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**Code of Practice on Producing Information** (Revised - September 2022)

**Supplement C - Technical Accessibility**

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**1. Introduction**

Making avenues of communication (e.g. websites, telephone systems) accessible means making sure it can be used by as many people as possible.

This includes those with:

* impaired vision
* motor difficulties
* cognitive impairments or learning disabilities
* deafness or impaired hearing

Almost 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland have a long term illness, impairment or disability. Many more have a temporary disability.

The accessibility regulations came into force for public sector bodies on 23 September 2018. They say public sector organisations must make their website or mobile app more accessible by making it ‘perceivable, operable, understandable and robust’. Public sector organisations need to include and update an accessibility statement on their website.

The full name of the accessibility regulations is the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

The accessibility regulations build on existing obligations to people who have a disability under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995).

Information provided only in a digital format does not fulfil Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act requirements. It will exclude sections of the organisation’s audience. For example, using website frequently asked questions to answer common questions without providing a telephone number for a service will prevent some people from using their service or accessing the information.

Similarly, telephone communications are not accessible for all disabled people, so organisations must make sure they use a mix of communications channels in their integrated communications provision.

**Web Site Accessibility**

Whilst a number of the above guidelines are relevant to the content of the Council’s web-site, there are a number of particular design considerations which must be addressed to facilitate the accessibility of the information to those individuals with a disability or who have particular needs.

Website Accessibility means more than putting things online. It means making content and design clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without needing to adapt it, while supporting those who do need to adapt things.

For example, the following users should be able to access the web-site content using adaptive strategies and appropriate technologies:

* Someone who cannot hear will want to see the information;
* Someone who cannot see will want to hear or touch the information
* Someone who does not have the strength to move quickly or easily will want to use as little movement as possible to see or hear or feel the information;
* Someone who does not read well may want to hear the information and see words highlighted as they read.

Accordingly, all Councilweb sites / pages should comply with established guidelines such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and /or be approved by recognised accreditation organisations such as CAST[[1]](#footnote-1) (“Bobby Approved”)

It should be noted that Council has the BrowseAloud facility on its website as an auxiliary aid to facilitate accessibility. BrowseAloud is assistive technology that adds text-to-speech functionality to websites

Council also has ReachDeck technology on its website. This provides features such as:-

* **Text-to-Speech** reads on-screen text out loud with read along highlighting
* **Translation**allows words to be translated into multiple languages
* **Picture Dictionary**displays word meaning through illustration
* **MP3 maker** converts online content into MP3 files for easy listening
* **Screen Mask** with reading pane reduces visual stress and improves focus
* **Text Magnifier**magnifies text and reads it out loud. This increases accessibility of even the smallest web text
* **Webpage Simplifier**creates a simplified view of a webpage and removes distracting content

**Telephone Accessibility**

Disabled people generally have less access to the internet than non-disabled people.

The telephone is an important channel for making information accessible to the organisation’s audience. Crucial information, for example Council services needs to be found easily by everyone who needs it.

Many disabled people, and especially older people, will not have access to the internet or may have difficulties using it. The telephone can be a very important method of communication for these groups.

Some deafblind people, who have both sight and hearing loss, have enough hearing to use the telephone if:

* background noise is kept to a minimum
* the caller speaks clearly and at a pace which suits the individual

Derry City and Strabane District Council have introduced a dedicated video sign language service for deaf community. This is called a Video Relay Service (VRS) and it allows hearing and Deaf people to communicate directly with Council officers via the telephone.

A hearing person can use a mobile or landline telephone to call a Deaf person on their smartphone or tablet. The hearing person will hear the interpreter over the phone.

**How it works for Council Officers**:

* The Council Officer can click on the icon on the Council webpage where is it displayed alongside contact details (see below) and they will be put through to a fully qualified interpreter



* The officer asks the interpreter to connect them to the Deaf person using the Deaf person’s number.
* The Deaf person will see the interpreter on their smartphone or tablet.
* The interpreter will sign what the officer is saying to the deaf person and voice back to the officer what the Deaf person is signing.

A Deaf person can use their smartphone or tablet to call about a Council service on their mobile or landline.

**How it works for a Deaf person**

* The Deaf person opens the VRS application and is connected to a fully qualified interpreter, who they can see on their smartphone or tablet.
* The Deaf person signs to the interpreter, asking them to connect to the particular Council service they require.
* The interpreter calls the Council and they will relay the conversation between the Deaf person and the Council officer. The interpreter will voice what the Deaf person signs and signs what the officer says.

The VRS facility will be available at four council venues during the pilot scheme namely: -

* Council Offices, Strand Road
* Council Offices, Derry Road
* Foyle Arena
* Alley Theatre

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This is another positive step to ensuring services are as inclusive and accessible for everyone.

1. \***Centre for Applied Special Technology** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)