

# Equality Impact Assessment Template

Please complete this template using the [Equality Impact Assessment Guidance document](#)

**Version 4: January 2019**

Title of proposal (include forward plan reference if available)	Review of polling places and polling stations 2022/2023
Directorate and Service Area	Directorate of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Name and title of Lead Officer completing this EIA	Electoral Services Manager, Tracey Hurst
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Names and titles of other officers involved in completing this EIA	Zoe Armstrong, Deputy Electoral Services Manager  <a href="mailto:Zoe_armstrong@sandwell.gov.uk">Zoe_armstrong@sandwell.gov.uk</a>
Partners involved with the EIA where jointly completed	None
Date EIA completed	November 2022
Date EIA signed off or agreed by Director or Executive Director	10 November 2022
Name of Director or Executive Director signing off EIA	Surjit Tour
Date EIA considered by Cabinet Member	November 2022

**1. The purpose of the proposal or decision required  
(Please provide as much information as possible)**

Section 18B of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983 states the authority must designate, and keep under review, polling places for the polling districts in its area. The Council is also required, to designate polling places which are accessible to disabled electors, so far as is reasonable and practicable.

The recommendations contained in the report are the consequence of the latest review.

The recommendations take into account:

- a) The commitment made at the last review of polling stations in 2021 to seek to further reduce the number of
  - i) schools and
  - ii) temporary huts, used as polling stations.
- b) The desire to improve voter accessibility to polling stations.
- c) The need to identify an alternative location where an existing polling station is no longer available to use.
- d) Recognition of the on-going need for flexibility in determining the sites of polling stations, particularly given the uncertainties and challenges that events, such as the impact of Covid-19 puts on the planning of elections.

## **2. Evidence used/considered**

Guidance has been taken from various documents, i.e.

Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations – published by the Electoral Commission.

Do I need to undertake a Polling District review to change polling places for local elections in 2021? – published by the Association of Electoral Administrators.

## **3. Consultation**

Consultation has taken place with relevant Ward members, internal officers and, through the Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), Disability Organisations in Sandwell, (such as Ideal for All, Options for Life, Sandwell Visually Impaired and Sandwell Deaf Association) and Age UK Sandwell.

At the time of producing this EIA, no comments had been received from disability organisations, but any received prior to Committee, will be shared verbally.

There were a number of comments received from ward members regarding the proposals. Each of these comments were considered and, where appropriate, changes were made to the content of the report and to the formulation of recommendations.

**4. Assess likely impact** - Please give an outline of the overall impact if possible.

The impact of these proposals will be that some electors will vote, in forthcoming elections, at a different polling station to the one they may have used previously.

Electors who apply to vote by the appropriate deadline by other means, i.e. by post or by proxy, will still be able to do so.

The recommendations contained in this report continues the position, in Sandwell, which sees no stations inaccessible to voters.

Whilst having to go to a different polling station will mean that some electors will have further to travel, there will be others for whom their new polling station will be closer to their homes.

For one specific proposal, the impact on making these changes on children's education will mean that there is less likelihood of it being adversely interrupted owing to the school's closure, and this will be of particular benefit for children with one or more protected characteristic.

Guidance issued by the Electoral Commission - and provided for all polling station staff in Sandwell - deals with a series of equality issues - including how to provide equal access to voters with disabilities, including those who are blind or partially-sighted.

**Please complete the table below at 4a to identify the likely impact on specific protected characteristics**

**4a. Use the table to show:**

- Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a negative impact on any of the equality strands (protected characteristics), that is it could disadvantage them or if there is no impact, please note the evidence and/or reasons for this.
- Where you think that the strategy, project or policy could have a positive impact on any of the groups or contribute to promoting equality, equal opportunities or improving relationships within equality characteristics.

Protected Characteristic	Positive Impact ✓	Negative Impact ✓	No Impact ✓	Reason and evidence (Provide details of specific groups affected even for no impact and where negative impact has been identified what mitigating actions can we take?)
<b>Age</b>			✓	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of their age.</p> <p>The recommendations also enable electors to go, in person, to their allocated polling station to vote, should they wish to do so. For electors who choose to vote in this way, their new station will be accessible.</p> <p>Clearly, whilst moving to a different polling station will mean that some electors will have further to travel, there will be others for whom the new polling station will be closer to their homes and therefore, more convenient.</p> <p>More generally for elderly voters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Polling staff will be trained to assist elderly voters.</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Polling stations are generally accessible for elderly voters. Where necessary reasonable adjustments are made which would apply regardless of the election cycle.</li> <li>o Aids are available at polling stations to help electors cast their vote, including a large print sample ballot paper, and a tactile voting device to help if voters have a visual impairment.</li> <li>o There are also procedures in place should an elector have difficulty in gaining access to a polling station, e.g. a wheelchair user seeking to access a temporary hut. In these circumstances the Presiding Officer will take the “voting“ process to the elector outside.</li> </ul> <p>Electors who do not wish, or are unable to go, in person, to a polling station, will be able to vote either by registering for a postal or for a proxy vote. When applying for an absent vote, electors can request a “signature waiver “- this means that they do not need to provide a signature due to having an illness or disability that prevents them from providing one.</p> <p>The option to vote by post or by proxy will be highlighted in letters sent to all households affected by a change in polling station, in an article in the Spring 2023 edition of the Sandwell Herald, and on Poll Cards distributed prior to the next scheduled elections on 4 May 2023.</p> <p>The article in the Sandwell Herald will also detail all polling station changes, as will the elections pages on the council website.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, there will no impact.</p>
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<p><b>Disability</b></p>			<p>✓</p>	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of whether or not they have a disability.</p> <p>The recommendations also enable electors to go, in person to their allocated polling station to vote, should they wish to do so. For electors who choose to vote in this way, their new station will be accessible.</p> <p>Clearly, whilst moving to a different polling station will mean that some electors will have further to travel, there will be others for whom the new polling station will be closer to their homes and therefore, more convenient.</p> <p>More generally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Polling staff will be trained to assist any disabled voters who go to polling stations to vote.</li> <li>o Polling stations are generally accessible for disabled voters. Where necessary reasonable adjustments are made which would apply regardless of the election cycle.</li> <li>o There are also procedures in place should an elector have difficulty in gaining access to a polling station, e.g. a wheelchair user seeking to access a temporary hut. In these circumstances the Presiding Officer will take the “voting“ process to the elector outside.</li> </ul> <p>Aids are available at polling stations to help electors cast their vote, including a large print sample ballot paper, and a tactile voting device to help if voters have a visual impairment.</p> <p>Electors who do not wish, or are unable to go, in person, to a polling station, will be able to vote either by registering for a postal or for a proxy vote. When applying for an absent vote, electors can request a “signature waiver “ - this means that they do not</p>
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				<p>need to provide a signature due to having an illness or disability that prevents them from providing one.</p> <p>The option to vote in either of these ways will be highlighted in letters sent to all households affected by a change in polling station, in an article in the Spring 2023 edition of the Sandwell Herald, and on Poll Cards distributed prior to the next scheduled elections on 4 May 2023.</p> <p>The article in the Sandwell Herald will also detail all polling station changes, as will an updated Council website.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, there will no impact.</p>
<b>Gender reassignment</b>			✓	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of whether or not they have a re-assigned gender.</p> <p>This characteristic has no bearing on the recommendations being proposed.</p> <p>In general terms the training for polling staff will include gender reassignment and the need for awareness and discretion if there appears to be a difference between the gender of the voter or the name which a voter gives and details on the register.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, there will be no impact.</p>
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>			✓	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of their marital or civil partnership status.</p> <p>This characteristic has no bearing on the recommendations being proposed.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, there will be no impact.</p>



<p><b>Pregnancy and maternity</b></p>			<p>✓</p>	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of their pregnancy or maternity status.</p> <p>The recommendations also enable electors to go, in person to their allocated polling station to vote, should they wish to do so. For electors who choose to vote in this way, their new station will be accessible.</p> <p>Clearly, whilst moving to a different polling station will mean that some electors will have further to travel, there will be others for whom the new polling station will be closer to their homes and therefore, more convenient.</p> <p>Electors who do not wish, or are unable to go, in person, to a polling station, will be able to vote either by registering for a postal or for a proxy vote. The option to vote in either of these ways will be highlighted in letters sent to all households affected by a change in polling station, in an article in the Spring 2023 edition of the Sandwell Herald, and on Poll Cards distributed prior to the next scheduled elections on 4 May 2023.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, there will no impact.</p>
<p><b>Race</b></p>			<p>✓</p>	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of their race.</p> <p>Research by the Electoral Commission suggests that those with an ethnicity other than white were less likely to know when local elections were taking place. The research also indicates that the minority communities may not be participating due to confusion about eligibility, residency requirements and perceived language barriers. Mitigation is provided by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Electoral Services signpost the Electoral Commission website where voters can download registration forms in 25 languages.</li> <li>o Electoral Services also use local radio to communicate key messages to all residents in different languages.</li> </ul>

				Overall, therefore, there will no impact.
<b>Religion or belief</b>			✓	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of their religion or beliefs.</p> <p>This characteristic has no bearing on the recommendations being proposed.</p> <p>In general terms, in future, female Muslims who wear a niqab (a face veil worn by some Muslim women) will need to remove it for the purpose of checking their identification (ID). A separate room or screened off part of the polling station will be available for this. A female will be appointed to each polling station so that ID checks can be carried out by a female, if requested.</p> <p>Electors who do not wish to go, in person, to a polling station, will be able to vote either by registering for a postal or for a proxy vote. The option to vote in either of these ways will be highlighted in letters sent to all households affected by a change in polling station, in an article in the Spring 2023 edition of the Sandwell Herald, and on poll cards distributed prior to the next scheduled elections on 4 May 2023.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, there will no impact.</p>
<b>Sex</b>			✓	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of their gender.</p> <p>This characteristic has no bearing on the recommendations being proposed.</p> <p>In general terms, in future, female Muslims who wear a niqab (a face veil worn by some Muslim women) will need to remove it for the purpose of checking their identification (ID). A separate room or screened off part of the polling station will be available for this. A female will be appointed to each polling station so that ID checks can be carried out by a female if requested.</p>

				<p>Electors who do not wish to go, in person, to a polling station, will be able to vote either by registering for a postal or for a proxy vote. The option to vote in either of these ways will be highlighted in letters sent to all households affected by a change in polling station, in an article in the Spring 2023 edition of the Sandwell Herald, and on poll cards distributed prior to the next scheduled elections on 4 May 2023.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, there will no impact.</p>
<b>Sexual orientation</b>			✓	<p>The recommendations contained in the report apply to all persons on the electoral register in Sandwell, irrespective of their sexual orientation.</p> <p>This characteristic has no bearing on the recommendations being proposed.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, there will no impact.</p>
<b>Other</b>				

Does this EIA require a full impact assessment? Yes  No

If there are no adverse impacts or any issues of concern or you can adequately explain or justify them, then you do not need to go any further. You have completed the screening stage. You must, however, complete sections 7 and 9 and publish the EIA as it stands.

If you have answered yes to the above, please complete the questions below referring to the guidance document.

**5. What actions can be taken to mitigate any adverse impacts?**

Not applicable

**6. As a result of the EIA what decision or actions are being proposed in relation to the original proposals?**

Individuals who may be impacted by the proposals are those who may find it difficult to physically go to or access a polling station, whether due to age, disability or pregnancy. The Equality Impact Assessment sets out the measures taken to reduce the impact on these groups by making polling stations accessible and also promoting alternative ways of voting such as by post or by proxy. Assessment and understanding of accessibility, as required by the Electoral Commission Guidance on Polling Districts and Polling Places reviews, have been embedded in the review from the beginning of the project.

**7. Monitoring arrangements**

Information received from electors, from polling station staff, electoral services staff and elected members before, during and after election day will help ensure that, going forward, polling stations continue to be accessible for all voters, including for those with mobility difficulties.

**8. Action planning - You may wish to use the action plan template below**



## 9. Publish the EIA

### Where can I get additional information, advice and guidance?

In the first instance, please consult the accompanying guide “Equality Impact Assessment Guidance”

#### **Practical advice, guidance and support**

Help and advice on undertaking an EIA or receiving training related to equalities legislation and EIAs is available to **all managers** across the council from officers within Service Improvement. The officers within Service Improvement will also provide overview quality assurance checks on completed EIA documents.

**Please contact: [equalities\\_team@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:equalities_team@sandwell.gov.uk)**