

Wakefield Council Website Standards

Version 2.0

These standards have been established to ensure that web content is provided in a consistent way throughout the site.

Web site visitors are asked to inform the Web Team of any parts of the site that do not meet these standards. New web pages will be developed and implemented in line with the standards.

This document does not include technical standards for the website.



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Introduction

This document is designed to provide a set of web site standards for presentation of information on the Council's corporate web site.

Content

Information

The main aim of the Council's web site is to provide accurate, timely, relevant and ultimately useful Council information to its visitors. Information will be:

Relevant

Any information will be relevant and suitable for its intended audience.

Timely

Information published on the web site will be current and kept up to date.

Accurate

Accurate information is vital and will be checked to ensure it is correct, including:

- Dates and times
- Names and addresses
- Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses
- Spelling
- Web links
- Copyright if information is from an outside source.

Readable

Content will be written in plain English.

Information types

Information published on the Wakefield Council web site will be divided into the following categories:

- Information about a council service
- Formal documents and publications
- Promotional and marketing
- Consultation
- Frequently asked questions (FAQ)
- Forms and interaction

Each category of information has a different purpose and how information in each category is dealt with depends on that purpose.

Information about a council service

Definition

Any information that helps a visitor to find out about, interact with and use a particular Council service.

Purpose

To enable citizens and visitors to easily and conveniently find out more about a particular Council service and how it can be of benefit to them.

Recommended content

Below are some common things that will be included when providing information about a Council service. These items are geared towards making it easy for the customer to access a Council service.

Service name

This is the official name of the service and the one which staff use when answering the telephone, not the one which reflects the position of the service in the Council's organisation.

Service description

A clear and concise description of the service will be given, avoiding buzzwords, jargon, promotional and management speak.

Contacts

Contact information will be provided for each service point/section and will have a 'general enquiries' contact point for visitors who do not know which section they need to speak to. Where there is more than one contact point providing the same service (e.g. housing offices) it will be clear how they are divided. Typically this will be by geographical area.

Contact details will consist of:

- Service name (not individual staff names)
- Postal address including postcode
- Telephone number
- Fax number (if applicable)
- Service email address (not a personal email address)

Personal contact information (staff names and individual's email addresses) will not be available.

Names of staff will not be provided as it is the role that matters, and some staff may play many roles. The title is key. Furthermore, many roles involve more than one member of staff. A group email address (non-personal) for the service will be provided that allows work to be shared and emails to be handled by colleagues during an Individual's absence.

Note: many of council's frontline services' enquiries are now handled by its contact centre to ensure progress of an enquiry can be tracked. The contact information given will be for the contact centre.

Service times and availability

There will be a distinction between the elements which require a service to be 'open' and those which can be delivered any time. Some service elements will be tailored to customer needs, such as appointments at home or in an area office.

Typically departments will provide some services online and some that require input from staff. Below are some common service elements that will be accessible online:

- obtaining basic information,
- obtaining access to more specialised information,
- booking an appointment or other form of attendance e.g. a leisure facility (if feature is available)
- consultation
- identifying and booking a course,
- identifying and downloading a form,
- completing and dispatching a form,
- claiming a benefit or grant,
- ordering an element of service (including repeat orders),
- supplying a service (or goods),
- paying for service,
- providing feedback - comments, discussions, complaints, appeals

If any times are likely to be altered by public holidays or other special events, such as elections, these will be specified well in advance.

Emergencies

If an emergency occurs and the service cannot be delivered to normal standards, people will be informed about this in the most effective alternate way. An 'Important Notice' feature will appear on the website homepage during an emergency linking to relevant information for the public.

Service entitlement and eligibility

The criteria for entitlement to a service will be made clear. Wherever possible, all the requirements will be spelled out, including those where staff have to make a judgment. There may be cases where different kinds of eligibility apply, such as income levels or family structures. Each of these will be considered and spelled out with clear paths to each. Any references to Codes of Practice, legal documents or other sources will include directions on how to obtain them, preferably by electronic access.

Fees and charges

Customers will know not only what charges apply and to whom, but also when they might change if a decision is forecast. If a charge is made, can it be paid before or after the service is obtained? Can it be paid online? Which options are available? How? Is there a penalty system? How does that operate? If there are discounts, do they apply to everyone (e.g. age- ranges, anyone with a Wakefield address) or are they dependent on circumstances (e.g. full- time students, Liberate discount card for people receiving benefits)?

Location and access

If a service requires that customers need to visit a building a full postal address and possibly written directions to the building will be provided. Links to online maps will be generated based on the postcode of the building.

Relevant details of access, such as lifts, ramps, different entrances for wheelchair users etc. will be provided through links to the Disabled Go website

If customers are disabled staff will make arrangements to meet their needs. The site will provide a degree of accessibility in different languages.

Service access includes a consideration of the language used to provide information and access the service. This includes interpretation and translation, some online and some at service access points. Requirements of customers who may have difficulties reading standard layout documents or in conversing with staff will also be considered.

Formal documents and publications

Definition

Typically these are self-contained formal documents such as policy documents, plans and strategies.

Purpose

To enable citizens and visitors to find and identify specialised information to fulfil a specific need or interest.

Recommendations

Documents will be downloadable

Downloading a file for later use is a familiar concept and is widely adopted/recognised by internet users. It is therefore a feasible and common option for distributing a self-contained document such as a plan or policy.

Downloadable documents will not be linked

Creating links directly between individual standalone documents (e.g. directly between one PDF file and another) is not allowed. This is because problems can occur as the structure of the web site changes and documents are moved around and/or renamed, which can result in dead links. It also means that the site search engine cannot index the document which means people will be less likely to find it.

Every downloadable file will be accessible directly from a web page.

Documents will be optimised

Downloadable files are often much bigger (in terms of file size) than individual web pages and take more time to download, so files will be made as small as possible. On a standard 56K modem a 1 Megabyte file takes approximately 5 minutes to download, this time increases by 5 minutes for every additional Megabyte

For the reasons outlined above downloadable documents will be kept as small as possible

File Format

Adobe PDF

For Wakefield Council web sites the standard format for a document that people can download is Adobe's widely used Portable Document Format (PDF). All downloadable files will be made available as PDF documents unless there are very exceptional circumstances why this cannot be done.

Microsoft Word

The use of Microsoft Word files on Wakefield Council web sites will not be encouraged because how the finished document looks to users using different versions of Word cannot be guaranteed. For instance users using Word 97 but viewing a document authored in Word 2000 are not guaranteed to see all the formatting, styles and fields (bookmarks etc.) that the author has added. For this reason the PDF option is preferred as it is more reliable in terms of presentation.

Microsoft Excel

Microsoft Excel Spreadsheets will not be used on the Wakefield Council Corporate site (unless there are exceptional circumstances). The user will only need to view the results or data and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets will be converted to PDF format.

Promotional and marketing information

Definition

Information aimed at raising awareness of a particular event, activity or service.

Purpose

To raise public awareness of a particular Council event, activity or service.

Recommendations

Planned in advance

Events will be published in good time, at least two weeks before the event takes place.

Have a fixed life span

Promotional and marketing information typically has a fixed life span. The big danger here is that the information will quickly become out of date and steps will be taken to ensure that information is updated or removed from the web site.

In addition to, not instead of core service information

Promotional information will be viewed as supplementary. That is it will be used in addition to, not instead of core service information.

Factual

Promotional and marketing information will be factual.

Relevant

When promoting an activity, event or service the user will be provided with everything they need to know, standard information will include:

- The date of the event or the date that the service/activity is available from.
- The date that the event, activity or service ends.
- The start and finish times, or opening hours if the activity/service is based in a building.
- Venue. Include a full postal address and postcode and consider adding basic directions or a link to a map.
- Full contact details of the event organisers or service in case of enquiries or complaints.
- Any costs or charges.
- Accessibility, does the venue have access ramps, hearing loops etc.
- Do participants need to bring anything with them?

Consultation

Definition

Information relating to a specific theme upon which a response from customers and/or other stakeholders is encouraged or required.

Purpose

Consultation can be used for several purposes, some of the more common ones are:

- To gauge customer opinion/satisfaction.
- To evaluate and monitor service usage.
- To help determine new services and new ways of working.
- To determine areas that need improvement.

Recommendations

Objectives

Before people are expected to submit information it will be made clear the reasons for collecting the information, how the information will be used and what is aimed to be achieved by collecting the information.

Deadlines

If a response is being sought from customers a definite deadline will be provided for participants to respond by. Be aware that after the deadline has expired pages will be updated to say that the deadline has passed and that no further responses are required.

Publish the results

Results will be published on the web site when practical to do so.

Data Protection

If users are asked to submit personal information current Data Protection regulations will be adhered to. Web authors will have completed the Council's Data Protection Training test which is available on the Intranet.

Frequently Asked Questions

Customers will be provided with answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) without the need to contact the service/department. Questions will be reviewed on a regular basis (minimum every 3 months)

Forms and interaction

Definition

A mechanism by which customers can interact with the Council.

Purpose

To enable customers to interact with the Council via the web site. This may be by making an enquiry or a complaint online, downloading/completing a Council form, participating in a survey, making choices that influence how the web site is viewed (personalisation) or participating in an online forum.

Recommendations

Interactive forms

Interactive forms are those forms which can be completed and submitted online. These forms will be produced using a specialised third party software solution and designed for ease of use by the user.

Contacts

For further information on any aspect of Wakefield Council web sites please contact:

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