



Website editorial Policy

Cherwell District Council is committed to ensuring that its corporate website is accessible to the widest possible range of people. We are actively working to increase the accessibility and usability of our website and are working towards 'Web Content Accessibility Guidelines' <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/>

Cherwell is a largely rural district, which has a number of implications for the accessibility of our services. A good website extends, in effect, the council's opening hours to 24/7 so more of our customers can access the service they want at a time convenient to them.

Our Website

The website is an important tool in the way we communicate with our customers, residents, visitors and potential visitors to the district. We want our website to provide useful and relevant information to those who use our web site. It should also reflect the best of the Council and of Cherwell district and give each visitor to the site the information they want in a clear and easy way.

Government guidelines for local authority websites state:

“Today’s users expect {local} government websites to be authoritative, comprehensive and designed to consistent standards.”

As well as benefiting our customers, the website is a means of:

- Providing online services
- Publicising our events and projects
- Consulting with residents on any number of issues
- Helping us evaluate the information our customers want and use.

What our website visitors want

The web is a different form of communication and it is essential to understand how people use the web in order to make our website as user friendly as possible.

Web users are different to other audiences and expect information to be presented in a certain way. They can be impatient and critical: they have not chosen to visit our site because it is great but because they have something they want to do. People read about 25 per cent slower on screen than from paper and don’t want to have to skim lots of pages to find what they want.

Web users can be distrustful so the credibility of the site is important. Credibility can be established not only through the language you use or the information given but also the ease with which they can find what they want. The web is an informal and immediate medium compared to print, so clear conversational plain English is expected. <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>

The aims of the website are to:

- Provide an easily accessible source of information for all residents about the Council and the district
- Promote Cherwell district both within the district and to users across the world
- Improve the delivery of council services by making them available online
- Encourage people to engage with the council and local democracy
- Provide an opportunity for residents to give us their views on a variety of issues
- Provide a joined up approach to services with links to other service providers
- Provide a place for community groups to publicise their events
- Be in a form that users recognise and understand as consistent local government style
- Be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act
- Be accredited to the Web Accessibility Initiative AA and the Internet Crystal Mark for Plain English.

We will achieve these aims by making the website:

- ✓ **Clear** – Web users tend to scan web pages for the information they need so the layout of pages is an important consideration. The use of sub headings, bullet points, lists, or pdfs for longer documents, is essential to manage content effectively.
- ✓ **Concise** - Most web users won't read a lot of information so it is essential that information is as brief as possible. Do not assume you can cut and paste information from existing printed documents. Web English is generally 50% shorter than normal English. Use Plain English to make it readable.
- ✓ **Easy to navigate** – It is important to make sure that information is in the most logical place and to recognise where it might fit under two or more headings so that links or signposts can point visitors to the site in the right direction.
- ✓ **Easily recognisable** – It should be made clear on every page who the site belongs to. Clear style guidelines and rules about format will make sure every visitor knows which site they are in and see the Council as one organisation rather than a number of divisions working independently.
- ✓ **A reliable source of information** – The website should give the most up-to-date information that the Council possesses. Relevant contact details should be provided at every opportunity to offer more information if required. We want visitors to know our website is trustworthy.
- ✓ **The quickest way to find out about the Council** – Links that don't work, pages that are too long, or information that is out of date, difficult to find or

doesn't answer your questions is a sure way to stop people wanting to visit our site again. It is worth trying to think like a visitor to the site – what are they likely to want to know (which isn't necessarily what you want them to know).

- ✓ **The first stop for a wider range of Council services** – the more Council services, forms, leaflets and other publications that are available through the website, the greater the number of people able to access the service, complete the form or read the leaflet.

Standards for writing for the web

- ✎ Think about your audience – Imagine you are a member of the public using the site and think about how they would expect the information to be presented.
- ✎ Write in Plain English and avoid jargon and technical information that some readers may not understand. If you think you need to explain a word, don't use it.
- ✎ Avoid clichés and puns – international users may find these difficult to understand.
- ✎ Limit metaphors – users may take you literally and beware of using clever headings since users rely on scanning to pick up the meaning of the text.
- ✎ Use 'you', 'we' and 'our' as opposed to 'the Council', 'the applicant', etc wherever possible.
- ✎ Use active words such as 'writing,' 'hoping', 'using', 'publishing' rather than passive.
- ✎ Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs – assume a low level understanding, no background knowledge and a short attention span! Web English is generally 50% shorter than normal and needs to be scannable.
- ✎ Make your first paragraph a summary of the page so users can immediately see if they are in the right place or make sure your heading clearly sums up the page.
- ✎ Where possible break down the content using bullet points or sub-headings to break up the text
- ✎ Make sure the topic flows logically.
- ✎ Check your spelling and grammar – poor spelling and poor or missing punctuation slows the user down and can make it more difficult to understand. This will affect the credibility of the information.

- ✎ If you have a lot of detailed information to put on the web, write a basic summary and add the main document as a pdf or a separate page with a link.
- ✎ If you do have a long page, make it easier for the user by adding bookmarks (links at the top of a page that take the user directly to a place on the same page)
- ✎ Never capitalize blocks of text – they are harder to read and they can imply shouting.
- ✎ Don't underline text – all links are underlined so using it in any other way may confuse the user.
- ✎ Use only black text – users may think text in another colour is a link
- ✎ Bold text should only be used rarely as it can look messy and distract the user.
- ✎ Italics should also be used sparingly as they are difficult to read on screen and don't always print well.
- ✎ You must not rely solely on colour to indicate something.
- ✎ Avoid 'sales' language that is overly boastful or exaggerated. We are not selling local government – we are providing a service for our users. A more objective style will make our information more credible and trustworthy.
- ✎ If you need to copy and paste text into the content management system always cleanse the text first in Notepad. Failure to do this will cause problems with the functionality of the page and it will fail accessibility requirements.

Format for publishing on the web

Links

Links can be used very effectively to navigate users around the site or to other sites that may provide extra information.

If you are linking to an outside site make sure you satisfy yourself that the site you are linking to does not contain material that is offensive or that may reflect badly on the council.

Use a link to an outside site rather than endorse a private company or group on our site.

Make sure your link is meaningful in itself. Write, for example, [read the latest news releases here](#). Never write [click here](#). This is to ensure it makes sense to people who use a screen reader (such as the visually impaired). 'Click here' gives no indication what the link is for when accessibility tools are being used.

Avoid 'teaser' links such as [click here for exciting news](#) - we are not a sales website, our visitors expect clear, reliable information and want to know where the link will take them.

Try to make links active by asking the user to do something – that way they will know what the link involves e.g.

- [Complete an online survey here](#)
- [Find your nearest recycling centre](#)
- [Tell us what you think about our summer activities programme](#)

Downloads/documents

PDFs can be a useful way of including a lot of information on the site without alienating every user who doesn't need such detailed information. They are basically an attachment that users can download but they must be in a specific format.

Please note: The external site should minimise the use of Word for forms and documents because Word is not easily accessible for all users. PDF format should be the preference for attaching documents and Achieve software for forms. Please contact the Web Editor or the ICT helpdesk if you need assistance.

PDFs should be no larger than 5mb. Wherever practical, documents should be saved as Rich Text Format (for Word documents) and CSV (for excel documents), rather than in their native Microsoft Office format. If you are unsure how to do this, contact the IT helpdesk.

If you provide attachments that users can download, think about what

File names you use. It is important to be specific in your filenames and think about what would be logical to the public, for instance [01052013.pdf](#) might be very useful to council employees as a dated document but it will not mean anything to the public.

A well named file will help a user find it if they save it on their hard disk.

Filenames can't have spaces in them so use hyphens to make it easier to read e.g [Performance-Plan-2013.pdf](#)

Never use the '&' symbol in a filename because it confuses some browsers.

After the name of the downloadable file you should include the file type and size in brackets, for example, (.pdf / 2.3mb).

House style

It is important that similar types of information such as addresses and contact details, and the use of branding and logos should be consistent throughout the website.

In most cases, you should abide by the information in the **Corporate Style Guide** (coming soon), which is available from the Communications Team.

Addresses, where included, should follow this format:

Job Title
Division
Company/Organisation
Address line 1
Address line 2
Town/city/county
Postcode

tel: (+44) 00000 000000
fax: (+44) 00000 000000
email: [xxxxx@xxxxxxxxx.xx.xx](#)
Website: [www.abcdefg.co.uk](#)

Note

- **Tel, fax and email are all lower case**
- **The email address should all be lower case**

Wherever possible please use the contact details box, as these details can be changed globally.

When adding contact details for services or information, never use an individual email address or give individual employees' names – always use job titles or generic email addresses.

Some of the generic email addresses are:

[xxxxxxxx.xxx@xxxxxxxx.xxx.xx](#)
[housing@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](#)

Images

Good photos should tell the user something more about, or give a better understanding of, the content of the page. If the photo is poor quality or irrelevant it is not worth including – it just takes up valuable space on the page and does nothing to add to the usability of the site.

- Photos should be no larger than 100kb
- Images must not be used to replace text. (This will fail our accessibility auditing)
- Images must be in .jpg or .gif format.
- Images must have short, meaningful alt text.
- Complex images conveying detailed information (eg; pie charts, diagrams) must be accompanied by a text description.
- Photographs of people must have the relevant permission.
- Copyright material must have the relevant permission.
- Maps must acknowledge the copyright owner and comply with any usage restrictions.
- Do not use animated images without consulting the Communications/Web Team first.

If you are unsure whether your picture is suitable for use on the site, contact either the Web Editor or the Technical Web Developer.

The use of children in photographs is a very sensitive issue. All photographs of children that appear on the site should have the written permission of the parents or guardians of the child. If in doubt, it is wiser to err on the side of caution or seek advice from the Communications/Web Team.

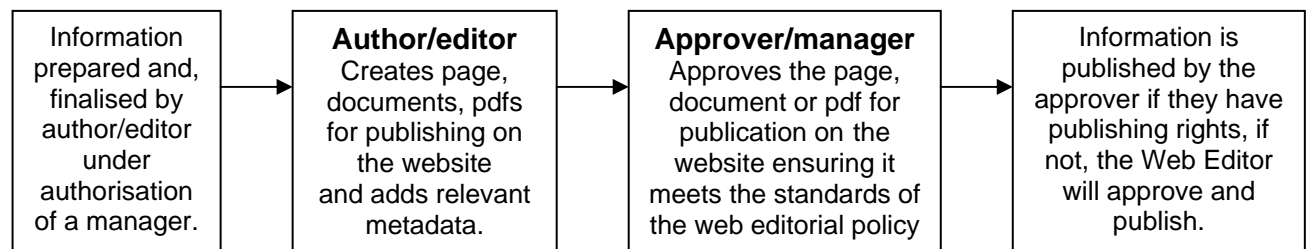
In the case of photographs of individuals, it is also necessary to have the subject's written permission before including the photo on the website.

It is also important to be aware of potential political issues when using photographs of councillors. In such cases, be mindful that images should be representative of all political parties and should display no particular bias for any one group or affiliation.

Forms

The Council is trying to make as many of its services as possible available online. If you have a service, a form or an application that residents of the district could complete online, please discuss the requirement with either the Communications/Web Team or, if it is a technical query, the Technical Web Developer.

The Process



There is a simple process for information to appear on the web. Each division will have responsibility for their own information on the site (even though the navigation list will not be split by division) and there will be nominated people from each team that will have been trained on how to create web pages (these are the authors/editors).

A list of authors and editors can be found on:

The authors/editors will create pages with this editorial policy in mind but with Goss, the page will need to be manually 'signed off' or approved by a manager or content approver before it will be published on the web.

The approvers therefore, have the responsibility of making sure that the information published by their division is up-to-date, relevant and up to the standards set in this editorial policy.

The content approver is usually the line manager of the authors/editors.

The Communications/Web Team will regularly review the information on the site to ensure it is consistent with these standards and will review the pages monthly for broken links and to ensure that they are compliant with the Web Accessibility Initiative.

Website monitoring

The division of responsibility

It is the responsibility of each division, and ultimately the Head of Service for that division to guarantee that their web pages on our website are accurate, written according to the web editorial policy and are regularly kept up-to-date.

- ✓ **The pages must be accurate** – inaccurate or misleading information on the website could not only cause confusion and distrust for visitors to the site but could potentially leave the council open to legal issues.
- ✓ **The pages must follow the guidelines in the Web Editorial Policy** – the editorial policy is there to help anyone who is writing for the web. It is not enough to just copy and paste information onto the web. It must be readable, concise and in plain English.
- ✓ **The pages must be up-to-date** – it is essential that the website is kept up-to-date. For the site to be taken seriously and used by our visitors as a trusted source of information, it must be reviewed at least monthly to make sure the pages your division is responsible for haven't dated or there is information on there that is no longer accurate. Similarly, the website should not be used as a dumping ground for documents – if it's still useful leave it on there, if it isn't take it off.

The Communications/Web Team will periodically review the website to make sure pages are up-to-date, in the right place and are correctly attached to the A-Z. However, this should not be seen as a failsafe for the monitoring process – there should be procedures already in place within each division, even within individual teams to keep the website regularly monitored.

Useful Contacts

Liz Maule, CDC Web Editor, extension 1755
Robert Walker, SNC Web Editor, extension 2366
Janet Ferris, Corporate Communications Manager, extension 1870
Roger Elmer, Technical Web Developer, extension 7954