



FAIR OAK & HORTON HEATH PARISH COUNCIL

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CONSTITUTION

CHAPTER 12

ACCESS TO INFORMATION POLICY

Adopted on 22 April 2024

1. Background

- 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 Disability Discrimination Act 2005, places a duty on local authorities to publish race and disability equality schemes. This includes making our information accessible to everyone.
- 1.2. The Freedom of Information Act 2018 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 Parish Council information in a language or format that suits them, within reason.
- 1.3. Our policy is committed to making information (website, letters, emails, leaflets, reports, minutes) and services available:
 - To individuals
 - On request
 - In alternative formats
 - In alternative media
- 1.4. The Council Constitution sets out for the public our key goals and our values as a local authority. Promoting ethnic integration and diversity in Fair Oak & Horton Heath is one of our key values and this policy helps make us accessible to all.
- 1.5. This policy is part of our approach to equality and diversity. At Fair Oak & Horton Heath Parish Council, we do not discriminate when people want to access information and services.
- 1.6. All our policies will, upon request, be made available in different formats such as large print, Braille, audio or in a different language. They will also include the Council's contact details.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy provides guidelines to make sure the Parish Council is accessible to everyone, including:
 - The public
 - Staff
 - Elected Cllrs
 - Partner organisations
- 2.2. 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 and partner organisations, with the aim of developing future protocols on accessibility that would cut across organisations.
- 2.3. This policy provides an overall framework for people to access us through:
 - Printed information
 - Electronic information
 - Face to face contact
 - Telephone
- 2.4. This policy covers all areas of access to information including alternative formats, translators and interpreters as well as other support for people at meetings.

2.5. Our policy aims to make accessible services and information straightforward and part of the Council's day-to-day work.

3. Accessing interpreters and translators

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

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

3.3. We have the following responsibilities regarding interpreters:

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

3.4. Due to the low level of request for this service, the Council does not have direct access to interpreters, however if required, we will endeavour to respond within a reasonable timescale to find a suitable person who can provide an adequate level of interpretation.

3.5. 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 will endeavour to respond within a reasonable time to find a suitable person who can provide an adequate level of translation.

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

4. Accessible information: using plain language

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

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

- Using short words that are commonly used
- Using 'you' and 'we' (except for council reports and minutes)
- Not being afraid to give instructions
- Using positive language
- Avoiding jargon
- Explaining what acronyms stand for
- 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

5. Accessible information: keeping documents clear

5.1. Clear print is a design that considers a wider audience.

- Type size/face: we will always use font Arial 11 or above.
- Type weight: medium or bold weight fonts are more accessible than light ones.
- 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, we will make sure the background is dark to provide good contrast
- Using paper: we will avoid using glossy paper because the glare makes it difficult to read and will choose uncoated or matt paper.
- 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.
- 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.

5.2. Page layout and word spacing: to make a document accessible:

- Keep the same space between each word.
- Do not condense or stretch 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.

5.3. Navigational aids: we will use numbered headings and paragraphs in long documents and use a contents list or index to guide readers to relevant sections and pages.

5.4. 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.

5.5. Illustrations: where possible we will try not to write letters over pictures

5.6. Watermarks: these 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.

5.7. Large print: 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.

5.8. With long documents it a good idea to ask the person whether they want all or part of a document made available in large print.

6. Accessible information in alternative formats

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

Electronic 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.

6.2. Coloured paper: can help some readers with dyslexia. It is important to ask the individual reader what is best for them. 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.

6.3. Translation: is a critical way to make documents accessible to people who read in other languages. All requests for translation must be met in the language requested.

6.4. British Sign Language in video clips: when needed, we will pay for an interpreter to sign the document in front of a camcorder.

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

- Photos
- Flow charts
- Tables
- Diagrams

6.6. Key points to remember when illustrating a printed text:

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

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

Further Information

Learning disabilities

MENCAP: www.mencap.org.uk

Visual impairments/blindness:

Royal National Institute of the Blind: www.rnib.org.uk

Hearing impairments/deafness:

Royal National Institute for the Deaf: www.rnid.org.uk

Plain English Campaign: www.plainenglish.co.uk