



CAPABILITY SCOTLAND  
TURNING DISABILITY INTO ABILITY

# **Access All Areas – A Guide to Making Elections More Accessible**

## **A Vote2003 Production**

“I had always assumed the process of voting was easy. You turn up, vote and leave. But I now realise that many disabled people have to overcome a long and needless obstacle course just to get to the ballot box”. (Voter, 2001 General Election)

## Introduction

The legal requirements on accessibility measures at elections are well documented. This Guide aims to cover the practical and attitudinal issues which are just as important in ensuring that all voters get to exercise their right to vote. It draws on the real life experiences of disabled voters that have informed Capability Scotland's campaigning on access to voting in the last six years.

## What does access actually mean?

- **Knowledge** - Knowledge about rights in relation to voting empowers disabled people to exercise those rights. It also empowers local authorities and their staff to implement their duties and responsibilities.
- **Physical** - An accessible built environment from houses to public buildings to streetscapes enables disabled people to get out and about – to do the things the rest of the population take for granted.
- **Information** - Access to information is vital to understanding processes and disabled people who need information in a different format should be able to receive it in the way that best suits their needs
- **Culture** - An inclusive culture where everyone is respected for who they are matters in every aspect of life, including participating in the democratic process

Access All Areas is designed to be used again and again – hopefully in elections beyond 2003. It can be used as a checklist with tick boxes for each issue or simply as a reference guide. Vote2003 hopes it enables election staff all over Scotland to deliver accessible Scottish elections on 1 May.

## **It's Not What You Say, It's the Way that You Say It**

“I hate it when people say to my companion “how’s Pamela doing” instead of asking me.”

A little disability equality goes a long way. The attitude of Presiding Officers and Polling Clerks towards disabled voters can make all the difference between a good voting experience and a bad one.

- Talk to the disabled person – not the person with them
- Not all disabled people are deaf or hard of hearing – so don’t shout!
- Everyone likes to see the face of the person they are talking to – sit to speak face to face with wheelchair users but don’t lean on them or their wheelchair
- Staff should make it clear that they are there to offer assistance if it is needed – don’t assume that all disabled voters want or need help

## **Location, location, location**

The height of signs is vital – after all very few voters are 6 feet tall! And barrier free should mean just that. Capability Scotland’s Poll Position report has some useful accessibility standards and measurements.

- Why not put up two lots of signs and notices – one at standing eye level, one at sitting eye level
- Make routes to and from the polling clerks’ desk, booths and ballot boxes clear and obstacle free, with plenty of turning space – everyone will appreciate it, not just voters with a visual impairment
- If using a separate entrance for disabled access, check it is open and it is not blocked by rubbish bins or other obstacles – you’d be amazed how many disabled voters encountered this problem at the last elections!
- Where possible, prop open heavy doors

## Money's Too Tight to Mention?

Creating accessible elections doesn't necessarily mean spending a lot of money. Sometimes the easiest, least expensive adjustments can be the most effective.

- If you don't have enough accessible booths, use clipboards or a table in a quiet, private area of the polling station
- Placing booths and ballot boxes close to windows will provide more light for free – assuming it's not grey and raining all day of course!
- Large print versions of signs, notices and instructions can be produced at very little cost in-house – just remember to follow SAIF or RNIB guidelines

## Size Matters!

Nobody likes having to squint at tiny print – large print in a clear font that is well spaced out will be appreciated by people who have difficulty seeing, but also people who have difficulty reading and/or understanding information

- Minimum standards should be at least 12 point font size, a print style font like Arial or Helvetica and at least 1½ line spacing
- Background colour and contrast are important – dark background, light print or light background, dark print
- Think about how people read when designing your ballot papers and poll cards – most of us read from left to right and lots of capital letters are not good

## Mind Your Language

“People pat me on the head and say “How are you today, hen?”

The words we use can help change the way we think about and act towards disabled people. Like everyone else, disabled people have feelings – they don’t like being insulted or patronised. Capability Scotland’s Plain Talking Guide has some advice on language.

- Every disabled person is an individual – so don’t refer to disabled people as “the disabled” people
- A wheelchair represents freedom for many disabled people, enabling them to get out and about – they are wheelchair users, not wheelchair bound
- Did you know that “handicap” is considered derogatory, coming from the term “cap in hand”?

To discuss access issues or to order more copies of Access All Areas, call 0131 313 5510 or e-mail [ascscapability-scotland.org.uk](mailto:ascscapability-scotland.org.uk)

Copies are available in a range of different formats and languages.

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