

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

**Supplement B - Guidance on Accessible and Inclusive Language and Imagery**

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**1. Plain English**

In order to ensure more effective communication with young people, people with learning disabilities and the community generally, the Council has committed itself to using approaches such as “Plain English “.

Plain English makes your writing more-friendly, direct and easy to understand.

The points below should be followed andwill help you use language more effectively:

**Plan your writing. Ensure that the points you want to make are in a logical order.**

* Think about what you want to achieve in the document.
* Gather all the information you need. Make a short note of the key points you want to make leaving out any unnecessary detail.
* Plan the document so that the content will be in the order your readers will find clearest to understand.

**Write in a tone and style that is appropriate to the reader.**

* Think of the document from the reader’s point of view.
* Be direct and friendly. For example, use ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘you’.
* When publication is being made available to the public it is more appropriate to use full words instead of shortened versions – i.e. do not instead of don’t, is not instead of isn’t.
* Avoid patronising or insincere phrases.
* Avoid phrases in documents that may worry the reader

**Get to the point quickly. Make the document interesting.**

* The first few sentences should be the essence of the document, covering who, what, why where, when and how. They need to interest your readers enough for them to continue reading.
* Think carefully about the title of your document.

**1. Plain English (contd)**

**Be understood. Everyday language is more likely to help people understand your ideas or message.**

* Use words that most people will know. Using obscure, foreign, technical or legal words and phrases will be a barrier to understanding.
* Explain any technical terms.
* Be consistent, use the same words and phrases consistently even if it sounds repetitive. For example, don’t begin writing about the ‘delegates’ and then refer to them as ‘attendees’ or ‘participants’.

**Don’t use jargon unless your readers will understand it.**

* Use familiar words whenever possible.

**Where possible, make only one main point in a sentence. Be concise.**

* Readers have difficulty in understanding long sentences.

* An average sentence should be no more than 15 to 20 words.
* Check to see if any sentences using commas or joined with ‘and’ could be broken in two.
* Remove unnecessary words and phrases.
* For example, instead of saying:” If there are any points on which you require further information or clarification we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone”, say;” If you have any questions, please ring”.

* Make only one main point in a sentence.

**Be direct – for example, say "we will do it" and not "it will be done by us".**

* Use commands when writing instructions – with ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ as necessary.
* Indirect language may cause confusion and can appear impersonal and pompous.

**Be clear. Do not stray from the main point or message. Do not use ambiguous or vague words or phrases.**

* Do not use unnecessary words.
* Don’t overuse qualifying words e.g. ‘definitely’, ‘very’, ‘completely’, ‘really’.

**1. Plain English (contd)**

**Design clear and helpful leaflets and forms.**

* Leaflets and forms should be helpful, polite and as friendly as the subject allows.
* All Council literature helps determine the public’s view of this organisation.
* Use the Council crest / corporate image to identify the source of the leaflet or form.
* Do not cram too many questions into one form or too much information into a leaflet;
* Direct the reader through the questions and point them to relevant parts of any accompanying document
* Use clear headings so that readers can find the information they need. Do not use CAPITALS as these can seem unfriendly. Use bold, rather than underlining, to emphasise headings – it is easier to read
* Provide a telephone number, address and e-mail address where the reader can get more information

**Read and check everything you write.**

* Check that the grammar is correct. The Plain English Campaign has a useful guidance on grammar at [www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk).
* Make sure that the document reads clearly.
* Ask yourself if the reader will understand it.
* Delete anything that you can do without.

**2. Inclusive Language**

When you are writing or communicating with people, you need to follow general principles to ensure that your language is free of bias. Here we provide guidelines for talking about people from various Section 75 categories with inclusivity and respect.

**2.1 Age**

Inclusive language should be reflective and welcoming to people from all generations. It is good practice to avoid terms that may be perceived as ageism. Ageism can be defined as stereotyping and/or discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of their age regardless of that individual’s actual personal characteristics or abilities.

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| **Tips[[1]](#footnote-1)** | **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| Avoid general terms as these imply that people of certain age groups or generations are a homogenous group failing to recognise people’s individuality | The elderly  Elders  Elderly people  The aged  Aging dependents  Seniors  Senior citizens  The young | Older Adults  Older People  Persons aged 65 years and older  The older population  Young person  Young Adults |
| Avoid using the terms ‘girls’, ‘boys’ when referring to colleagues or employees, as these refer to young children. | The boys/girls in the office | The men/women in the office Our colleagues in the office |
| Avoid using language that stereotypes or implies that a particular age group is more or less able or has stereotypical characteristics by virtue of chronological age. | A young and vibrant team  A mature workforce | An effective and vibrant team  An experienced workforce |

**2.2 Disability**

The portrayal of people with disabilities has traditionally used language that emphasises the disability rather than the person, resulting in the depersonalisation, stereotyping (often with people with a disability seen as victims or suffering) and the amalgamation of whole spectrums of specific physical and intellectual impairments. In the majority of circumstances there will be no need to refer to a person’s ability or disability. If the need arises, it is best practice to use ‘person-centred’ rather than focusing on the disability

When writing or talking about a person with a disability do not use subjective terms such as **afflicted with, victim of, troubled with, suffering from** and so on. Such expressions convey negative connotations. It is preferable to use an expression such as **a person who *has* (a specific disability).[[2]](#footnote-2)**

More suggestions for appropriate language and terminology when addressing people with a disability are contained in the table below:

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| **Tips[[3]](#footnote-3)** | **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| Avoid blanket terms. Always put the person before the disability | The disabled  The handicapped | Person with a disability  People with disabilities |
| Avoid using terms that imply normalcy/being healthy when referring to people without disabilities | Normal  Healthy  Able bodied person | Person without a disability  People without disabilities |
| Use positive language rather than descriptions that emphasise limitations | Disabled Toilets/Lifts  Toilets/Lifts for the disabled | Accessible toilets/lifts |
| Avoid negative terms that overextend the severity of a disability | Wheelchair bound  Confined to a chair  Cancer or dementia victim | Person who uses a wheelchair  Person/People living with cancer or dementia |
| Avoid outdated and derogatory terms2 | Deaf and dumb  Nuts,  Psycho  Retarded,  Slow | People who are deaf  People with hearing impairment  People with a mental illness/condition  Person with learning disability |
| Avoid terms which equate the person with the ability or disability. | Schizophrenic  Autistic child | Individual with schizophrenia  A child diagnosed with autism |
| Avoid using euphemisms. | Challenged,  Special | Person with learning disability |
| Avoid being effusive about the achievements of people with disability when they are going about their daily life and work. | Courageous, inspiring, heroic | Successful, productive |

**2.3 Ethnicity**

In March 2021, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended that the government stop using the term BAME.[[4]](#footnote-4)

One of the recommendations in the final report on COVID-19 disparities, published in December 2021, was to refer to ethnic minority groups individually, rather than as a single group.

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| **Tips** | **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| Use adjectives rather than nouns when it is necessary to refer to someone’s race. | Asians | The Asian people |
| Don´t use ‘minority group’ or minority “communities” as it implies inferior social position and is often relative to geographic location | Minority group  Minority communities | Minority ethnic group  People from minority ethnic background |
| The government’s preferred style is not to capitalise ethnic groups, (such as ‘black’ or ‘white’) unless that group’s name includes a geographic place (for example, ’Asian’, ‘Indian’ or ‘black Caribbean’). | Blacks  Whites  Mixed race people | ‘People from a black Caribbean background’, ‘the black ethnic group’ and ‘black people’  ‘People from a white British background’,  ‘The white ethnic group’ ‘white people’  ‘People with a mixed ethnic background’ or ‘people from the mixed ethnic group’ |
| In user research, some people were offended when white was placed first in a list of ethnic groups, while others did not like inconsistent ordering. |  | Ethnic groups should be put in alphabetical order when listed in charts and tables, with ‘other’, and occasionally ‘unknown’, as a final category. |
| The term ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ has been used to describe a range of ethnic groups with nomadic ways of life.   * Gypsies (including English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies or Travellers, Welsh Gypsies and other Romany people) * Irish Travellers (who have specific Irish roots) * Roma, understood to be more recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe   These groups are not homogenous. | Don’t use slashes (/) when writing or talking about these groups as this can imply these terms are the same. | Instead refer to them:   * ‘the white Gypsy and Roma ethnic group’ or ‘white Gypsy and Roma people’ * ‘the white Gypsy and Irish Traveller ethnic group’ or ‘white Gypsy and Irish Traveller people’ |

**2.4 Gender, Sex - Gender Identity**

It’s very common for people to confuse sex, gender, and gender identity, despite being very different things:

• **Sex, or biological sex**, is a label assigned by a doctor at birth based on attributes such as anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones. An individual can be male, female, or intersex.

• **Gender** is a set of expectations from society, about behaviours, characteristics, and thoughts. Gender is usually considered binary (male or female), but can also be viewed as a spectrum, instead of being anchored on biology, it’s more about how one is expected to act, because of one’s sex.

• **Gender identity** refers to an individual’s internal sense of gender, i.e. being a man, a woman, neither of these, both. This can be man, woman, transgender, cisgender, non-binary, genderqueer/gender fluid or agendered[[5]](#footnote-5). In language terms, the most inclusive strategy is to avoid references to a person’s gender except where it is pertinent to the discussion. This often involves seeking gender neutrality when using terms, expressions and pronouns. Fortunately, English provides many options for ensuring that language usage is both unambiguous and inclusive

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| **Tips[[6]](#footnote-6)** | **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| Use gender neutral terms | Man, Mankind  Workmanship  Man the desk/phones  Man-made | Human, Humankind  Quality of work/skills  Attend the phones  Artificial, manufactured, synthetic |
| Use gender neutral pronouns and expressions | Anyone who wants his work evaluated  Welcome ladies and gentlemen | Anyone who wants their work evaluated  Welcome to friends and colleagues |
| Use person-centred language | The transgender | Transgender people |
| Respect the preferences of those people who want to be referred to by gender neutral pronouns | She, her, hers and he, him, his | They, them, theirs (e.g. Xena ate their food because they were hungry.) It is correct to use in the singular |
| Use terms that include all relationships | Boyfriend, wife, husband | Partner, Spouse |
| Official forms should include a comprehensive list of titles, sorted alphabetically rather than following any perceived hierarchy. | Prof. Dr. Mr. Mrs. Miss Ms Mx etc | Dr Miss Mr Mrs Ms Mx Prof etc |
| **Tips[[7]](#footnote-7)** | **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| Avoid titles that imply the usual job-holder being of a particular gender. | Cleaning ladies  Policeman | Cleaners  Police Officer |
| Avoid using terms that are only used by individuals that self-identify as part of a specific community | Queer (use only if you identify as queer)  Agender (Use only if you identify as agender) | Queer communities |
| Avoid using patronising terms that may cause offence to a particular gender | Girls, Ladies, Dear, Son, Love | The person’s name,  Their professional title or  Friends and colleagues |
| Avoid irrelevant gender descriptions | A female scientist  A male nurse | A scientist  A nurse |
| Recognise and respect the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity | Don’t use LGBTQ+ if you are only talking about gender or gender identity  Don’t use ‘straight’ as the opposite of ‘LGBTQ+’ (transgender people can be any sexual orientation, including straight) | Only use LGBTQ+ when referring to both sexual orientation and gender identity-based communities  Use ‘straight cisgendered’ or ‘ally’ |

**2.5 Marriage and Civil Partnership Status**

Since 2005, in the UK same sex couples have been able to form a legally recognised relationship, known as a civil partnership. Couples who form a civil partnership have a new legal status – that of a ‘civil partner’, where the couple gains rights and responsibilities similar to that of a marriage. It is good practice to use language that reflects this new legal status.

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| **Tips5** | **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| Official forms should include this new legal relationship status | What is your marital status?   * Single * Married * Divorced * Widow/widower | What is your relationship status?   * Single * Married/Civil partner * Divorced/Dissolved Civil partnership * Widow/Widower/Surviving civil partner |

**2.6 Religious Belief**

In addition to not discriminating on grounds of religious belief under the Fair Employment and Treatment Order, public authorities in Northern Ireland have to comply with equality and good relations duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Public authorities have to pay ‘due regard’ to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different groups, including those of different religious belief. They must also ‘pay regard’ to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief.

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| **Tips5** | **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| Avoid using Christian-centric terms, not only on ground of respect but also for practical reasons. The term ‘last name’ should not be used as it could be confusing to Asian groups who place their family name first. Surname is not unacceptable. However, this word may originate from sire-name, or the name derived from one’s father. | Christian name  Last name  Surname | First name  Given name  Family name |
| Official forms should include both options for religion and belief  These options should be listed in alphabetical order rather than follow a perceived hierarchy. | What is your religion?  • Christian  • Hindu  • Jewish   * Muslim   • Sikh  • Other | Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?  • Yes  • No  If yes, which one?  • Christian  • Hindu  • Jewish   * Muslim   • Sikh  • Other  Alternatively:  What is your religion or belief? |
| Use legally correct terminology | Faith  Religious discrimination | Religion or belief  Discrimination on grounds of religion or belief |

**2.7 Sexual Orientation**

For an individual of any age, appropriate terms are “person,” “individual,” and so on. In general, avoid using “males” and “females” as nouns; instead use “men” and “women” or other age- and gender-appropriate words. “Males” and “females” are appropriate when groups include individuals with a broad age range (e.g., “males” to describe a group that includes both boys and men).

Within the LGBTQ community, there are many terminologies that are used to explain a person’s gender identity, sexual orientation gender expression and much more.

For the purpose of communicating with this grouping it is not necessary to have details of their gender identity however using the appropriate pronoun to address them can be so important. You can’t always know what someone’s pronouns are by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone’s pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.

When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, or alienated (often all of the above). Inclusive language usage for LGBTQ+ youth and adults drastically decreases experiences of depression, social anxiety, suicidal ideation, and other negative mental health factors[[8]](#footnote-8).

See table below for some tips on suggested language.

|  |  |  |
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| **Tips[[9]](#footnote-9)** | **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| Avoid terms that suggest a degree of voluntary choice when this is not necessarily the case. | Sexual preference  Lifestyle choice | Sexual Orientation |
| Use person-centred language | Lesbians, gays, bisexuals | Lesbian, gay, bisexual people |
| Use language that does not assume heterosexuality as the norm | Invite your boyfriend/husband | Invite your spouse/partner |
| Recognise diverse family formation | Mother and father | Parents, caregivers |
| Recognise and respect the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity | Don’t use LGBTQ+ if you are only referring to sexual orientation  Don’t use “straight” as the opposite of “LGBTQ+” - (Transgender people can be any sexual orientation including straight.) | Only use LGBTQ+ when referring to both sexual orientation and gender identity based communities.  Use “straight cisgendered” or ally |

**3. Imagery**

**3.1 Using symbols**

* If used properly, symbols can show what is available at a glance.
* Symbols should be clear and easy to recognise. Use a key to explain what symbols represent.
* Use symbols to represent only key words or phrases as too many symbols on a page can be confusing.
* Place symbols alongside text rather than above the words.

**3.2 Pictures/Illustrations**

* Pictures and illustrations should be simple and easy to understand and relevant to the message that is being presented.
* As with text, repetition reinforces messages, so there is no harm in using the same picture/illustration several times.
* Don’t use the same picture/illustration to convey two different messages.

**3.3 Positive Images:**

Photographs, cartoons or drawing are often used in publicity material. When using images in publications it is important to use them positively. It is important that your publicity includes rather than excludes.

Take care what images you use:

* Avoid stereotypes e.g. photos of disabled people as objects of pity, older people carrying walking sticks.
* Use images of people from other races, disabled people or women which show them as dignified and/or actively participating in activities.
* Show people doing non-traditional jobs; sporting/leisure activities; etc.
* Avoid depicting the family as mother, father and two children only. Remember households in Derry City and Strabane District Council are made up of a wide range of people in terms of race, gender, sexuality, age, and disability with or without children.
* It is often useful to ask a sample of the groups concerned for comments on draft artwork before you prepare your final art work

**Glossary**

* **Agender**, genderless, gender-free, non-gendered, or ungendered – terms describing someone who identifies as having no gender or being without a gender identity. As such, it is not a term that non-LGBTQ+ people should use.
* **Ally** – heterosexual and cisgender person who supports equal rights, gender equality, LGBTQ+ social movements, and challenges homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. **Asexual** – not sexually attracted to anyone and/ or not acting on attraction to anyone. Does not necessarily mean sexless. Asexual people sometimes do experience affectional (romantic) attraction.
* **Bisexual** – a person who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards both men and women.
* **Cisgender** – denoting or relating to a person whose gender identity corresponds with their biological sex.
* **Cross-dresser** – this refers to a person who dresses in clothing typically worn by the opposite sex. A cross-dresser probably won’t wish to alter their body. Similarly, they probably don’t experience gender dysphoria or desire to live permanently in the opposite gender to that of their birth.
* **Gay, homosexual** – a man who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards men. Gay is preferred over homosexual
* **Gender dysphoria** – a medically recognised condition of feeling one’s emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one’s biological sex.
* **Gender fluid** – denoting or relating to a person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender.
* **Gender reassignment**, sex reassignment surgery or SRS, gender-affirming surgery or sex realignment surgery – the surgical procedure (or procedures) by which a transgender person’s physical appearance and function of their existing sexual characteristics are altered to resemble that socially associated with their identified gender.
* **Gender variance or gender non-conformity** – behaviour or gender expression by an individual that does not match masculine and feminine gender norms.
* **Intersex** – denoting people who are born with any of several variations in sex characteristics that do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies.
* **Lesbian** – a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women. Some lesbian women prefer to be referred to as gay women
* **LGBTQ+** – a common shorter version of a variety of longer acronyms that describe sexuality and gender identity-based communities. The letters stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and the + indicates other categories such as Questioning, Asexual, Intersex, Pansexual, thus indicating the variety of sexuality and gender-based identities that have been or are being defined.
* **Non-binary, gender-queer** – umbrella terms used to describe gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine.
* **Pansexual** – refers to a person whose romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction is not based on gender, biological sex or sex identify.
* **Preferred Gender Pronouns** (PGPs) – pronouns that a person chooses to use for themselves. The most commonly used pronouns are she, her, hers and he, him, his, however there are many gender-neutral options for those people who identify as non-binary. Please refer to the Suggested language table.
* **Queer** – umbrella term for sexual orientation and gender identity groups who are not heterosexual or cisgender. Originally meaning ‘strange’ it has been historically a derogative term to describe people with same-sex desires or relationships but has been reclaimed by the younger members of the LGBTQ+ community.
* **Questioning** – term used to describe someone who is unsure of or exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
* **Straight, heterosexual** – a person who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual orientation towards people of the opposite sex.
* **Trans** – term used by some transsexual and transgender individuals who are open about their status and/or believe that transition does not mean they become men or women. It can also be used as a generic term to refer to the trans community.
* **Transitioning/Transition** – term referring to the process and/or the period of time during which gender reassignment occurs (whether with or without medical intervention).

1. [inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf (cii.co.uk)](https://www.cii.co.uk/media/10120292/inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Inclusive language: words to use and avoid when writing about disability - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf (cii.co.uk)](https://www.cii.co.uk/media/10120292/inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Writing about ethnicity - GOV.UK (ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Definitions are contained in the glossary at end of this guidance [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf (cii.co.uk)](https://www.cii.co.uk/media/10120292/inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf (cii.co.uk)](https://www.cii.co.uk/media/10120292/inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/qa_faqs/why-is-it-important-to-respect-peoples-pronouns/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf (cii.co.uk)](https://www.cii.co.uk/media/10120292/inclusive-language-guidelines.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)