

The Electoral Commission
4 Cromac Place
The Gasworks
Belfast
BT7 2JB

12th March 2015

Appeal against review of polling stations, Howard Primary School, Dungannon.

The Electoral Commission,

As an Elector of the Fermanagh South Tyrone Constituency I wish to exercise my right under section 18D of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to appeal the decision to close the Howard Primary School polling station, relocating it to Dungannon Leisure Centre and Roan Primary school Eglis, on the grounds that

the review failed to take sufficient account of the accessibility to disabled persons within the proposed Dungannon Leisure Centre polling place.

The Howard primary school has been a convenient polling station to the vast majority of the voters in the wards it serves for many decades without incident, it has large amounts of parking with a spacious interior and excellent disabled access. Although located at the main access point to Dungannon Town it is relatively free of congestion which means even at busy period most voters can cast their vote in a relatively short period of time.

The proposed alternative Polling Station at Dungannon Leisure Centre is unacceptable. The electoral office has confirmed the complete unsuitability of the leisure centre car park and instead has made an arrangement for some access to the council office car parks nearby. As I am aware of no plans to close the council offices on election day I cannot understand how these already full car parks, including the Disabled spaces, can take the extra volume of traffic proposed, especially as the only spaces at the centre will not be available for security reasons. Internally all but one room is accessed via flights of steps, with the lift only able to take a small number of people there is a high possibility of disabled people putting their health at risk of people by using the stairs rather than wait.

I and other disabled and less abled voters believe the new location breaches the right of disabled access to the polling station, we have commissioned and included a Access Audit from a suitably qualified body, "The William Keown Trust" which we would ask you take into consideration as part of the appeal. As the report points out there is insufficient disabled

parking available, with most of the remaining parking areas also unsuitable people with even slightly limited mobility.

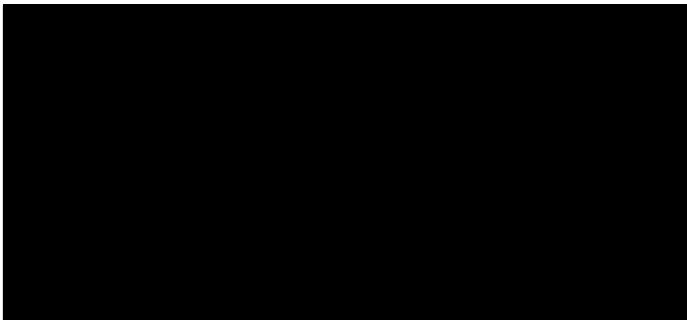
We would request that those who carry out the appeal have not previously been involved in making representations on the issues to the Electoral Office, and further we wish to request any access reports carried out by yourselves or the EONI at Howard Primary School Polling Station or Dungannon Leisure Centre in the last 15 years.

We would also wish to lodge a formal complaint that the Chief Electoral Officer failed to make us aware of our right to appeal, either in his public press statements and interviews or in correspondence with representatives disputing the decision, it was only following a resolution of Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough council condemning the decision and subsequent correspondence with the chief executive that the right of appeal to the Electoral Commission came to light.

We note that the commission have stated that any change is "unlikely" to be implemented in time for the 7th May 2015 elections, however as this does not completely remove the possibility and public confusion about the location we would request that the Electoral Office be instructed to reinstate the original published and established Polling Station at Howard Primary School until such times as a review is carried out.

I would request that the office of Tom Elliott MLA is copied in on any correspondence.

Yours sincerely,





**HIGHLIGHTING THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROMOTING
THE DIGNITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

OVER 30 YEARS EXPERIENCE OF ACCESS AUDITING AND CONSULTATION

***Audit Report on Dungannon Leisure Centre and Council Office Parking Facilities
at Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, Circular Road, Dungannon***

The William Keown Trust (www.wkeowntrust.co.uk) was requested to inspect the site designated for use as a Polling Station on the day of the forth coming elections.

The Leisure Centre building is to be used as the Polling Station; however electors will have access to three car parks within the boundary of Council premises on polling day.

Assessment of current Car Parking arrangements at the front of the Leisure Centre

Car Park 1 - Is accessed directly off Circular Road and has four parking bays all designated for the use of people with disabilities. There is level access and is located within a short walking distance of the main entrance. However, access will not be permitted to these four disability parking bays on polling day for security reasons.

Car Park 2 - Is to the rear of the Leisure Centre and is accessed from the Killymeal Road. This car park has sixty standard parking bays with none designated for persons with disabilities. To accommodate the big difference in ground levels between this car park and the front of the Leisure Centre, access is provided by means of four steep ramps linked at turning points by tapered steps. These ramps and steps can only be used by able-bodied people, rendering this car park totally unsuitable for use by people who have any form of physical disability.

Car Park 3 - Is the main car park designated for use by visitors to and staff employed in the Council Offices and is accessed from the Circular Road via the internal access road.

This car park has forty parking bays with no designated disability parking bays. However, with the Council being open for business on polling day not all of these spaces will be available for the use of electors. In addition this car park is at a much higher level than the main entrance to the Leisure Centre, making access difficult due to a twenty three riser flight of steep steps or alternatively by negotiating a steep foot path that is totally unsuitable for wheelchair users. The car park is also located an excessive distance of one hundred and seventy metres from the main entrance to the Leisure Centre.

President
Kate Smith of
Ulster Television

All Communications to
Bill Keown MBE JP
Chief Executive

The William Keown Trust is an Independent Registered Charity XR 5954.
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Car Park 4 - Is located approximately mid-point between the Council Offices and the Leisure Centre with easy ramped access to the main entrances.

There are a total of twenty parking bays with five designated disability bays, the closest being fifty metres from the Leisure Centre main entrance and the furthest eight-two metres from this entrance.

Conclusion - From the foregoing analysis of the site it is obvious that Car Park 4 is the only car park available on Polling Day which is suitable for the use by people with disabilities, having five disability parking bays at the same level as the Leisure Centre's main entrances.

It should be noted that standard parking bays are of inadequate dimensions to conveniently and safely accommodate people with disabilities and their carers, as they disembark from their vehicles, therefore standard bays can be discounted for use by people with disabilities.

Giving cognisance to the fact that twenty per cent of our population have some degree of disability, the use of this site will inconvenience and severely disadvantage the most vulnerable in the community due to physical barriers which would impede easy access for those with a disability.

Report Prepared by:
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16 March 2015

President
Kate Smith of
Ulster Television

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Bill Keown MBE JP
Chief Executive

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