North Somerset Council

Accessible information and communication guide

2014

Help is also available for people who require council information in alternative formats or in languages other than English.

To request this document in an alternative format:

Phone: 01934 634 989 or
Email: anthony.rylands@nsomerset.gov.uk

Introduction to the 2014 Guide

What's changed in this revised third version?

1. The document has been updated to reflect changes in legislation and the introduction of the Equality Act 2010. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has been superceded.

2. The list of companies that can provide alternative formats contained in Appendix One has been removed.

3. The position on the use of digital ways of accessing services or presenting documents and printed or other formats is made clear.

Important
The requirement to provide alternative formats and to ensure a service is accessible to disabled people remains the same.

The council's administrative and financial process for providing them also remains the same.

Produced by Equality and Diversity Team
North Somerset Council
2014

To be reviewed 2016.

Contents

Introduction

This guide has been produced to assist you in making sure:

1. The digital and printed information that we produce is accessible to disabled people using the latest best practice in this area.
2. That we are able to produce all our information in alternative formats whenever a disabled person needs it.

This Guide does not cover translation into different languages although many of the principles are similar and should be borne in mind. A similar guide to this one is available that deals with translation.

This Guide sets outs:

- ➲ The council's legal duties – it's important you understand these.
- ➲ The council's policy on alternative formats
- ➲ A checklist to guide you through the process
- ➲ Some background information on what are alternative formats
- ➲ Details of who can help you with any queries

Also available to download from the council's website is the Meeting and Venue Checklist Guide which you may find useful.

Suggestion

Would you or your team like some help to go through the issues as they affect you?

Contact the Equality and Diversity Team and we can cover accessible information, translation and interpretation and accessible meetings in one session.

Our Legal Duty

[The Equality Act 2010](#) clearly states that disabled people should not be disadvantaged in accessing information or services. The Act states service providers should make 'reasonable adjustments' by providing auxiliary aids and services to ensure disabled people receive the same standard of service. This includes providing information in a variety of formats, which would enable disabled people to use a service by a reasonable alternative method. (This has been a legal requirement since 1999, under the previous Disability Discrimination Act).

So although a service may chose to offer or run its service in a particular way eg on a website, "digital by default", it must be ready to offer it in other ways that will ensure a disabled person can receive the service to the same standard if the website, (or whatever the service's preferred format might be), is not accessible.

EXAMPLE 1
If printed material offers more information but the source is a website then an alternative link to the same source should be available. Typically the easiest way to do this is to provide a phone number. People can then choose to ask a question, or use it to request a print copy etc. or get help on the website.

EXAMPLE 2
If a website is the only way to access a service then provision must be made to advertise its existence through other means as well for the people who are not yet computer literate or confident and also for the people who are unable to access a computer based service.

This means North Somerset Council MUST ensure that disabled people receive information in their most appropriate format . They may reasonably require different formats; for example standard print, (including large print) Braille, audio, in sign language, etc according to the situation.

If the council fails to make the reasonable adjustment including making information accessible case law clearly shows we would be open to a challenge under the Equality Act.

A justification exists for a reasonable adjustment not to be made where the service provider can show it is not within their resources. However, again, case law has shown so far that organisations of the size of North Somerset Council would find it difficult to defend such an approach in court.

It is a breach of the Equality Act to pass the costs of providing alternative formats on to the service user.

Accessible information policy

This policy applies to all communications whether they are audio-visual, digital, eg internet or email; or printed.

The terms and ideas described in the Policy, such as what actually is an alternative format or Plain English, are explained in appendix one.

> **Key point**
>
> Its important that the council must maintain the same standard of service for the disabled person receiving the alternative format.

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1 Alternative Formats

When to provide an alternative format

With certain exceptions given below, information in different accessible formats will be provided on request. The exception to the above is:

1. On display screens in either an audio or (or digital) format.
2. Where a document for public consultation is being produced,
3. Large print runs (100 or more) are being produced of a document that is generally available to the public at Gateways, receptions or libraries or regularly sent out in the post. Or, services that are publicised on the council's website.

   Some examples include:
   a. How to apply for a service
   b. Opening hours and details about a service such as the libraries or sports centres

   Arrangements should be made for different format versions of the document to be produced at the same time as the standard printed or electronic document.

Who provides the alternative format?

There are two situations.

A Council material
1. Generally, the service writing the document or issuing the information has the responsibility for the alternative format and its production cost.

The exception being:

2. In the case of those papers sent for public access meetings i.e. Executive Policy and Scrutiny panels, Planning Committees, Democratic Services will be responsible for the agenda and covering reports.

But:

> The Directorate responsible for all background papers, reports and appendices relating to individual reports will be responsible for providing them in the appropriate accessible layout as described in this guide and for producing alternative accessible formats within the parameters set out in this guide if requested to do so.

B Other organisations' material

If the council is distributing information produced by another organisation, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) advises that where it is a central government document that can be downloaded from the web the council will have the responsibility to make the document accessible. If the document is not easily available then the organisation producing the document should be contacted for the accessible format.

How to handle requests

If you receive a request for information in an accessible format you should pass the request on to the information owner and let the enquirer know what action is to be taken on the same day. You should not respond negatively, by replying "no we can't offer an alternative format" or "we will not" as this would not be considered a "reasonable adjustment" under the Equality Act.

Requests for different accessible formats must be met within **five** working days of the request, i.e. the person making the request should receive the alternative format by the end of that time.

Key point

You must inform customers of this policy when the request is acknowledged. Bear in mind deadlines for consultations etc to ensure the disabled person still has the same reasonable amount of time to respond.

If you think its likely there will be disabled people needing a document from a third party and it may take longer to obtain then you may wish to obtain the alternative format in advance to maintain the standard of service.

Exceptions

The only exception to the above will be where a document is especially lengthy or technical or especially complex to translate (such as a document containing maps, plans and tables). Where this is the case a reasonable time-scale will be agreed with the person making the request based upon a formal quotation received from a recognised company.

Costs – who pays?

Where providing a document in a different format incurs a cost this will be met by the council. It is a breach of the Equality Act to pass these costs on to the service user.

Key point

The responsibility for providing a different format and meeting the cost will be the responsibility of the service that has produced the document. Costs for providing accessible formats should be built into budgets.

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Assessments should be made of work plans for the forthcoming year to determine potential areas of spending on alternative formats.

Having a separate budget heading will allow services to monitor spending and refine budgets over a period of time.

2 Accessible presentation styles and formats

Printed material

It's important all graphic and written material is presented in the most inclusive way. It avoids people having to present themselves as exceptions and to be segregated. There are some key rules to follow to achieve this.

1. The font size to be used will be 12-point type size in the Arial typeface or similar sans serif typeface.
2. Exceptions to this rule are only where the print size and typeface are legally regulated. Using a typeface which is due to a custom or practice is not acceptable.
3. All material must respect the readers understanding of the subject. Material for the public eg for consultations must be written in a plain language style, avoiding jargon and with clear explanantions of technical terms.
4. Talk to the Graphics Unit if you are producing a publication for public information about how to present your service and still achieve these standards. Avoid:
   a. Complex page layouts and a heavy reliance on an image to convey a message in a written document.
   b. The use of stereotypes where images are used and ensure positive role models are portrayed
   c. Do not use text over images
   d. Keep text in simple clear, regular blocks – a maximum of two columns.

The appendices contain more detailed information about this.

Suggestion

Periodically its useful to consult with disabled customers to directly ask about how accessible your service's information actually is. Bear in mind this can bound up with the way your service is delivered, including staff training.

Key Point

To ensure disabled people know we are willing to provide the alternative formats, any written information produced by the council, including letters, should contain a statement that
"this document can be made available in a different format on request by contacting x where 'x' will include contact details. This needs to be placed:
1. At the bottom of the first page for letters
2. On the front cover for documents, reports etc.

Digital material

The same principles apply to anything uploaded to a web site, using an on-line form or which is making use of email or text messaging formats. Both the software running the webpage and the appearance of the information, need to be accessible so that a disabled person using either assistive software such as screen readers or assistive hardware may physically use the same web page or receive an email. Forms and specific links to information requiring additional processes within software, etc., may not be accessible.

Key point

PDF formats are not suitable for all computer users with assistive software. Some free PDF converter software does not produce fully accessible documents.

Sticking to the council's webpage format and templates is an important first step towards achieving these aims. We have a duty under the Equality Act to provide an accessible website to a clear standard that many providers do not achieve. Other website providers may not achieve the required standards.

Emails should be sent in plain text formats which will ensure they can accessed by most people with assistive software.

Any other formats in the form of attachments such as PDF files can be made to be more accessible to disabled people, but do rely on more recent software being used such as Microsoft's Word or Adobe Professional. The PDF creator software must follow certain key principles in the way it works. Adobe have written a supporting document that provides key information you need to check if you are using other software or are unsure of the way your document has been created or how it has been downloaded. Contact the Web Editor for more information.

See Appendix two below.

If you're using on-line contact forms or service application forms they also need to be fully accessible. An alternative is to offer an accessible file format to be downloaded, saved and sent by email. A phone number on the form to seek advice with it would help the applicant etc.

Suggestion

Consulting with service users and stakeholders is important when introducing digital channels to a service to ensure first, it actually works, but also importantly that your customers are wholeheartedly embracing your approach.

Establishing the need for an alternative format

In a one-to-one communication with a customer of the council where information is being requested, such as in a letter, you should, when appropriate, ask if the information is needed in a different format. When a different format is needed every effort should be made for all communication from that point to be in that format, unless the person concerned states otherwise.

If you would normally direct someone to a webpage or email a reply you shoud check that they have access to a computer and in addition, that they are happy to receive the information etc in this format. It cannot always be assumed all computer users can automatically access all programs and formats.

If communication is received by us in an alternative format to standard print, every effort should be made to reply in the same format.

CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

Notes

Use this space here to record details for your service, eg budget codes etc and save it where its easily accessible .

Budget code……………………………………

My contacts
Equality and Diversity Team 01934 63 4989

Suggestion

Ask someone simply;
"We always like to check formally that everyone's happy to receive an email or use the website is that ok for you or would you like it in a different format such as a printed copy or an audio cd?"

This will provide the opening many people are looking for to ask for a chosen format.

Step 4 starts at the point when you're dealing with a request for alternative formats.

Step 1   Before you start!

Check you know the finance code etc for your team or service budget to cover alternative formats.
Ensure you understand who you are writing for
Is it a colleague or a customer?
Is it to go on the web, a letter or a formal report to Members?
What formats do I need to consider?

Step 2   The Three Basics

Always write in a Plain English style – everyone needs to understaqnd what your message is.
Stick to the 12-point type size in a sans serif typeface (eg Arial)
Include the statement that "this document can be made available in a different format on request by contacting x where 'x' will include contact details on the front of documents or at the bottom of the first page of letters.

Step 3   A date with Graphics?

If it's a draft for external publication when you meet with Graphics ask about:
- Ensuring the presentation style is accessible – think about layout, use of images, text styles and colours.
- Producing alternative formats as a part of its production – have you checked any information about who will use the information?

Step 4   Establish with all customers if they require an alternative format

Though someone may not appear to have an impairment they may still welcome an alternative format to written text. Some people may want an email to pick up on a smart phone or tablet.
Many situations are not immediately obvious. For example, if your customer has a learning or mental health impairment. Or they may have difficulty reading written English.

Step 5   **How to order alternative formats**

1. Compile all the information together and email them to the supplier for a quotation. Give them any information they may need about the document such as how to deal with maps or diagrams. (They could provide a description of them).
   - ➲ Ask for a timescale for the work and communicate this to the disabled person who has made the request for the format.
   - ➲ Agree the quotation and send your cost centre information through together with the disabled person's address so that it can be sent directly to them to save time unless you agreed something different.

2. Decide if you are going to record the format you've provided for the disabled person. Consider this if you are likely to have to contact them again. BUT, ensure they are happy for a note to be kept and it is clear both in your team and to the disabled person:
   - ➲ What it is being kept for,
   - ➲ What information is being recorded and where its located;
   - ➲ Who has access to it.

Key Point

Think about tailoring the initial method you use to publish or send out information so that its in the most accessible format to start with.

What's easiest for you may not be to your intended audience.

Get it right at the start and fewer people are made to feel the exception and its more inclusive.

Appendix one: What are accessible or alternative formats?

Accessible formats is the term given to information that is required in a different format to standard print or spoken communication. Accessible formats are most frequently, but not solely, requested by people with a hearing, visual or learning impairment. Below are listed a range of common accessible formats used by disabled people. Some disabled people may need information in several formats, or another format that's not listed:

- Printed documents or text only documents on CD, audio cassette or in MP3/4formats
- Easy Read or Makaton
- Large print — this is usually font 16 or above
- Braille (a method of reading by touch using raised dots)
- Moon (a method of reading by touch but is less common than Braille. Moon letters are tactile shapes, partly based on the standard print alphabet)
- E-mail - plain text
- British Sign Language — a form of sign language used by many deaf people
- Makaton — a form of sign language used by some people with learning or cognitive impairments
- Type Talk — a communication system using telephones and type used by some deaf people
- Minicoms — a telephone adapted to use typed print for use by a deaf person

Other communication methods which enable better access to information are:
- Speaking clearly to aid lip readers
- Clear signage
- Telephone services — for example, a bus timetable enquiry service
- A verbal or spoken announcement alongside a written version and vice versa
- Audio-description services, for example, in a seminar or museum
- Tactile maps

Never make an assumption about what format a person may want. Always remember to ask when possible. Try and make it as routine as asking someone's address or telephone number.

Appendix two: Making web sites accessible

Website accessibility is a straightforward process and clear expectation of all users of websites. It is seen as a basic standard and not something requiring compromises in website appearance or functionality. The University of Southampton website sets out succinctly many of the key design and equality issues including running through the Myths and Facts and Accessible Content.

Anyone working on any form of website design or content editing should ensure it always addresses some key basic issues:
- Cascading style sheets
- Colour
- Images
- Multimedia
- Navigation
- Scripts and forms
- Text
- Structure

Guidance on multimedia requirements can be found on the web standards organisation, W3C website.

Appendix three: Writing an accessible document

The following guidelines are intended to help you produce a written document that will be accessible to many people not just those with a visual impairment. The ideas are straightforward and inexpensive, focusing on some basic design elements, for example font, type size, contrast and page navigation.

The needs of individuals obviously vary. The above guidance is designed so that the maximum number of people benefit. But where possible always ask the reader how they would like information produced.

Choosing the right typefaces

To ensure clarity sans serif type faces must be used. Two alternative typefaces are suggested.

1. Arial 12pt is the new corporate typeface for IBM generated documents.

2. Futura 12 point, 1.5 spaced where possible for MAC generated documents.

Other ways of improving clarity include avoiding:
1. Underlining,
2. *Italics*, and
3. Blocks of words WRITTEN IN CAPITALS.

Text which is set at an angle or follows a curved line is more difficult to locate and read. Text set vertically is extremely difficult for people with a visual impairment to follow and should be used with caution.

Colour contrast

The contrast between text and the background on which it is printed is extremely important. A significant number of people have difficulty with colour perception. As a result, two colours that would contrast sharply to an individual with unaffected colour vision, such as red and green, appear far less distinguishable to someone with colour blindness. The relationship between the colours is more important than the colour themselves. As a general rule, contrast dark against light.

Remember that many colour related visual impairments relate to difficulty distinguishing between red and green.

Reversing out type

When using reversed out type and the type is white, make sure that the background colour is dark enough to provide sufficient contrast. The weight of typeface is also important since white text on a coloured background appears smaller. Nothing lighter than a semi-bold type should therefore be used.

Layout

For someone with a visual impairment, the page layout and design should be simple and uncluttered. The different elements of a page layout — headings, photos, illustrations, text and captions, need to be clearly separated from one another.

Justification
Use left justification. In left aligned text, it is easy to find the start and finish of each line and the spaces between words are even.

Leading
Another important consideration is the space between one line of type and the next, known as leading or line space. If the leading is too narrow, it makes print difficult to read for people with a visual impairment. Since the lines are less clearly separated, the eye struggles to find the beginning of the next line. As a general rule, the space between one line and the next should be at least 1.5 to 2 times the space between words on a line.

Text over images
Placing text over images detracts from the type making it harder to read. Difficulty arises with because of the difference in background tone which confuse the eye. People with a visual impairment are not expecting to find text within pictures so this can easily be missed.

Choosing the right paper
Avoid high gloss papers because reflected light obscures the print and the glare makes it difficult to read. A silk finish paper is often a happy compromise.

Thin papers (80 grams and less) may allow the text printed on the reverse side to show through.

Printed document format
When designing leaflets, ensure the paper folding avoids creases that obscure the text. If designing a book, make sure the central margin is wide enough to avoid text printing too close to the centre of the spine as it will appear distorted. People who use scanners or screen magnifiers need to place the document flat under the magnifier, so care should be taken about the number of pages in a document and the binding methods chosen.

Binding
Perfect binding (as used for paperbacks) can make it difficult to flatten the document, so wire stitching or comb binding, are the preferred alternatives.

Designing forms
Any form must be laid out so that it is intuitive. The reason many of us dislike "form filling" so much is that frequently they are not. The idea should be that the structure of the layout acts as a guide.

Remember that some people with a visual impairment often need a generous amount of space to fill in details that have to be handwritten. 'Tick' boxes also need to be enlarged. This will also benefit people with impairments that affect their manual dexterity.

Large print
Documents should be reproduced in 16 point directly from the electronic version to maintain layout and understanding. Photocopying a document at a larger size is not acceptable. For example, enlarging A4 to A3.

Images
When producing a document with pictures and images in it try to make sure the images and pictures you use reflect the full range of people that represent your customers. You

must avoid the stereotypes eg a wheelchair user and avoid conveying disabled people as helpless or always in need of assistance. This is undignified and discriminatory. Such practices might result in legal action.

Information in plain language

The following is guidance about producing a document in plain language. Similar to the above guidance about producing accessible information producing documents in plain language will benefit many more people that just disabled people.

Structure
- Keep sentences short. The ideal length is between 15-20 words.
- One sentence should express one idea.
- Split your information into short easily absorbed paragraphs or sections using a title, clearly stating the subject.
- Draft headings and sub headings that enable you to group your ideas in a logical sequence. Put the points you want to cover under these headings or sub-headings.

Language
- Use language your audience will understand. Don't use jargon. Where jargon is unavoidable always put a glossary at the start of the document.
- Try not to use abbreviations. If you need to use abbreviations write the words in full the first time you use them, followed by the abbreviation. If you haven't used the abbreviation for a few pages then write the words in full again.
- Be as brief as you can without losing clarity. Make sure that every bit of information is relevant to your message. Eliminate unnecessary words. For example, use "now" instead of "at the present time".
- Avoid ambiguity. Avoid words or sentences with more than one meaning. Avoid the use of words such as "it" "this" and "they" which refer back to something you have already mentioned.
- Words that have different meanings in different contexts should also be avoided.
- Write using an active rather than a passive voice e.g. "we will hold meetings" rather than "meetings will be held".
- Be direct where you can. If the information that is being written allows, then refer to the reader as "you" and yourself as "I" or "we". People respond more positively to a direct style. However, it does depend on what it is you are writing.
- Sentences which use negatives such as; "you will limit your choice of course dates if you do not respond by . . ." can be hard to assimilate accurately. They are better expressed positively by saying instead; "you will have more choice of course dates if you respond by . . ."
- Keep punctuation simple and accurate.
- Where possible always try to use "everyday language" such as words like "we" and "you" instead of "the client", "the applicant".

Communicating with people who are deaf or hard of hearing
For many people whose hearing loss has come about in adulthood, documents in standard printed formats will be acceptable. However, it is important to recognise that written English may be a second language for people who use sign language. So in

addition to using Plain English vocabulary and grammar may need further adaptation to ensure it is fully understood.

Deaf and hard of hearing people make use of a number of communication methods that include:

1. Interpreters for British Sign Language and Sign Supported English,
2. Note takers,
3. Lip speakers, and
4. Speed text and Palantype operators.

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly the Royal National Institute for the Deaf) has a Communication Services service who can provide a number of services to aid communication with deaf and hard of hearing people. There is a charge for this service.

Information about a variety of equipment intended to aid communication for deaf and hard of hearing people. Contact Vision North Somerset, details in appendix below.

Making information accessible for people with learning impairments
In producing this section advice has been sought from North Somerset People First, a self-advocacy group run by and for people with learning impairments. The committee at North Somerset People First have agreed with its members that the following guidelines should be used when presenting information specifically for people with learning difficulties.

- The print should be in Comic Sans font, 18 is the best size, but 16 would be acceptable.
- Any papers need to be no more than 15 pages long.
- Clear pictures and symbols should be used as prompts.
- Easy English should be used for all pieces of information with no jargon.
- Work should have a glossary at the back explaining key words.

North Somerset People First employs people with learning impairments to make information accessible. Their contact details are at the end of this document. They charge for this work. The cost will depend on whether just pictures and symbols need to be added and how long the piece of work is.

Where to go for advice

Within the council

Specialist Teams	
Equality and Diversity Team • any queries about what people's needs are and how to provide them	Anthony Rylands 01934 634989 Anthony.rylands@n-somerset.gov.uk
Adult Disability Team, Adult Care • needs of deaf people	Liz Watkins 01275 882142 Liz.watkins@n-somerset.gov.uk
Care Connect • contact for specialist staff able to provide advice on a range of issues	01275 888801 Minicom 01275 888805
Marketing and Communications • general guidance on style and presentation of documents	Vanessa Andrews 01275 888728 Vanessa.andrews@n-somerset.gov.uk

External organisations offering advice on impairments

North Somerset People First	01934 426086 Enquiries.nspf@yahoo.co.uk
Vision North Somerset	01934 419393 info@visionns.org.uk
Bristol Centre for Deaf People	0117 924 9868 office@centrefordeaf.org.uk
Action on Hearing	Telephone: 020 7296 8000 Textphone: 0800 808 0123
Royal National Institute for the Blind	Business Development Team 01733 375345 busdev@rnib.org.uk

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