

**Policy for the**

**Provision of Accessible Information**

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**Quick Reference Guide**

**For use by staff when producing documents.**

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| **The Guide to Making Information Accessible can be found in full in the Equality & Diversity section on the staff portal.**  **Key issues for preparing all documents and relevant paragraphs in the Guide are detailed below:** | |
| **Page** | |
| Requests for information in alternative formats should be responded to within 20 working days. |  |
| Size 12 should be the minimum size used. Large print can be between size 16 – 20 font. |  |
| Number all pages and paragraphs using Arabic numbering, i.e. 1, 2, 3... |  |
| Numbers used in the text should be numeric rather than written, e.g. you should write ‘23’ instead of ‘twenty-three’. |  |
| The following information on contacts and alternative formats should be included on the first page of your document in large print (font size 16 – 20). Do not assume that all your customers will be able to use a telephone.  “**This document is available in a range of formats please contact us with your requirements**.  **Contact details are**:   * *Name of person responsible for the document.* * *E-mail address.* * *Telephone number* * *Text Phone Number* * *Mobile number* (*optional*). |  |
|  |  |
| Alternative Formats  Different types of alternative formats are detailed below. Large prints should always be considered as a matter of course, especially as there is no cost. Large print can be between size 16 – 20 font.   * Translation into ethnic minority languages; * Braille. * Face-to-face interpreting services for spoken languages; * Text to text translation services; * Interpreting services for British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language including Braille; * Sign Supported English; * Speech to Text Translation/Transcription; * Notetaking; * Finger Spelling; * Lipspeaking; and * Hearing/Visual Impairment communication. * Computer disc, DVD and other digital formats, including Websites; * Audio - CD-R and audio versions of documents on the internet; * Video/DVD with either sign language inserts or subtitles; DAISY Digital disc; <http://www.daisy.org> * Easy-Read format; * Tactile maps, plans or diagrams; * Advertising or promotion in specialised publications, e.g. Disability Action Ezine, audio newsletters, community radio etc.   When producing a document in an alternative format you should adhere to the council’s Procurement Guidelines. |  |

If you need any further information please contact

Cathy Watson, Equality and Diversity Officer 028 2766 0201

**1. Introduction**

The Council’s Equality Scheme makes a commitment that we will promote equality of opportunity and value the diversity of all the people in our community. By this we believe that all members of society should have fair and equal access to our services and have opportunities to participate in our plans for how we deliver our services. Through ensuring that the information we produce is equally accessible, we will continue to demonstrate this commitment.

Information produced by council exists in many forms, including information about services, policies, facilities, legislation etc. This means that both individuals and the public at large may be target groups of our information. By understanding and thinking about how we provide information and communicate with others we will help improve our standards in accessible information.

1. **Policy Statement**

The purpose of this policy is to help Council meet the information and communication needs of individuals as effectively as possible by giving particular regard to accessible formats. This includes information for our staff.

We want to make sure that our approach to the provision of information either in written or alternative format is accessible, clear, balanced, fair, transparent and accurate. The policy is aimed at managers and all staff involved in, or who have the responsibility for, the provision of information.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Mayor, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Chief Executive, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

1. **Scope**

The Council recognises that:

* Everyone has the **right** to **equal access to information**;
* People require information to be made available in **formats** and in **ways that suit their particular requirements**;
* When information is made available in a preferred format it should be done so **without undue delay or, if appropriate, without any charge**;
* The Council needs to be **proactive** in ensuring people know where and how to obtain the information they need; and also anticipatory in identifying any reasonable adjustments that may be needed.
* Where preferred formats are not appropriate, the Council needs to make **alternative arrangements**. These may include arranging face-to-face meetings to pass on information; giving an oral briefing; or providing additional staff time to help customers understand and complete forms etc.
* Some people may require the **assistance of a supporter**, for example a personal assistant, carer, interpreter etc. who would accompany them when information is being provided.

The policy relates to all nine categories covered by section 75 equality legislation including age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, dependants, religion and marital status.

There are however specific needs in relation to sensory needs, learning disability, sexual orientation, older people, younger people, translation and interpreting for minority ethnic groups and more general literacy levels that are of particular importance in relation to this policy.

This is a living document that will be reviewed on an annual basis but may be subject to change within the yearly cycle where best practice is identified or changes are required. Staff will be advised should any amendments take place.

1. **Legislative Contex**t

There is a legal requirement under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; Race Relations Order 1997 and the Disability Discrimination Order 2006 to ensure that we make our services, including information, accessible.

Our equality scheme further commits us to promoting equality of opportunity, with a commitment to “*ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we provide information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. Where the exact request cannot be met we will ensure a reasonable alternative is provided.*

*Alternative formats may include Easy Read, Braille, audio formats (CD, mp3 or DAISY), large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language”*.

1. **What is Accessible Information?**

Information must be accessible, easy to understand, relevant and appropriate to target audiences. If people cannot get it, read it, hear it or understand it information is of little value.

What we produce needs to be of a quality that is fit for purpose and appropriate to the target audience. This does not mean simplifying the message too much, appearing patronising or reducing the quality of the content. What is means is taking information that is in a format that is not accessible to an individual, and changing it to reflect their preferred format suitable for the particular setting. Alternative information can be described in a number of ways according to different needs and experiences. A large number of people find it difficult to read the typical information available from council, not least when it is lengthy or when jargon and abbreviations are used.

Accessible information is about using plain language to make information easier to understand for everyone and thereby more effective. A person with sight loss may need information in large print or audio format. A person with hearing loss may need a sign language interpreter. A person with additional learning needs may need information in an ‘easy read’ version. A person who does not speak English as a first language (people from a different country and people who use sign language) may need a translation or an interpreter. Some people may need a combination of these supports.

Appendices 1 and 2 give practical advice on how to make communications more accessible.

1. **Identifying Customer Needs**

* The Council recognises that there is a risk that some sections of the public will not enjoy equality of opportunity in accessing information from the Council.
* These people have the right to expect a level of service consistent with that offered to the rest of the community from the Council in a tailored manner.
* Those that may require information in a variety of formats include:
* **People who have difficulty accessing information** because they:
  + Have a visual impairment which means they cannot see text, images or moving pictures;
  + Have a learning difficulty or disability and may need extra support to understand information e.g. people with dyslexia, or people who experience significant difficulties in learning, understanding or communicating information;
  + Have mental health difficulties;
  + Are profoundly deaf and use Sign Language as their primary means of communication, or are hard of hearing, and cannot use a voice telephone or access spoken information;
  + Have a low standard of literacy; or
  + Some combination of these.
* **People who have a speech impairment** and therefore find it difficult to use a phone;
* **People who have dexterity difficulties** which make it hard to hold or manipulate a printed document or use a keyboard.
* These groups will also include a large number of older and younger people, and some people will have multiple disabilities.
* Members of black and minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland and local regional or minority language speakers are as likely as the rest of the population to have a disability which could affect their ability to access information in addition to possible language barriers. Although demand for alternative format documents in languages other than English is likely to be low, it should not be overlooked.
* All officials should also be aware that, in addition to adopting a “good practice” approach to the provision of information, the Department must comply with the provisions of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 where it provides goods, facilities and services to the public.

Accessible and inclusive communication will help tackle significant inequalities in Northern Ireland. We have a responsibility to ensure our services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local needs. We need to be welcoming and inclusive to all who live here and avail of our services.

1. **Use Of Alternative Formats**

The **requirements of the target audience are paramount** in deciding how the information should be made available. Procedures should be in place to ensure that **accessible formats identified as necessary** are available at the same time as standard print and that access to these formats is given, if requested. The Council should endeavour to meet all requests for information in alternative formats.

The following formats should be **considered** when producing public information to meet the specific communication requirements of the groups identified above:

* Large print (16 - 20 point) in a clear font. If a request is received for large print check with the individual what size of print they would prefer. Large print version of a document should be considered as a matter of course;
* Word version available on internet. Programmes used by those who have sight impairments are not always compatible with a PDF version of documents;
* Computer disc, DVD and other digital formats, including Websites;
* Audio - CD-R and audio versions of documents on the internet;
* Video/DVD with either sign language inserts or subtitles;
* Braille;
* Easy-Read format;
* DAISY Digital disc;
* Tactile maps, plans or diagrams; and
* Translation into ethnic minority languages
* Advertising or promotion in specialised publications, e.g. Disability Action Ezine, audio newsletters such as Sound Vision Ulster, community radio etc. for relevant services or public appointments.

Basic word processing, large print and computer disks are the **low cost alternative formats**. Sign Language videos, CD-Rom and Website formats are the most expensive.

Staff should consider the sources of material available to them to ensure that turnaround time for material is within expected timescales usually 20 days for standard correspondence.

**Reasonable adjustment** is a requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act and must be considered in that light. Should a delay be encountered in producing time-sensitive documents in an accessible format, such as consultation documents, an extension should be granted to the individual to ensure they have an equal amount of time to make their reply.

1. **Who funds Accessible Information?**

It is the responsibility of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to make information and communications accessible. The cost of doing so must be borne by our organisation.

The responsibility for meeting the cost of producing and disseminating accessible information lies with the service area producing the information.

Each member of staff needs to take individual responsibility for communicating and providing information in an accessible way - recognising that this is a right of people who need/want to access our services, not a privilege.

1. **Events/Meetings**

The following points should also be considered when staff are organising any meetings or events.

* The organising department is responsible for making any reasonable adjustments, including booking sign language interpreters or speech to text operators etc. for those people who require this aid to communication. It should not be assumed that people who require these communication aids will book their own. Before booking an interpreter, if possible, check what the deaf person wants e.g. Sign Language Interpreter (BSL or ISL) or Lipspeaker etc.
* The services need to be booked some weeks/months in advance as the event may have to be rescheduled if these services are not available. Providers should identify any reasonable adjustments needed well in advance.
* All invitations to meetings and events must include a section requesting particular requirements, e.g. dietary requirements in addition to distributions in accessible formats for people who cannot read standard print.
* All invitations must clearly state that the venue is accessible and wheelchair friendly. This should include physical accessibility to the entrance and other parts of the building as required, such as ramps and handholds, clear signage, and access to catering, conference and toilet facilities. An audit may be required to ensure the suitability of venues.
* A suitable time for the meeting, bearing in mind that early meetings may not be suitable for people who need longer to get ready in the morning, and evening meetings may not be suitable for those who rely on public transport or rely on others for transport.
* Exhibition material to reflect the communication requirements of people with a learning disability and people with visual impairment, (e.g. black ink on white or yellow paper to be used to meet the communication requirements of people with visual impairment).
* Requirements of the audience to be considered when preparing material for information packs.
* Introductions by officials and speakers should be conducted in turn, to allow people with a visual disability to be sure where people are seated in relation to themselves.
* Appropriate signage to be used for directions e.g. fire escape, toilets, etc.
* Audio / Visual aids e.g. use of microphone; and when using presentations ensure they can be easily read at the back of the room.
* Announcements of evacuation procedures to take account of the needs of disabled people.
* Designated car parking including disabled parking bays or blue badge parking near to the entrance and reached by an accessible route.
* Public Transport provision, such as distance and accessibility from public transport links, should be taken into consideration.
* Provision of childcare/respite for Carers.
* Provision of Guide Dog/Dog Assistant facilities, e.g. toilet facilities, water bowls, exercise area.

1. **Formats and Languages – Accessibility Statement**

The following information on contacts and alternative formats should be included on the first page of your document in large print (font size 16 – 20).

Do not assume that all your customers will be able to use a telephone.

“**This document is available in a range of formats please contact us with your requirements**.

**Contact details are**:

* Name of person responsible for the document.
* E-mail address.
* Telephone number
* Text Phone number
* Mobile number (optional).

**Appendix 1**

**Improving Our Printed Documents**

In considering the accessibility and equitable requirements of people, some basic steps can be taken to **improve** the **overall clarity** of documents currently produced by the Department. These steps also make it easier to provide information in accessible formats.

* The use of **plain language** and **everyday words** improves comprehension and saves time and money. Documents that are produced in plain English are **easier to translate** into other languages and alternative formats. Try to use just one idea in each sentence. For advice see: http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html.
* **Making text and images easier to see** helps everyone. Use a clear, simple font such as Arial, preferably in size 14, as this will aid clarity. Size 12 should be the minimum size used. Large print can be between size 16 – 20 font.
* If the line spacing is too narrow it makes text difficult to read. For example people with sight problems, lines of text can appear to merge with the text on the line above and below making it difficult to recognise word shapes.
* A page of close-set type is difficult to read for many readers, so the **layout** of documents should be made **clear and easy to navigate**.
* All pages and paragraphs should be **numbered using Arabic numbering, i.e. 1, 2, 3.** Numbers used in the text should be numeric rather than written, e.g. you should write ‘23’ instead of ‘twenty-three’.
* Use **bullet points and paragraphs** if you have a lot of things to say about something.
* Documents produced for public distribution should include the following text in large print (size 16 – 20) on the front cover, along with contact details:

*“*This document is available in a range of formats; please contact us with your requirements”.

Contact details should include the following information:

* + Name of person responsible for the document;
  + Email address;
  + Telephone number
  + Text Phone
  + Mobile number (optional);
* To minimise the difficulties faced by those with defective colour vision the following rules should be applied:
* Ensure there is a good contrast between the text and its background;
* Avoid combining red and green; and
* Avoid combining yellow and blue.

**General Guidelines on Making Information Accessible …**

... **In relation to gender**

* use gender-neutral language
* avoid the use of images that reinforce occupational and lifestyle stereotypes
* avoid assuming that women are second income earners
* refer to trans people using language associated with their new gender role
* avoid assuming that women or men with caring responsibilities, especially those in part time roles, are less committed to the institution than others. Good planning of meetings and activities, especially those away from the workplace helps enormously.

... **In relation to race or culture**

* ask people how they wish to be addressed
* find out how to pronounce and spell people’s names and remember them
* use images that reflect diversity
* be aware that apparently impolite behaviour may be unintentional, and simply down to cultural differences
* ensure key documents and other materials are written in plain English or produced in a largely visual form so that they can be understood by everyone
* provide well translated leaflets on issues of particular importance for colleagues and service users.

... I**n relation to religion or belief**

* don’t make assumptions about needs but check with the person(s) concerned
* make sure (as far as possible) that meetings or other events do not clash with prayer times or holy days
* check preferences when providing refreshments, ensure vegetarian dishes and disposable plates are available and that food is clearly labelled to indicate ingredients
* be flexible with work arrangements to allow for cultural and religious practices
* be sensitive to the needs of colleagues and service users who are fasting – their energy levels may be better earlier in the day.

... **In relation to sexual orientation**

* do not assume everyone is heterosexual– e.g. ensure that any materials produced use the gender-neutral word ‘partner’ as the norm
* respect the confidentiality of personal information, such as a partner’s name, and do not assume it is common knowledge
* do not make assumptions about a person’s sexuality or try to illicit information about it
* ensure that a person in a registered civil partnership is not treated any less favourably than a married person in similar circumstances
* people in same sex relationships have same rights as heterosexual couples to flexible working, maternity, paternity or adoption leave, parental leave, time off to deal with a family emergency etc.

... **In relation to age**

* ensure that language and images do not reinforce stereotypes
* make sure the qualifications you ask for do not disadvantage people of different ages – many have changed or developed over the years
* avoid asking for ‘so many years’ experience’ unless such a time-bound requirement can be justified
* avoid using terms which imply a particular age group e.g. ‘mature’, ‘enthusiastic’ ‘highly experienced’
* do not let preconceptions about age influence your views – use the same criteria when setting objectives or measuring performance
* consider positive action to ensure people in certain age groups have increased exposure to training in areas such of new technology, which by definition they may have had little opportunity to experience in the past

… **In relation to disability**

* be aware that everybody’s abilities are different and many people have developed strategies to help them cope with challenging situations
* speak directly to the disabled person rather than to anyone who may be accompanying them
* find out what you can do to make things easier for the person concerned

Although the tips listed below are arranged by types of disability, many are useful practices that will help everyone, including those with other forms of disability.

**When working with someone with speech loss:**

* show patience, remain calm and relaxed, and allow them time to speak
* do not finish off sentences for them
* listen carefully to what they are saying
* ask them to repeat anything you do not understand
* ask them if they are comfortable with public speaking

**When working with someone with visual loss:**

* consider the three B’s – make things bigger, **brighter** and **bolder** (use bold for emphasis but not in excess)
* bear in mind that some eye conditions mean that it takes several minutes for someone’s eyes to adjust to different levels of light
* be aware that people may be able to read material, but often it takes them longer
* Make sure people can follow movements of the cursor on a computer screen
* Always include a text narrative describing what is pictured in all images used.

**When working with someone with hearing loss:**

* reduce background noise and ensure they can see your lips clearly
* don’t shout – it distorts your voice and lip patterns
* stop speaking if you or the other person has to turn away
* be aware that a person cannot lip read and take notes at the same time
* try not to startle people who cannot hear you approaching from behind

**When working with someone with reading and writing difficulties:**

* find out how they prefer to carry out tasks
* make sure their working environment allows them to concentrate
* provide technology, such as recorders, spell checkers and voice recognition software to help with tasks

**When working with someone who has difficulty relating to others:**

* be aware that with some conditions people take what you say very literally
* show patience, remain calm
* be specific and use closed questions
* avoid hypothetical or abstract concepts – draw on experience and factual

information

* bear in mind that people may have problems interpreting non-verbal communication such as body language and facial expressions
* recognise that some people view the world and relationships differently – they may not be interested in general conversation or social interaction

**When working with someone with organisational and memory difficulties**:

* make instructions clear, concise and easy to understand
* encourage them to break down tasks into manageable chunks
* provide equipment such as personal organisers, Sat Nav and mobile phones to help with personal organisation
* provide instructions for equipment such as fax machines, photocopiers and phone systems and keep them in an easily accessible place

**Appendix 2**

There are some simple rules to follow when creating written documents such as letters and reports which help ensure that they are accessible for a wide range of audiences. Bear in mind your audience and their preferred method of communication. The following are examples of how you can communicate more effectively by using RNIB’s Clear Print guidelines and through using Easy Read documents.

**Write clearly**

**Use:**

* Personal pronouns, such as “we”, “our”, “you”, and “your”
* Phrases with active verbs, such as “We will decide…” and “Please provide…”
* Images that support the text
* One sentence for each point, and one paragraph for each idea.
* Use simple language and short sentences. This makes information easier to understand for everyone.

**Avoid:**

* Unnecessary words
* Jargon that the customer might not know
* Abbreviations that the customer might not know
* Non-English expressions (in English)
* Long sentences
* Inconsistency.

**Present information clearly**

**Use:**

* Clear fonts,
* Use 12 point Arial as a minimum but ideally use size 14 point Arial.
* Clear backgrounds that give good colour contrast
* Left-alignment (except for languages that read from right to left)
* Proper punctuation
* Bold text for emphasis (but not in excess)
* Clear line-spacing, clear paragraph-spacing, and clear column-spacing
* Text to explain images and charts.

**Avoid:**

* Italicisation
* Underlining
* Hyphenation and justification
* Writing words in upper case letters
* Vertical text
* Outlined text
* Stretched or squashed text
* Glossy paper.

## “Easy-to-Read”

*“*Easy-to-Read*”* is different to plain English. “Easy-to-Read” documents are designed for people with intellectual disabilities, people who can’t read well, and people whose first language is not English.

**Images**

Use images where possible as this makes the information more accessible to those who do use English as their first language. Always accompany images with a text description of what is shown in the image.

**Appendix 3**

**Guide for Selecting Services**

Public authorities must provide “auxiliary aids and services” when necessary to ensure that their communications are as effective with all people. A wide variety of auxiliary aids and services can be employed, ranging from simple to sophisticated.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing may need to use devices or methods such as the exchange of written notes, qualified interpreters, assistive listening devices, telecommunication devices that are hearing aid compatible or equipped with amplification capabilities, captioned media, or real-time captioning services.

Individuals who are blind or have low vision may need qualified readers, audio recordings, screen reading or magnification software for computers, materials in Braille or large print, or other devices or services.

People who do not have English as their first language may need a qualified interpreter, accompanied by a companion, or have materials presented in an alternative format e.g. Easy Read.

The determination of what auxiliary aids or services will provide effective communication must be made on a case‐by‐case basis, considering the preferred mode of communication used by the individual, the nature, length, and complexity of the communication involved, and the context in which the communication is taking place.

When determining the appropriate method of communication, employees must make an individualized determination and cannot assume, for example, that simply because an individual is deaf, the individual is fluent in sign language.

In addition to giving primary consideration to the particular auxiliary aid or service requested by the individual with a disability, the council should also consider, for example, the number of people involved in the communication, the expected or actual length of time of the interaction(s), and the content and context of the communication. For example, will the communication with a person who is deaf be fairly simple so that handwritten or typed notes would suffice; or is the information being exchanged important, somewhat complex, technical, extensive, or emotionally charged, in which case, a qualified interpreter may be necessary.

When selecting which service is required:

* Ask the individual concerned what their requirements are
* Consider the situation
  + the expected length of time of the interaction
  + the number of people involved
  + the content and context of the communication
* Contact the Equality and Diversity Officer to get an up to date list of providers

For more information and advice please contact:

Cathy Watson

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