

COMMITTEE ON EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY EOC 02-02(p4)

Date: Wednesday 6 March 2002

Time: 9.30am

Venue: Committee Room 3&4, National Assembly Building

Title: **Code of Practice on Public Appointments**

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POLLS APART 3 SURVEY – WALES RESULTS

The Polls Apart campaign was launched in 1992 to work towards ensuring that Britain’s polling stations are fully accessible to all disabled people.

The Polls Apart 3 survey was undertaken during the 2001 General Election by Scope with support from the Disability Rights Commission (DRC). The surveys were carried out by volunteers throughout Britain, both disabled and non-disabled. Similar surveys were also carried out in the 1992 and 1997 General Elections.

In all, 474 constituencies were covered GB-wide, with 1,965 surveys returned; of these only 77 surveys were from Wales. Overall, and throughout GB, there has been improvement in the accessibility of polling stations, but there is still a long way to go. In the 1997 election 94% of those polling stations surveyed in Britain were found to have one or more barriers to access for disabled people. In the 2001 General Election 69% of polling stations were found to be potentially inaccessible to disabled people. Whilst this represents a marked improvement, it means that still well over two-thirds of polling stations were not fully accessible in the 2001 election.

The Polls Apart 3 report contains information in relation to Wales and some data from Welsh surveys. In addition, the DRC has a more detailed breakdown of results from Wales as follows:

Wales Regional Statistics

Surveys	% accessible	Large print & plain English polling card	Clear signposting	Designated parking	Level access up to building

77	34%	72%	72%	6%	33%
Well designed ramp	Low polling booth	Low ballot box	Large print notice	Well lit	Helpful staff
72%	22%	56%	61%	78%	94%

The number of surveys returned was relatively small for Wales and cannot be relied upon to draw general conclusions, but nevertheless the results provide useful indicators. The GB-wide and Wales results were similar in most areas, but there were some interesting differences.

The more negative results, in terms of a comparison between Wales and GB overall, were as follows:

- Only 6% of respondents in Wales found designated accessible parking compared with 19% GB-wide.
- Only 33% of polling stations surveyed in Wales had level access compared to 51% in GB overall.
- In Wales, only 22% of polling stations surveyed had a low-level polling booth compared with a much higher figure of 61% in GB overall. Interestingly though, a similar number of polling stations in Wales (56%) and GB wide (59%) did have low-level ballot boxes.

However, on a much more positive note:

- 72% of those submitting surveys in Wales said that polling cards received were in large print and plain English compared with only 32% in GB overall.
- Whilst throughout GB as a whole 81% of surveys reported that polling station staff had been welcoming and helpful, in the Wales surveys the figure was significantly higher with 94% of staff being described as helpful and welcoming.

It is clear that there is still much work to be done to ensure that all disabled people can exercise their right to vote unimpeded in their local polling. The barriers that remain are stark. It is interesting to note that for non-disabled volunteers who completed the survey, many had not previously considered the level of inaccessibility of the voting procedure – it clearly left a significant impression on many:

"Until I filled in the survey I had always assumed the process of voting was easy. You turn up, vote and leave. But now I realise that many disabled people have to overcome a long and needless obstacle course just to get to the ballot box." (Polls Apart 3 volunteer, Ceredigion.)

The DRC very much welcomes the commitment of the National Assembly for Wales significantly to improve accessibility to polling stations for the 2003 Assembly elections.

28th February 2002

Amelia John

Policy Officer