

Equality impact assessment

E648362314

Date assessment completed 19 Sep 2024

Title of equality impact assessment Polling District and Polling Places Review 2024

Service Governance and Corporate Services

Team Electoral Service

Focus / aim of equality impact assessment

Comply with the legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places. To assess the voting facilities for residents to ensure they are reasonable, practical and fit for purpose.

Names and roles of officers completing the assessment

Alison Hodgson - Electoral Services Manager

Contact telephone number of lead officer 01279 446038

Policy / service / function details

This is a review policy/service/function

What is the purpose of the policy / service / function?

To comply with the legislative requirements regarding the designation of polling districts and polling places.

To ensure that so far is reasonable and practicable, the polling places are accessible to all electors, including those who are disabled and when considering the designation of a polling place, must have regard to the accessibility needs of disabled persons.

To ensure every polling station is accessible to electors who are disabled while remaining within electoral legislation.

Who are the key stakeholders?

All registered electors, political parties, candidates and staff. The Electoral Commission.

Are there any other documents / strategies linked to this policy / service / function?

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a statutory requirement for councils to conduct a review of polling places every four years but also at any other time if a building becomes unavailable or if any changes are identified following an election.

Existing polling district and polling place review and Electoral Commission Guidance.

Who is affected by the policy / service / function?

All registered electors.

Who has been involved in the development of the policy / service / function?

Policy guided by the legislation carried out by the authority.

Which staff carry out the policy / service / function?

(Acting) Returning Officer, Assistant Director of Governance, HE & Legal, Electoral Services Manager

Quantitative and qualitative data

Quantitative

Quantitative Research is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics. It is used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other defined variables – and generalise results from a larger sample population.

What quantitative (numerical) data do you already have about those who use or will use the policy / service / function?

Approximately 100 people will work in all polling stations in Harlow for an election.

There are currently 65,516 local government electors and the population figure for Harlow according to the 2021 ONS census data was 93,300.

Census 2021 data has been used to inform the following:

Age - 21.6% of the population are aged 0-15 and 14.6% aged 65 and over. According to the 2021 census data Harlow is younger than the English average but the 65+ age group is expected to rise faster than younger cohorts.

Disability - 7.5% of Harlow residents were identified as disabled and limited a lot in the 2021 census. In the same census the proportion of Harlow residents who were not disabled increased from 80.5% to 82%

Religion - Christianity, at 44.7% of residents is the reported most common religion in the town, followed by 43.4% who reported as having no religion, 5.4% did not provide an answer, 4% muslim, 1% hindu, 0.7% other, 0.3% Jewish, 0.3% Sikh.

There are 10 out of 26 buildings used as a polling station which belong to a particular faith group. For the majority of these, the voting takes place in a function room/separate hall.

Race - The top three ethnicity groups in Harlow are White (82.7%), Black/Black British/Black Welsh/Caribbean/African (6.2%), Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh (6.0//%)

What gaps are there in the quantitative data?

Unknown numbers of Political parties/candidates until an election is called.

What other quantitative data do you need?

None. The above data uses the most up to date ONS census data from 2021.

Qualitative

Qualitative research is a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting. It focuses on the "why" rather than the "what" of social phenomena and relies on the direct experiences of human beings as meaning-making agents in their everyday lives.

What qualitative data do you already have about those who use or will use the policy / service / function?

Public consultation ran between 17 May and 31 August 2024. A total of 7 responses were received.

What gaps are there in the qualitative data?

none.

What other qualitative data do you need?

none.

Consultation

Number of formal or informal consultation that have taken place or that you are planning to hold to inform your Equality impact assessment 1

Title of consultation	Date	Who did you consult with?	What were the main issues raised?	Gaps in data	If further consultations are needed to fill these gaps – state with whom, by whom, when and how is this going to be done?
Polling District and Polling Places review 2024	17 May to 31 August 2024	Public	Location of polling places.	none.	none.

Protected characteristic groups from the Equality Act 2010

Assessment of Impact – Based on the data you have analysed and provided, and the results of the consultation or research you have undertaken, list below how the policy or function will or does work for each of the following equalities groups.

Protected characteristic groups from the Equality Act 2010 - Age, Disability, Pregnancy and maternity, Race/ethnicity, Religion or belief

What do you know?

No responses were received raised an issue in relation to a protected characteristic group.

What do people tell you?

none

What does this mean?

Older electors - may have difficulty accessing voting facilities. POSITIVE impact: Polling stations are kept under review to ensure that as far is reasonably practical, premises are accessible. The option to have a postal vote is promoted. Clear signage is provided, ramps installed where necessary and provide seating for those who may need to rest.

Disability - physical impairments that limit mobility. POSITIVE impact: Polling stations are kept

under review to ensure that as far as is reasonably practical, premises are accessible. The option to have a postal or proxy vote is promoted. Clear signage to the station is provided, (temporary) ramps installed where necessary, ensuring the layout of the room can facilitate wheelchairs and provide seating for those who may need to rest.

Visual impairments - POSITIVE impact: poll cards are provided in an increased size. the following aids are available in polling stations - magnifiers, large version sample ballot paper, braille ballot overlay. Where control over ballot paper colour is permitted, its use by partially-sighted electors is considered to provide clear print visibility.

Learning disabilities - POSITIVE impact: a booklet is available in an easy-read format explaining the voting and election processes.

In all cases, polling staff are given guidance and training in order to be able to assist any elector who may need help with voting. Provisions in law allow the Presiding Officer to mark a ballot paper for an elector if they are unable to do so themselves. Alternatively, provisions also allow electors to have assistance from a relative/friend to help them vote.

Pregnancy and maternity - POSITIVE impact: polling station staff are given guidance and training to assist as required and seating at polling stations is made available. The layout of the polling station is such that access for prams/pushchairs is considered.

Race/Ethnicity - those whose first language is not English may find it more difficult to participate in the consultation and provide their views on the proposed polling districts and polling places.

Current electoral law does not allow printing of official election materials (e.g. ballot papers, postal vote packs) in any language other than English or Welsh. Translations of explanatory guidance can be provided on request.

Religion or belief - Use of religious or consecrated buildings may discourage other faith groups from voting.

What can you do?

All proposed new polling places will be evaluated against the Electoral Commission checklist with a particular emphasis on the following requirements:

Level access at entrance and within polling places (or space for a temporary ramp)

Wide enough doorways and corridors to allow for wheelchairs

Sufficient space within the polling place to enable motorised wheelchair manoeuvrability.

Local authorities have a duty to review the accessibility of all polling places to ensure that every polling place, and prospective polling place for which it is responsible, to ensure it is accessible to disabled voters 'so far as is reasonable and practicable'. Presiding Officers and companions of voters with disabilities can assist electors with marking the ballot paper.

Due to the requirement to provide polling stations in a specified area and the requirement to make them accessible to all, it is often not possible to secure the use of a more generic building.

In all cases we promote the absent voting to ensure voters are given every opportunity to be able to vote.

Assessment of overall impacts and any further recommendations

The arrangements proposed in the review enable the council to fulfil the legal requirement for Returning Officers to take all reasonable steps to provide support for those with a disability in polling stations and designate the most appropriate polling places and polling stations for voters, that provide suitable access, space and facilities for voting.

Action plan

Number of action plans 0

Project Manager

Project Manager Alison Hodgson

Date 19 Sep 2024

Assistant Director Natasha Terrell

Date 19/09/2024