

## Producing accessible documents

Below are some tips on ensuring written communications are clear and accessible to as wide an audience as possible, and are effective in delivering key messages.

### Plain English

Writing clearly and concisely is fundamental to ensuring information is understood by as many people as possible. There are many sources of information on Plain English and the principals can also be applied to writing in Welsh. It is worth considering taking and promoting training in this subject. The Plain English Campaign recommends the following (with thanks to the Plain English Campaign for allowing us to adapt their material):

- Stop and think before you start writing. Make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order.
- Prefer short words. Long words will not impress your customers or help your writing style.
- Use every-day English whenever possible. Avoid jargon and legalistic words, and explain any technical terms you have to use.
- Keep your sentence length down to an average of 15 to 20 words. Try to stick to one main idea in a sentence.
- Use active verbs as much as possible. Say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done by us'.
- Be concise.
- Imagine you are talking to your reader. Write sincerely, personally, in a style that is suitable and with the right tone of voice.

The Plain English Campaign have produced a guide to writing in plain English which you can download from the [free guides section](#) of their website.

### Accessible document formatting

People have very different communication needs so there is no single approach to creating documents that are accessible to all. There are some formatting principles that will help documents be accessible to as many people as possible.

- Make Word documents accessible to screen readers by using formatting styles throughout document, adding alt text to images, avoiding non-standard bullet points, using page breaks to start a new page, laying data out in tables and breakout boxes
- Use at least 14-point font
- Make headings clearly distinct from regular text
- Left-align text
- Avoid unusual fonts, italics, underlining, block capitals and breakout boxes

- Create accessible pdfs

## Web accessibility

The Equality Act, which came into force in 2010, had implications for website accessibility. Your website should take into consideration the needs of all users, including residents who access the information using screen readers or are colour blind. UK government websites are expected to meet the Double AA standard set by World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and you need to work with internal teams and suppliers to ensure your website meets requirements. As a broad overview:

- Text should be clear and resizable
- Colour schemes should provide good contrast to improve legibility
- Colour alone should not be used to distinguish information
- Text alternatives must be provided for all images.
- Do not use 'click here' for links, as this will not provide the information some screen readers need to enable users to navigate links. You should provide the full link or a description of it instead.
- Keep blank areas to a minimum as partially sighted people using screen magnification software may find it difficult to find a specific item.
- Make sure web pages do not contain items that flash more than three times per second as this can trigger seizures in some people
- Ensure that the page is fully functional without a mouse for those who are unable to use one, particularly relevant for drop-down selection lists and interactive forms.
- Test the web page on colleagues and with stakeholder groups.

More details on technical approaches can be found at [www.w3.org](http://www.w3.org).

## Translation

The Commission provides [registration forms and letters](#) in a variety of languages. In developing and reviewing your public engagement strategy, you will need to ensure you have an understanding of the most commonly spoken languages in your area. You should make cost/benefit decisions over the extent to which you provide translated materials in addition to what the Commission provides, and whether you will print them or supply them online only. Understanding the level of demand for particular languages may involve actively contacting community groups to assess their interest – although you should also take into consideration the extent to which they will actively use the translated materials. You will also need to consider how the alternative language materials will reach the intended audiences, whether through community organisations, council distribution or are available on request.

When developing and reviewing plans you will need to ensure you build enough time and budget into your project to accommodate translations. There are also practical issues around translation – any communication material you produce for translation will need to reflect the fact that translated wording can take up more or less space and extra time and costs may be needed for designing of the completed translation. Time will also be needed for checking the translated document – it's very easy for

translators to miss sections and make punctuation and layout errors. Ideally you should ensure the translator includes a proofreading phase following their translation.

## Alternative formats

The Commission provides [registration forms and letters](#) in alternative formats such as large print and easy read. When you consider your target audiences you should also consider the extent to which you will produce information in alternative formats. You will need to identify suppliers and consider how you will ensure these formats reach the people they are aimed at. If you are supplying alternative formats on demand, establish a distribution method and turnaround time.

Due to people's different communication needs, one-size will not always fit all so, where possible, ask how the individual would prefer to receive communications. EROs should have in place a mechanism for capturing the communication needs of electors to ensure they are able to identify and fulfil those needs.

Formats for reaching different audiences include:

- Blind and visually impaired people – audio, Braille, large print, telephone support.
- Deaf and hearing impaired people – British Sign Language, textphone, text messaging.
- People with learning disabilities – Easy read, guides for support workers and carers.

The Office for Disability Issues produces [guidance on accessible formats](#).

## Communicating with specific audiences

The following organisations provide further information on the communication needs of a range of people.

- Deaf and hearing impaired people – Action on Hearing Loss
- Deafblind people – Sense
- Blind and partially sighted people – RNIB
- People with learning disabilities – Mencap , British Institute of Learning Disabilities

## Effective communications

We provide a range of communication templates that take into consideration user testing, and good advertising, writing and design practice. In some cases you may also want to produce your own materials and where you do it is important to make those communications as effective as possible. Each communication needs to have a clear purpose and be aimed at a particular audience.

## Writing style for clarity and effectiveness

A great deal of research has been undertaken into how people use written information. Readers don't always read the whole document you present them and often tail-off towards the end. For this reason it's important to put important information towards the beginning. At the same time, readers scan documents to find the information that is most relevant to them so it's important to signpost different information with clear headings. Dense text puts off many people, so make sure you break up information into manageable chunks.

## Information design

Good design is essential in ensuring any document or communication material is effective in achieving what it sets out to do. Clear layout will support accessibility and guide the reader through the document. Strong visual design will help make the document appear important and credible, stand out from others and encourage the reader to engage with it. If the document is aimed at a very specific audience, such as urban young people, designs can be tailored to appeal to this group, but achieving the right look can take design expertise that not all councils have access to. So in general sticking to good design principals will help make a document more appealing to a wide range of people.

## Writing for the web

People typically skim-read web pages and view them in an F-shaped pattern. They concentrate on the top half of a page and then scroll down the left hand-side scanning the beginning of lines for relevant information. Information needs to be concise and easy to navigate. For example you should:

- Put key information at the top of the page.
- Keep sentences short.
- Include sub-headings to break up text.
- Cover one concept per paragraph.
- Use bullet points and short lists.