. Size and finishes in a room can impact acoustics eg given hard floor surface in assembly hall of Howard PS and minor hall of Dungannon Leisure Centre; volume of space in main sports hall could cause echoing and reverberation. Noise can present problems for people with hearing loss, mental ill health, dementia, autism etc and background noise/echoing may present problems for people who are communicating with election centre staff eg in entrance foyer of Dungannon Leisure Centre.

Acoustic surfacing is used in relevant areas which can help to reduce the impact of reverberation or background noise eg carpet in the entrance foyer of Howard PS and in classroom polling rooms; as can soft furnishings eg curtains/blinds.

Due to the hard surfaces used and volume of the space within the main stairwell at Dungannon Leisure Centre, there was some evidence of echoing on the day of inspection, which can cause confusion for blind or partially sighted people and discomfort to people with hearing loss, or learning disabilities. See also Section 9 Vertical circulation.

Recommend: where glazing and polling rooms with predominantly hard surfaces are used, the introduction of temporary wall-mounted acoustic panels to absorb noise on polling day could be useful.

18 Signage

The auditor is aware that specific signage will be used on election days to assist electors relating to the voting process. Existing signage however, can provide assistance in terms of general wayfinding relating to permanent physical features in a building used for polling eg to help locate stairs, a lift, toilets etc.

As such, existing signage at both buildings was considered as part of this audit where it may be of significance to electors on polling day.

- Existing signage at Howard Primary School

Clear contrasting signage is provided at the site boundary, on approach from the A29 in both directions. It comprises large simple sentence case font, as is recommended in accessible sign design. This is useful for electors using the

polling centre for the first time and who may be unfamiliar with the building location; and to assist people with learning disabilities. There is also a large clear welcome totem sign once inside the site gates, which is useful.

Signage is mounted on the building façade to direct electors to the entrance – red upper case lettering on white backboard (sentence case lettering is usually recommended in accessible sign design).

Signage is provided on site to direct visitors to the reception using good contrast and sentence case font.

Classroom 1 and Classroom 2 are signed using white upper case lettering on a black backplate; mounted at high level and non-tactile (some people will find this difficult to read at high level).

Recommend: if not already considered as part of temporary polling day signage, mount a straight ahead directional sign leading to polling stations in Classrooms 1 and 2 on the noticeboard directly ahead when approaching through the corridor doors adjacent to the assembly hall (reading corner).

Recommend: polling day signage should be carefully planned and consistent to avoid clutter and to ensure it meets with accessible sign design standards as far as possible.

Handwritten/printed signs should normally be avoided, however for polling days they may be necessary. Ensure clear simple font and laminate should be avoided to reduce glare.

Note: further guidance is available to reference in BS8300: 2009, Section 9.2, p.64-69 on all aspects of successful sign design and also 'JMU Sign Design Guide'.

- Existing signage at Dungannon Leisure Centre

Directional road signs are not readily apparent within the vicinity of the leisure centre in Dungannon, on routes leading to it. If unfamiliar with the building location, lack of signage is problematic for first-time electors and people with learning disabilities. It is important that electors are aware of parking arrangements in advance and in good time when approaching the polling centre in a vehicle, particularly if the area is congested or busy.

Large upper case letters are wall-mounted on the building to denote 'LEISURE CENTRE', comprising polished chrome-finish letters on brown brick. This is helpful on approach, to identify the building.

There is no signage to denote the Entrance on the building façade. The location of the entrance doors will not be immediately evident to first-time electors or people with disabilities approaching from the leisure centre, or chapel accessible parking areas, using the ramp; especially as egress doors located at the bottom of the ramp may be mistaken for the point of entrance if a person is unfamiliar with the building layout. Directional signage is provided from the rear car (right side only) to denote the leisure centre entrance; and from the front council car park to denote the accessible leisure centre entrance for disabled people.

If arriving along Circular Road in the direction of the FE College, electors unfamiliar with the layout of the building and parking provisions may assume parking is at the front (this area is for accessible parking only) and there is no signage to provide instruction to direct people onto Killyman Road and beyond onto Killymeal Road where the car park is located, which will be confusing for people unfamiliar with the building.

Once on the Killymeal Road, there is a directional road sign to denote 'Swimming Pool car park'. This is difficult to read as the sign is worn. The inconsistency between Leisure Centre signage and Swimming Pool signage may be confusing for some people who are unfamiliar with the location of the polling centre. Even if consistent signage is used to denote the polling station, this may be located in various locations given the allocation of different car parking facilities and direction of approach. It may not, therefore be clear where electors are expected to go in order to accommodate their needs with regards to car parking and approach route; that is without reliance on stewarding/redirection of traffic to reach the appropriate provisions. This could potentially lead to congestion when electors are given advice/instruction. This could not be determined during the site inspection, as the building was not set up as a polling centre.

Recommend: to avoid confusion the lack of directional signage or the overuse of signage can create, it is essential that this is carefully planned and a suitable schedule of signage adopted - to reduce confusion and to ensure that people know what provisions are available, and where, as they approach the building from various directions.

There is a contrasting sentence case sign directing electors to the entrance from the rear leisure centre car park (right side route), however it would be more visible and easier to read if cleaned. There is no sign to denote the left side route to Circular Road.

Recommend: a sign to also denote the left side route would be useful.

There is a contrasting upper case lettering sign directing electors to the entrance from the front leisure centre car park (accessible parking bays),

however it has shifted around and may be confusing if first-time electors think there may be an entrance along the façade in this area, particularly where egress doors are positioned immediately ahead in this façade.

Recommend: re-fix sign to give accurate directional information leading towards the ramp and entrance.

There is a sign within the council offices car park to direct people to the 'Lower Car Park' (ie front council car park, lower section) and to the accessible leisure centre entrance.

There is no signage to denote the location of the lift within the entrance foyer.

Recommend: a clear sign denoting the lift could avoid some people with disabilities having to ask if there is a lift and where it is located; and reduces the likelihood that they may simply use stairs even though they find these difficult.

A directional sign for the Sports Hall is provided at the top of the stairs within the entrance foyer. Further clear directional signage at the foot of the stairs and on the sports hall corridor (arrow missing) denotes the way to the sports hall. On exiting the sports hall polling room an existing sign denotes the Way Out. A large sign using contrasting red lettering on a white backboard is located about the sports hall doors at high level.

Recommend: signage on exit from the lift and stairwell directly opposite, to denote direction of polling stations (the auditor is aware that this may already have been adopted for polling day, but this was not possible to assess on the day of inspection).

A sign for the minor hall is fitted to the door, however will not be visible when doors are held open. The auditor is aware that temporary polling day signage will be used to denote polling station locations.

Signage to denote Reception and EXIT is provided above the stairwell doors within the lower ground floor corridor, however as it is located at high level some people may find it difficult to read.

19 Toilets

Detailed assessment was not carried out on toilet provisions as part of this audit remit, however access to toilet facilities is a very important consideration for many people with disabilities, older people and children (may be with a parent on polling day). The auditor observed that male, female and accessible toilets are available and conveniently located to all polling stations

in Howard PS and to the minor hall/entrance foyer area of Dungannon Leisure Centre (vertical travel required to reach public toilets in relation to use of the main sports hall as a polling room at Dungannon Leisure Centre). There is no sign fitted to the accessible toilet door in Howard PS.

Recommend: symbol signage to denote accessible toilet at Howard PS on polling day.

Note: further guidance on accessible toilet fit-out is available to reference in BS8300:2009, Section 12 and in TBR 2012, Section 6.

20 Accessible voting

- **General notes**

It is important to consider that access to democracy and helping people to exercise their right to vote also includes the accessibility of information, accessibility of polling stations within polling rooms and other provisions made available to ensure that electors can vote easily and in privacy.

The buildings audited were not set up for polling on the day of inspection, therefore the accessibility of polling booths and reasonable adjustment provisions were not assessed. It can be assumed that many such measures would be as standard and applicable to all polling stations regardless of location however, with regards to polling booths, the polling room can have a bearing on accessibility eg clear visibility, but also privacy and space around polling booths ie dictated by size and layout of polling rooms.

Reasonable adjustment provisions would include equipment and facilities such as:

- Availability and accessibility of a low level booth, including clear circulation around it; adequate design and space for wheelchair footplates and; a location which allows wheelchair users to vote in privacy, but where the booth will be in a prominent position and visible on entering the polling room.
- Ballot box at an accessible height and clearly visible to assist all electors including people with learning disabilities and people with sight loss.
- **To assist people with sight loss:** tactile voting templates and a ballot paper that fits the device; election centre staff knowledge of the provision, where it is located and how to use it are key points;
- Large print version of the ballot paper available and on display, and election centre staff aware of this and the whereabouts of additional copies;

- Alternative format of polling information and manifestos;
- Information on full list of acceptable IDs eg Blind Persons Smartpass;
- Photograph of candidates and names in large print;
- Someone to assist eg to guide between the entrance and polling room, between polling booth and ballot box.
- **To assist people who are deaf or have hearing loss:** loop system made available in polling rooms and signed accordingly;
- Notepad and paper;
- Election centre staff who can sign is extremely helpful.
- **To assist people with learning disabilities:** easy read manifestos (pre-election);
- Having a helpline number to hand for people with learning disabilities or election centre staff can access in the event of queries;
- Voting with the assistance of the presiding officer or a qualified elector eg support worker if that is required, without question;
- Logical external and internal layouts in polling centres.
- **To assist people with hidden disabilities** eg epilepsy, dementia, heart conditions etc: lighting suitably designed;
- Rest seating;
- Easy drop-off and walking distances from parking or bus stops;
- Allocation of bays for blue badge holders (and also other people who may have mobility difficulties or conditions which mean they are not able to walk long distances). Steward awareness of such issues as part of equality/awareness training;
- Logical external and internal layouts in polling centres.

Training

As mentioned in the Introduction, attitude of election centre staff is key to the overall experience of people with disabilities when they vote. The importance of election centre staff training is critical and it is essential that they are aware of what equipment or reasonable adjustment provisions have been made; and how they operate.

Steward and election centre staff assistance on polling day is vitally important, but an over-reliance on stewarding can often mean that permanent physical alterations and good physical accessibility are lacking and have not been addressed to enable a more accessible voting experience overall. Steward and staff assistance on polling day is also vitally important to assist in the event of emergency evacuation.

Note: it is also essential to consider and address the needs of election centre staff who have disabilities and introduce reasonable adjustments to enable them to carry out their election day duties to their full potential.

Pre-election information

Pre-election information outlining the accessible provisions available is encouraged. This is a useful way to provide information for people with disabilities in advance of polling eg through the website, with polling cards and through social media. This can be particularly helpful for a person voting for the first-time, or a first-time elector who is not familiar with the location or layout of their polling centre. Importantly it helps disabled electors to make choices (eg in Northern Ireland they may choose to vote at another polling centre in their local area) and to determine whether to avail of a postal or proxy vote instead if that is their preference. Accessibility information and general information about voting and the polling centre can reduce anxiety for people with autism if they can pre-plan their journey; and avoids unexpected barriers on arrival. Many people with disabilities will choose and prefer to vote at a polling station and as such their access needs must be met.

Targeting specific information to local user groups and disability organisations is a pro-active way of promoting and sharing information about the provisions in place at a building used for polling eg advance information about parking numbers and the location of accessible designated parking facilities; including any temporary measures introduced to increase numbers of bays on polling day (eg allocation of two standard bays and/or signage to denote accessible provision).