

Frome Town Council Constitution

Chapter 13 Access to information policy

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1 Frome Town Council's Policy

This policy provides guidelines to make sure the Town Council is accessible to everyone. This includes:

- The Public
- Staff
- Elected Cllrs
- Partner Organisations

The policy has been written both for staff and elected Cllrs in the Council. The policy has also been written so members of the public can access it. Finally, the policy has been written for partner organisations, with the aim of developing future protocols on accessibility that would cut across organisations.

This policy provides an overall framework for people to access us through:

- Printed information
- Electronic information
- Face to face contact
- Telephone

We will cover all areas of access to information including:

- Alternative formats
- Translators
- Interpreters
- Other support for people at meetings

Our policy aims to make accessible services and information:

- Straightforward
- Part of the Council's day to day work

1.1 Information is a right

Every member of the public has a right to access our service.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Equality Act 2010, places a duty on local authorities to publish race and disability equality schemes. This includes making our information accessible to everyone.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives every member of the public a right to request information on any aspect of our work. This means that people have a right to Town Council information in a language or format that suits them, within reason.

1.2 How this will make a difference for the public

Our policy is committed to making information and services available:

- To individuals
- On request
- In alternative formats
- In alternative media

This applies to everything produced – website, letters, emails, leaflets, minutes, reports etc.

1.3 Accessibility and Council policies

The Council Constitution sets out for the public our key goals and our values as a local authority. Promoting ethnic integration and diversity in Frome is one of our key values and this policy helps make us accessible to all.

This policy is part of our approach to equality and diversity. For more information, please read the Equality and Diversity chapter of the Staff Handbook

At Frome Town Council, we do not discriminate when people want to access information and services.

1.4 Commitment to accessibility

All our policies will include the following statement at the beginning:

A copy of this document is also available in different formats such as large print, Braille, audio or in a different language, please contact the office if this is required.

They will also have our postal, email and website addresses and our telephone number on the front page.

2 Accessing Interpreters and Translators

This part focuses on making services accessible to people whose first language is not written or spoken English.

2.1 Access to interpreters

Interpreters are needed where a person finds that communicating in English is a barrier to getting the information, advice or service they need.

We have the following responsibilities regarding interpreters:

- To provide them on request.
- To only use them with a person's consent.

The Council does not maintain in-house interpreting services but will arrange appropriate provision when required.

2.2 Translators

At any point in time someone may want a document translated into a language other than English. The Council does not as a matter of course translate documents into other languages. However, if required, we hold details of translators for French, German and Polish and in the case of other languages, we will endeavour to respond within a reasonable time to find a

suitable person who can provide an adequate level of translation. There are also several good websites that will provide electronic translation, but care must be taken as these translations are not always completely accurate.

2.3 Confidentiality

Staff will ensure that both translators and interpreters sign a written undertaking that they will keep all information being translated or interpreted as confidential.

3 Accessible Information: Using Plain Language

Plain language is about making sure that everything we write is clear to read.

3.1 Definition of Plain English

The Plain English Campaign define Plain English as 'something that the intended audience can read, understand and act upon the first time they read it'.

The Plain English Campaign list what they consider plain language to be:

- Using short words that are commonly used.
- Using 'you' and 'we'.
- Not being afraid to give instructions.
- Using positive language.
- Avoiding jargon.
- Explaining what acronyms stand for, such as Citizen's Advice instead of CA.
- Using words rather than abbreviations or symbols, for example care of, not c/o.
- Keeping sentences and paragraphs short (aim for maximum sentences of 15-20 words).
- Using headings to break up writing.
- Explaining any technical terms you have to use.
- Avoiding long-winded sentences.
- Using the active voice 'I will eat jelly' rather than the passive voice 'jelly will be eaten by me'
- Choosing a photograph, diagram or illustration to replace long written descriptions.
- Only using basic punctuation. , ; : / ()
- Avoiding phrases such as inter alia and raison d'être, where an English equivalent can be used.

You can find further information by visiting the Plain English website - www.plainenglish.co.uk

4 Accessible Information: Keeping documents clear

Clear print is a design that takes into account a wider audience.

4.1 Type size

We will always use font size 12 or above.

4.2 Type weight

Medium or **bold weight fonts** are more accessible than light ones.

4.3 Typeface

The Council has agreed Kefa II Pro for font in bold and Kefa II Pro Book for text.

Simulated handwriting and elaborate typefaces are difficult to read and should not be used.

4.4 Contrast

We aim for a clear colour contrast. Black text on a white background and **strong blue text on a yellow background** provides the best contrast. Inks which are of a darker tone of the same colour as the paper should be avoided. People with colour blindness may have problems distinguishing **reds** or **greens**. **When using white type, make sure the background is dark to provide good contrast.**

4.5 Using paper

We will avoid using glossy paper because the glare makes it difficult to read and choose uncoated paper or matt. Thin paper should not be used when printing documents on both sides.

If the text is showing through from the reverse side, then the paper is too thin, and remember that bold and large text is more likely to show through. Alternatively choose paper with a minimum density of 90gsm for double sided printing.

4.6 Type styles

We will avoid sentences using CAPITAL LETTERS, *italics* or underlined text as these are generally harder to read. **Bold** is more accessible but only in small amounts.

4.7 Page layout and word spacing

To make a document accessible:

- Keep the same space between each word.
- Do not condense or s t r e t c h words.
- Try not to write more than 60-70 letters per line.
- Do not split words at the end of lines.
- Align text to the left margin so it is easy to find the start and finish of each line.
- Avoid justified text as it creates uneven spacing between words.
- Break information down into sections with titles and sub titles.

4.8 Navigational aids

We will use numbered headings and paragraphs in long documents, also to use a contents list or index to guide readers to relevant sections and pages. It is also helpful to place clear page numbers in the same position on each page and leaving a space between paragraphs makes reading easier.

4.9 Illustrations

Where possible try not to write letters over pictures.

4.10 Watermarks

Watermarks can be confusing to a reader, although it is a very useful tool especially for DRAFT or CONFIDENTIAL documents. In addition, we will usually state DRAFT or CONFIDENTIAL in large bold print at the beginning of the document.

4.11 Large print

Large print documents will be made available on request. The RNIB defines large print as a minimum font size of Point 16. Action for Blind People recommend anything between Point 16 to Point 22. We will ask people what size they would like, as no single size suits everyone. With long documents it is a good idea to ask the person whether they want all or part of a document made available in large print.

5 Accessible information in alternative formats

The Council has a responsibility to make available materials in alternative formats.

5.1 Electronic information

Electronically held information can be adapted or translated before being sent out. In some cases, readers will have adaptations to their computers so all they will need is an email.

5.2 Coloured paper

Printing material in a different colour or onto coloured paper can help some readers with dyslexia. It is important to ask the individual reader what is best for them.

5.3 Braille

Some people prefer information in Braille. Before responding to requests for information in Braille it is important to check that the person would rather have information in Braille than on CD. The appendix gives details of organisations that can translate documents into Braille.

5.4 Translation

Translation is a critical way to make documents accessible to people who read in other languages. The Council will make reasonable efforts to provide translations on request.

5.5 British sign language in video clips

We will pay for an interpreter to sign the document in front of a camcorder.

5.6 Using pictorial information

Many people may find information easier to understand if text is supported by illustrations. These could include:

- Photos

- Flow charts
- Tables
- Diagrams

MENCAP provide helpful information on how to make printed information accessible for people with learning disabilities and literacy difficulties .

Key points to remember when illustrating a printed text:

- Make sure the text is in plain language.
- Make sure the font is a large size.

Appendix 1: Useful Information and Guidance

Learning disabilities: Mencap

www.mencap.org.uk

Visual impairments/blindness: Royal National Institute of the Blind

www.rnib.org.uk

Somerset Association for the Blind

info@somersetblind.org.uk

01823 333818

Hearing impairments/deafness: Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID)

www.rnid.org.uk

0808 808 0123

Plain English Campaign

www.plainenglish.co.uk

Somerset Sight (providers of Braille transcription services)

www.somersetsight.org.uk

01823 333818

E-Com Communications (can transcribe documents into Braille, audio, easy-read or large print etc)

www.e-comcommunications.co.uk

01825 765999

Citizens Advice Somerset

www.citizensadvice-somerset.org.uk

0808 278 7842

Somerset Total Communication

STC aims to support people's speech, language and communication needs in Somerset.

stc@somerset.gov.uk

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