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Vale of White Horse District Council

Accessible information policy

Version control

Version number	Date	Author	Notes
1	16/05/08	Katharine Doherty (KD)	Partial draft, discussed with Nikki Malin
2	23/05/08	KD	First draft completed
3	10/06/08	KD + Nikki Malin (NM)	Nikki's comments
4	11/06/08	KD + NM	Nikki's amendments accepted, other changes made. Also, new timetable. All agreed by Katharine and Nikki
5	14/07/08	KD + NM	Amended following JB's feedback
6	04/08/08	KD + NM	Amended following Helen Bishop's feedback
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8	08/10/08	KD + NM	Post consultation draft (updated with amendments)
9	03/11/08	KD + NM	Final draft
10	24/11/08	KD + NM	Finalised - for the Executive Committee meeting on 05/12/08

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Every resident in the Vale has a right to access our services and this includes being able to access information about our services and opportunities. Council employees and councillors also need to have access to Council information. In all cases, the information we provide needs to be clear and meet the needs of individuals.

2. Our commitment

- 2.1 At the Vale of White Horse District Council, our vision is to build and safeguard a fair, open and compassionate community. We are committed to the principle of equal opportunities and aim to deliver accessible services and employment opportunities which meet the needs of all our residents and employees. This commitment includes providing accessible information. Our Communications Strategy also commits us to clear and involving communications to ensure the optimum number of people are informed about Council issues.
- 2.2 In addition, the Council has a corporate priority to improve and modernise access to its services which includes access to service information.

3. Our approach

- 3.1 This policy aims to ensure that the Council provides its service users, staff and councillors with clear information (written, and oral) which meets their needs in terms of:
- **formats**
 - **languages**
 - **overall readability**

It also aims to achieve a level of consistency across the Council regarding the provision of accessible information.

- 3.2 As well as striving to meet service users' needs, the Council also has a duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to provide services which are accessible to people regardless of race or disability. This policy helps the Council to meet this duty, in terms of providing accessible service information.
- 3.3 The Council recognises the need for proportionality and taking a reasonable approach, bearing in mind the make up of the Vale community and the resources available to the Council. With regards to meeting the information needs of people from ethnic minorities, our approach is in line with that of the Government. Guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government states that 'we should reject automatic translation in favour of a more selective approach, where translation is targeted to particular needs'¹.
- 3.4 This policy is accompanied by a staff and councillor hand-book called 'is your message loud and clear?' which sets out in detail the steps they will need to take to make sure the information they provide relating to the Council is accessible.

4. What Council functions does this policy cover?

- 4.1 This policy covers all Council functions and services. We will also make sure that our major contractors and the strategic partnerships we're involved in are aware of this policy.

5. Links between this policy and other Council policies/strategies

- 5.1 The Council's Corporate Identity Strategy (1994) does refer to some of the things that are covered in this policy. However, as thinking, legislation and advice regarding access have changed over the past 14 years, this policy supersedes the relevant sections in the Corporate Identity Strategy.
- 5.2 This policy relates to the following Council documents:

¹ 'Guidance for local authorities on translation of publications', Department for Communities and Local Government - 2007.

- Equality and Diversity Scheme 2008/09 – 2010/11
- Communications Strategy
- Consultation Strategy
- Equality in Employment Policy
- Customer Contact Strategy
- Payments Strategy

6. Definitions

- 6.1 Translation – written communication in a second language which has the same meaning as the written communication in a first language
- 6.2 Interpreter – somebody who receives a message in one language and delivers exactly the same message in another language through a verbal exchange

7. Use of plain English

- 7.1 Plain English benefits everybody, including people with learning disabilities, younger and older people and people with limited English.

When should we offer written information in plain English?

- 7.2 The Council will write all its information (printed and electronic) for service users, staff and councillors in plain English

How should we offer written information in plain English?

- 7.3 Plain English guidelines are included in the ‘is your message loud and clear?’ hand-book for staff and councillors.
- 7.4 The Communications Team will be able to help staff and councillors to produce documents in plain English. They will also monitor the written information that the Council provides for the public, to ensure that it meets the plain English guidelines.

8. Standard font size, style and layout

- 8.1 The Council will use Arial font (or a similar sans serif font) for all its printed information and any electronic documents that it is converting into PDFs. We will also use point 12 as a minimum font size. Our text will be left aligned (not justified) with minimal use of capital letters and italics. For all Council information, we will use a strong contrast between the colour of the text and the colour of the background.
- 8.2 In some exceptional circumstances, we may not be able to produce printed documents in point 12 (for example, producing a lengthy printed document in point 12 could compromise the Council’s aim to save paper). Although producing a Council document in a smaller font size is not ideal, when this is the case, we will pro-actively offer the document in large print upon request.
- 8.3 It is also good practice to use photographs, pictures or symbols wherever possible (and appropriate) to illustrate points and get messages across to the reader. Diagrams and graphs can also be useful tools but it is important not to make them too complex or detailed.

9. Offering Council information in alternative languages

Background statistics

9.1 The following statistics set the local context regarding the language needs of the Vale population:

- 6.7% of the Vale's population is from an ethnic minority (all ethnic groups except for White British). White Irish people are included as an ethnic minority and account for 1% of the Vale's population.²
- 2.4% of the Vale's population is from a non-white ethnic minority. This equates to around 2,800 people³. The largest non white ethnic group in the Vale is the Chinese population.
- According to the Worker Registration Scheme data, the Vale had 540 migrants registering to work in the District between May 2004 and March 2007. This was the lowest number when compared to the other Oxfordshire districts⁴.
- Being from an ethnic minority does not automatically mean that a person has a language need. However, they are more likely to experience language barriers when accessing services than the ethnic majority population.

Written information

9.2 The Council will meet any requests it receives to provide written information in an alternative language, where it perceives there to be a genuine need. For long documents, it may be more appropriate to translate summaries (depending on the need of the person requesting the translation).

9.3 Services may themselves recognise that they need to provide translated information if they are dealing with any members of the public who have no or only a limited understanding of English. For example, if a service receives a letter or email from a member of the public and it is clear that they have a limited understanding of English, officers will need to explore whether or

² According to the 2001 Census data

³ According to the 2001 Census data

⁴ 'Oxfordshire's Sustainable Community Strategy - A long term vision for the county: Briefing Paper 9', The Oxfordshire Partnership – August 2007
http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/public/oxfordshirepartnership/News/SCSbriefingpapers/9_Population_3Aug07.pdf

not to provide further information in a suitable alternative language. This is particularly important when the officer is dealing with an issue which has potential legal and/or financial implications for the service user.

- 9.4 If services receive any letters or emails from a member of the public which are written in a language other than English, it is their responsibility to get the information translated.
- 9.5 In addition, the Council will pro-actively **offer to provide** certain written information in other languages, upon request. This pro-active approach is set out below:

Pro-active approach:

What will the Council offer?	When will this provision be offered?	How will it be offered?
<p>We will offer to provide certain information in alternative languages and include a translation of the statement in Chinese⁵</p>	<p>Services which have a significantly higher proportion of service users from an ethnic minority (when compared to the local population) should offer key public advisory leaflets, consultation surveys, standard letters and service information leaflets in alternative languages, which they will make available upon request. These services will include licensing, food safety and economic development.</p> <p>Services which deal with significant numbers of vulnerable people should offer key public advisory leaflets, consultation surveys, standard letters and service information leaflets in alternative languages, which they will make available upon request.</p>	<p>For these documents, services will add the two following statements (the English and Chinese versions):</p> <p>‘This document is available in other languages, upon request. Please contact the Council on the telephone number below’</p> <p>此文檔備有中文版本以供選擇。如需索取，請通過以下的電話聯繫地區議會。 如果您不會講英語，您可以請講英語的親屬或朋友為您代勞。</p>

⁵ largest non white ethnic minority in the Vale

<p>Services will not be expected to have documents already translated in case somebody needs them. They will provide translations upon request.</p> <p>This list of languages will be under constant review to take into account the changing demographics of the Vale district. Therefore, it may be subject to change and all staff and councillors will be informed of any such amendments.</p>	<p>These services will include the benefits service, the housing service and the community safety team.</p> <p>Services dealing with enforcement cases should offer standard letters and related information in alternative languages, which they will make available upon request. These services will include planning enforcement, council tax collection, benefit fraud and car parking.</p> <p>Any corporate initiatives which specifically target people from ethnic minorities should offer relevant information in alternative languages, which the Council will make available upon request.</p> <p>Other services may identify that they need to offer key public documents in alternative languages if their Equality Impact Assessments highlight relevant access barriers.</p> <p>The Council's website home page will say that Council information is available in alternative languages upon request (where there is a genuine need) and will include the Chinese statement. The website home page will also provide the Communications Team contact details as a point of contact for such enquiries.</p>	<p>Services will also add the contact details of the service/relevant officer responsible for the document.</p> <p>Staff will be able to copy and paste the statements from the 'is your message loud and clear?' staff and councillor hand-book.</p>
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Verbal information

- 9.6 The Council will meet any requests it receives from service users to provide an interpreter in order to communicate Council information, where it perceives there to be a genuine need. This could be provided over the phone or face-to-face, depending on the circumstances and the needs of the service user.
- 9.7 Services may themselves recognise that they need to provide interpreters if they are dealing with any service users who have no or only a limited understanding of English (for interviews, meetings, telephone discussions etc). This is particularly important when the officer is dealing with an issue which has potential legal and/or financial implications for the service user.
- 9.8 As part of this policy, the Council will develop a voluntary 'languages register'. This register will list staff who speak languages other than English and are willing to provide an internal resource to help enable communications between the Council and members of the public who don't speak any English. Staff on the register would only be called upon by services to help assist them with any initial contact between their service and a member of the public who is unable to speak English. Staff listed on the languages register would not be asked to translate documents or to act as an interpreter other than at the initial point of contact with the service user. Further details about the languages register are set out in Appendix 1 of this policy.
- 9.9 If somebody who doesn't speak English visits the Abingdon or Wantage Council offices, they will be assisted initially by the Local Services Point (LSP) staff. Once it becomes clear which service they require (this may involve using the 'languages register' or a telephone interpreter), they will be referred to the relevant service which is then responsible for arranging interpreters.

Meeting any requests for alternative languages (written translations or interpreters)

- 9.10 Requests for written translations or interpreters will be met as soon as possible by the relevant Council service. The Council has identified preferred providers for translation work, telephone interpreting and face-to-face interpreting to help make it as easy as possible for staff and councillors to access these services when necessary. The 'is your message loud and clear?'

staff and councillor hand-book lists details about the preferred providers. The service will keep the person requesting the translated information or interpreter informed of the arrangements that have been made to meet their need.

Responsibility for providing information in alternative languages (written translations or interpreters)

9.11 Services are responsible for meeting any requests they receive for information in alternative languages. They are also responsible for covering any associated costs from their own budgets. Services will not charge people requesting the translated information/interpreter for the service.

10. Offering Council information in alternative formats

Background statistics

10.1 The following statistics set the local context regarding the alternative format needs of the Vale population and Council staff:

- 13.1% of the Vale's population are disabled. This equates to more than 15,000 people.⁶
- Over 17,000 people in the Vale are aged 65 or over
- 5.2% of staff declare themselves to be disabled⁷

Written information

10.2 The Council will meet any requests it receives to provide written information in alternative formats, where it perceives there to be a genuine need. If somebody requests to have a lengthy document provided in an alternative format, it may be appropriate to offer to produce a summary of the document in the alternative format. It may also be appropriate to talk

⁶ According to the 2001 Census data

⁷ Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) data as at end of March 2008

through the document with the person, on a one-to-one basis. The suitability of these options will depend on the need of the person making the request

- 10.3 Services may themselves recognise that they need to provide information in alternative formats if they are dealing with any members of the public who have visual impairments or learning difficulties. This is particularly important when the officer is dealing with an issue which has potential legal and/or financial implications for the service user.
- 10.4 In addition, the Council will pro-actively **offer to provide** certain written information in alternative formats. This pro-active approach is set out below:

Pro-active approach:

What will the Council offer?	When will this provision be offered?	How will it be offered?
<p>The Council will offer to provide certain written information in alternative formats, upon request.</p> <p>Services will not be expected to produce information in alternative formats on the off chance that somebody may need them. They will provide information in alternative formats upon request.</p>	<p>Services which have a significantly higher proportion of service users who are older and/or disabled (when compared to the local population) should offer key public advisory leaflets, consultation surveys, standard letters and service information leaflets in alternative formats, which they will make available upon request. These services will include assisted travel, Disabled Facilities Grants and assisted waste collection.</p> <p>Services which deal with significant numbers of vulnerable people should offer key public advisory leaflets, consultation surveys, standard letters and service information leaflets in alternative formats, which they will make available upon request. These services will include the benefits service, the housing service and the community safety team.</p>	<p>For these documents, services will add the following text to them (in font size 14 or above):</p> <p>‘This document is available in alternative formats upon request e.g. large print, email’</p> <p>Services will also add the contact details of the service/relevant officer responsible for the document.</p> <p>Further guidance will be included in the ‘is your</p>

	<p>Services dealing with enforcement cases should offer standard letters and related information in alternative languages, which they will make available upon request. These services will include planning enforcement, council tax collection, benefit fraud and car parking.</p> <p>Other services may identify that they need to offer key public documents in alternative languages if their Equality Impact Assessments highlight relevant access barriers.</p> <p>Any corporate initiatives which specifically target disabled and/or older people should offer relevant information in alternative formats, which will be made available upon request.</p> <p>The Council's website home page will say that Council information is available in alternative formats upon request (where there is a genuine need), and will provide the communications contact details as a point of contact for enquiries.</p>	<p>message loud and clear?' staff and councillor hand-book.</p>
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Verbal information

- 10.5 The Council will meet any requests it receives from service users, staff or councillors to provide a signer or a lipspeaker in order to communicate Council information, where it perceives there to be a genuine need.
- 10.6 Services may themselves recognise that they need to provide signers or lipspeakers if they are dealing with any members of the public who have hearing impairments (for interviews, meetings etc). This is particularly important when the officer is dealing with an issue which has potential legal and/or financial implications for the service user.

Meeting any requests for alternative formats (written information or signers/lip speakers)

- 10.7 Requests for alternative formats of written information and signers/lip speakers will be met as soon as possible by the relevant Council service
- 10.8 For requests for written information in alternative formats, service teams themselves may be able to meet some requests for alternative formats (e.g. documents in large print, documents sent via email). However, for other formats, services may need to use an outside resource. The Council has identified preferred providers for Braille, audio cassettes/CDs and easy read to help make it as easy as possible for staff and councillors to access these services when necessary. The 'is your message loud and clear?' staff and councillor hand-book lists details about the preferred providers.
- 10.9 To meet any requests for a signer/lip speaker, service teams should use the preferred providers which are listed in the 'is your message loud and clear?' staff and councillor hand-book.
- 10.10 The service will keep the person requesting the alternative formats or the signer/lip speaker informed of the arrangements that have been made to meet their need.

Responsibility for providing information in alternative formats

- 10.11 Services are responsible for meeting any requests they receive for information in alternative formats. They are also responsible for covering any associated costs from their own budgets. The person requesting the alternative format(s) or the signer/lip speaker will not be charged for the service.

11. Monitoring requests for translations, alternative formats, interpreters, signers and lip speakers

- 11.1 If a member of staff has to arrange for any Council information to be provided in an alternative way, they will need to log this information using a designated spreadsheet on the intranet.
- 11.2 The Equalities Officer and Head of Communications will review this data regularly to keep an eye on the demand for such services.

Appendix 1

A staff 'languages register' – details and guidelines

What will this look like?

- The electronic register will list all those members of staff who speak languages other than English (including sign language).
- Joining the register is totally voluntary and any member of staff wishing to be included would need to agree this with their line manager beforehand.

What is the purpose of the register?

- To provide an internal resource to help enable communications between the Council and service users who don't speak English.
- The register will help to provide a more efficient service, both for the service user and the Council (would reduce potential costs associated with having to source an external interpreting service)

How will the register be used?

- It will be a tool for staff to use, to help assist them with any initial contact between their service and the member of the public who cannot speak English. Via the informal staff interpreting, staff should be able to establish the nature of the person's query and collect contact details. Any further communication with the member of the public would need to involve an official interpreter (either face-to-face or telephone) and it will be the responsibility of the relevant team to arrange and pay for this.
- Staff on the register will not be called upon to translate documents or to act as an interpreter other than at the initial point of contact with the service user who cannot speak English.

- The register will also list members of staff who have some sign language skills so that if a member of the public who uses sign language contacted the Council, the relevant member of staff could help assist with any initial contact

Will there be a great demand for staff to help in this way?

- The number of people from ethnic minorities in the Vale is very small (6.7%) and the percentage of these who can't speak English is even smaller.
- Anecdotal evidence from Council officers suggests that it is rare for somebody to contact the Council who is unable to speak English.
- It would be very rare for a member of staff to be called upon to help in this way.
- Any service could be the beneficiary of this register.

How will the register be maintained?

- The Equalities Officer will update the register on an annual basis (removing those members of staff who had left the Council and contacting new starters to ask them if they would like to join the register)

JOINING THE REGISTER

How good do my language skills need to be if I want to be added to the register?

- You would need to be able to hold a conversation in the second language

What information would I need to provide if I joined?

- Your name, your job title, your extension number and the languages you can speak in addition to English.
- The register will be for internal use only and information within it will not be circulated outside of the Council.

USING THE REGISTER

Where could I find the register?

- It would be available to all staff via the intranet

If somebody visits the Council offices and doesn't speak English, how can we identify which language they are speaking?

- The LSP has a language card so somebody could point to their language (this will also be available on the intranet)

What if nobody on the register speaks the language of the person who's contacted the Council?

- The service team dealing with the person would need to use an over-the-phone interpreting service

Contact officer regarding the 'languages register':

Katharine Doherty (Equalities Officer)

E-mail – katharine.doherty@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Tel – extension 407

Contact officers for this policy:

Katharine Doherty (Equalities Officer)

E-mail: katharine.doherty@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Tel: extension 407

Nikki Malin (Head of Communications)

E-mail: nikki.malin@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Tel: extension 376

This document is available in other languages, upon request. Please contact the Council on the telephone number below

此文檔備有中文版本以供選擇。如需索取，請通過以下的電話聯繫地區議會。
如果您不會講英語，您可以請講英語的親屬或朋友為您代勞。

This document is available in alternative formats upon request e.g. large print, email.

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