



Accessible Communications for All Project

Best Practice Guide

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Introduction

Purpose of guidance

Welcome to this Best Practice Guide to accessibility for health and social care communications. This guide aims to provide insights and tips for improving the accessibility of communications across different mediums.

The guide is based on work with disabled people in Tower Hamlets for a project called Accessible Communications for All. Focus groups were held to review the accessibility of communications from three local organisations. The feedback from those groups informed coproduced training and this guide. You can find more details on the project in the appendix.

What we mean by a *communication*

By a communication, we mean an instance of information sharing using any medium. This includes digital media:

- Social media (X/Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.)
- Websites
- Emails

And physical media:

- Letters
- Posters
- Leaflets

What we mean by *accessibility* and why it is important

Accessibility in communications refers to the inclusive design and delivery of information that ensures everyone can access and understand the content without barriers. Consideration should be given to the accessibility of all the features of a communication to ensure that no one is excluded from its message. From the language and pictures used to how they are arranged and formatted, there may be simple changes that improve accessibility.

If a communication is not understood by a group of people, they miss out on its message. This is particularly important with health and social care, where access to and understanding the message can improve health outcomes and reduce health inequality.

Accessibility is not only about comprehension – it can also affect engagement and the impact of the message. It may be that someone understands the message, but due to poor accessibility, does not engage with it. This is particularly true for social media platforms where interactions are brief and there is limited time to catch a reader's attention. An inaccessible communication can cause someone to disengage from the message if they don't feel their needs have been considered or accommodated.

Who this guide is for

The project and this guide are focussed on health and social care, but the insights and best practice are applicable to all communications related to any subject. Likewise, though the project worked with organisations' communications teams, the guide can be used by everyone, whether in a professional or personal capacity, to reach as many people as possible.

How to use the guide

The guide can be read as a whole, or you can navigate to individual parts for reference. The Accessibility Checklist can be referred to each time you produce a communication prior to publishing it.

The guide is arranged as follows:

- **General recommendations:** things to consider when producing any content that can improve accessibility.
- **Specific recommendations:** things to consider related to specific characteristics of a communication. Arranged in categories of Text, Messaging and Inclusivity, Design and Digital, with explanation of the issues and examples.
- **Accessibility Checklist:** questions to ask yourself and things to consider when producing a communication to help assess its accessibility and prompt improvements.

Each section begins with a summary followed by a series of questions to ask yourself when designing a communication. These questions are collated in the Accessibility Checklist so you can run through them before publishing a communication to improve its accessibility.

The specific recommendations have detail and examples to aid understanding.

General recommendations

Design vs accessibility

When producing a communication, there may be a need to balance design and accessibility. Elements of design may not be accessible to all impairments, but there is no reason that the communication's message and impact be reduced by making it accessible to everyone. Finding that balance should allow you to create a communication that is both accessible and attractive to the target audience.

Simplicity

As a rule of thumb, keeping a communication simple is beneficial to everyone engaging with it. This needn't compromise the message or its impact. By simplifying language and design and keeping the messaging focussed, the communication stands more chance of being understood by everyone.

Consider different impairments

Before publishing a communication, consider how people with different impairments may engage with it. For example: Does the complexity of the language used create a barrier for people with a learning disability? Are there alternative ways to interact with images for people with a visual impairment?

Competing access needs

Accessibility is not always an objective issue. People may have differing opinions on what is or isn't accessible, and some impairments have competing access needs. Unless the communication is targeting a specific group of people with known access needs, it is best to find middle ground that can reach as many people as possible.

Imagine you're not a communications professional

If you work daily with communications, it's possible to forget that not everyone will have the same level of understanding and appreciation of certain design elements and content or familiarity with the platform used for the communication. Put yourself in the position of someone who has not heard of what you are advertising and has not used the communication platform before. Would they know what the acronym you've used means? Would they understand what a hashtag is used for?

Content from other sources

When re-using content such as pictures from other sources, accessibility still needs consideration. Even if the content comes from a trusted source, you should not assume it is accessible to everyone.

Using content across multiple platforms

If re-using content for multiple platforms, such as different social media, or using a physical poster for digital media, consider how this affects interaction. Adapt the communication for each platform. For example, a QR code on a poster can be scanned far easier than on digital platforms. Links can be clicked on Twitter/X, but not Instagram.

Specific Issues and Recommendations

Section 1: Text

This section covers text in communications. What is written and how it is displayed affects how accessible the communication is – how likely it is the reader can engage with and understand it.

Consider the following:

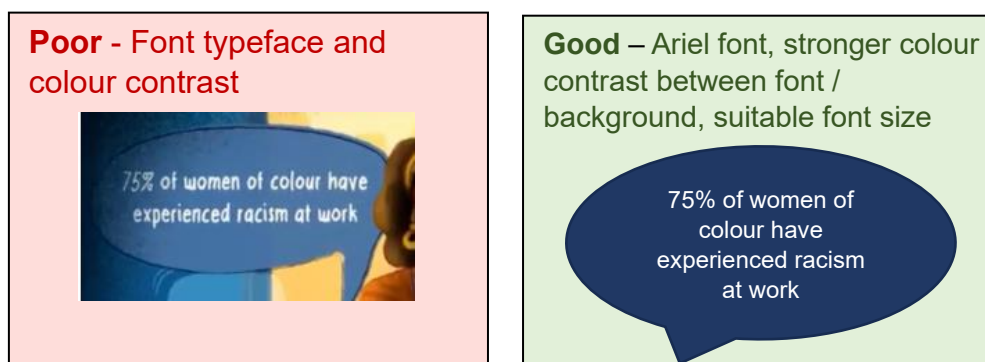
- Is the typeface and font readable?
- Is emphasised text (bold, italic, underline) necessary?
- Is the line spacing large enough?
- Is text justified left?

Characteristic: Font

Issues and recommendations

- Size: usually 12/14 points [larger for headings, if required]
- Typeface: use accessible fonts, for example Arial, Tahoma, Calibri, Helvetica, Verdana. These are clear and distinct.
- Colour: provide a strong contrast to the text background

Examples



Further reading

Accessible Fonts [What Are Accessible Fonts? \(accessibility.com\)](https://accessibility.com/What-Are-Accessible-Fonts/)

Characteristic: Text Emphasis – Bold, Italics, Underline

Ways of emphasising elements of texts are not always accessible. For example, people with dyslexia can find it hard to read large amounts of bold or italicised text. People with a visual impairment may use a screen reader, and these do not necessarily announce if text is bold or italicised. If the emphasis is important, it is best practice to find an alternative way of expressing this.

Otherwise, there are some recommendations below for when emphasising text.

Issues and recommendations

Bold

- Use with care to give emphasis to headings and words / phrases used in a paragraph.
- Avoid using bold for whole paragraphs.

Example

Poor – bold in a whole paragraph.

Use restraint when using bold type. Whole paragraphs of text set in bold type are hard to read. The reason bold type creates emphasis is that it slows down the reader and forces the eye to take in the words more carefully. If you slow the reader too much, they may just skip over what you have to say.

Good – bold used with care.

Use restraint when using bold type. Whole paragraphs of text set in bold type are hard to read. The reason bold type creates emphasis is that it slows down the reader and forces the eye to take in the words more carefully. If you slow the reader too much, they may just skip over what you have to say.

Some typefaces are even harder to read once made bold. Proportional spacing can be lost. See the example below.

Example

Poor – this is the typeface Impact which is a heavy font and hard to read in bold.

Standard: **headings and words**

Bold: **headings and words**

Good – any accessible typeface should give accessible content. This is Arial.

Standard: headings and words

Bold: **headings and words**

Further reading

<https://www.lifewire.com/how-to-use-bold-type-effectively-1074100>

Italics

- Use with care to give emphasis.
- Some typefaces are harder to read when italicised.

Example of usage

1. to give emphasis to a specific word / phrase:

I am *not* going to do that!

2. using figurative language:

I must have eaten at least a *million* cakes today!

3. to indicate a quote or speech:

As usual, Rose told everyone to *hurry up*.

Using non accessible fonts with bold and italic characteristics

From the above examples, some fonts produce a more accessible text content with these characteristics than others.

You can experiment with other fonts that are not necessarily designated as accessible.

Adding the bold characteristic may improve the readability of the italic characteristic.

Example of usage

1. I am ***not*** going to do that!
2. I must have eaten at least a ***million*** cakes today!
3. As usual, Rose told everyone to ***hurry up***

The best way to discover a working combination is to test it on the impairment group that would be expected to have a problem with this characteristic.

Underline

- It is best to avoid underline text as it is hard to read for some impairments.
- It can lead to confusion of whether a word/phrase is a hyperlink.

Example

Poor – potentially unreadable or distracting.

Our videographer is available to visit your location and on **Wednesday 25th October 2023, after 2pm** or **first thing Thursday 26th October 2023.** If you want to contact directly to confirm logistics, you can do so on...

Characteristic: Linespacing

Issues and recommendations

- Ensure that vertical text lines are not packed too closely together.

Example

Poor – lines are too close together.

Even when using a typeface that is considered accessible, it's possible to use it in ways that can create barriers for users. To avoid this, using fewer fonts...

Good – lines are reasonably spaced.

Even when using a typeface that is considered accessible, it's possible to use it in ways that can create barriers for users...

Further reading

How to adjust line spacing [Word: Line and Paragraph Spacing \(qcfglobal.org\)](http://qcfglobal.org/Word:LineandParagraphSpacing)

Characteristic: Justification

Issues and recommendations

- Justification can affect the readability of text.
- Avoid using full and right justification.
- Limit the use of centre justification, usually just for headings.

Example

Full justification

Poor – creates proportional spacing between words, that can be difficult to follow.

Even when using a typeface that is considered accessible, it's possible to use it in ways that can create barriers for users. To avoid this, use fewer fonts...

Good – word spacing remains constant making the dialogue flow easier (left justified).

Even when using a typeface that is considered accessible, it's possible to use it in ways that can create barriers for users. To avoid this, use fewer fonts...

Example

Left justification

Poor – harder to read for left-to-right readers.

Even when using a typeface that is considered accessible, it's possible to use it in ways that can create barriers for users. To avoid this, using fewer fonts...

Good – easier to read for left-to-right readers.

Even when using a typeface that is considered accessible, it's possible to use it in ways that can create barriers for users. To avoid this, using fewer fonts...

Centre justification

This can be used to enhance the design of certain elements of communications, particularly headings.

Caution is advised as centre text can be less accessible for some impairment groups. Try to find a balance between the design elements you would like to incorporate whilst at the same time maintaining accessibility.

Further reading

Accessible line justification <https://accessible-digital-documents.com/blog/justified-text/>

Section 2: Messaging and Inclusivity

In this section we will look at issues and recommendations around messaging and inclusivity. Clarity of audience and purpose and inclusion of important details can affect the accessibility of a communication. Ensuring that language used is simple and free of jargon helps more people understand the communication.

Consider the following:

- Is the purpose of the communication clear?
- Is it clear who the communication is for?
- Is the language simple?
- Are jargon, abbreviations and initialisms explained?
- Is there a balance of negative and positive messaging?

Characteristic: Clarity of audience and purpose

Who is the message for? What is it about? Where there is mixed messages and uncertainty about who the communication is for, people are more likely to disengage.

Issues and recommendations

- Ensure it is clear who is being targeted – particularly for events and services.
- Images should reflect the target audience and relate to the message.
- Ensure it is clear what the communication is about.
- Avoid multiple or mixed messages in one communication.
- For events and services, ensure it is clear what is being offered.

Example

It could be interpreted that this event is only for older residents due to the people present in the picture.



The area pictured is different from the address of the event.

It is unclear what will happen or is being offered at this event.
A brief description would help.

Characteristic: Negative/positive balance

When a communication is heavily focussed on negative messaging, it can put people off. The reader may disengage if they feel they are being told off or talked down to.

Messages can often be reworded to change negative to positives. For example, discussing the benefits of giving up smoking compared to how harmful smoking is.

Issues

- Use positive messages over negative.
- Where negative messaging is required, substantiate with evidence.
- Encourage informed choice rather than telling off the reader.

Example



This image uses positive messaging by covering the benefits of avoiding sugary fizzy drinks.

A negative slant on the same subject would mention that fizzy drinks are expensive, can cause weight gain and erode teeth.

Characteristic: Jargon and Complex language

Jargon and complex language can present a barrier to understanding. Avoiding jargon and simplifying the language used helps reach as many people as possible. Where there is no alternative, simple explanations of the terminology should be included.

Issues and recommendations

- Use Plain English.
- Avoid long sentences with multiple clauses. Use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Avoid technical terms and complex technical descriptions.
- Unless you know otherwise, assume your target audience has minimal knowledge of the technical aspects of what you are writing about.
- Use formatting to aid understanding of complex issues, such as line spacing and bullet points.

Example

Poor

The Integrated Urgent primary care service offers urgent care services for residents and visitors of Tower Hamlets. If you are unwell and need urgent care in Tower Hamlets, please contact 111 for initial assessment, if further assessment is required you will be directed to the IUPC Services. This may include a call back from a GP or Nurse or face-to-face consultation with a clinician.

Better

The Integrated Urgent Primary Care Service [IUPC] offers urgent care services for residents and visitors of Tower Hamlets.

If you are unwell and need urgent care in Tower Hamlets, please **contact 111** for initial assessment.

If further assessment is required, you will be directed to the IUPC Services. This may include a:

- call back from a GP / Nurse or
- face-to-face consultation with a clinician

Further reading

Plain English Campaign: <https://www.plainenglish.co.uk>

Characteristic: Typos and Grammatical Errors

Typos and grammatical errors can blur the meaning of a communication, or in some cases change it. They also risk undermining trust in the communication.

Issues

- Review text with word processor spelling / grammar checker.
- If possible, review again after a time break.
- If possible, ask a third party to proofread before publishing.

Further reading

Proofreading for Common Errors: <https://wts.indiana.edu/writing-guides/proofreading-grammar.html>

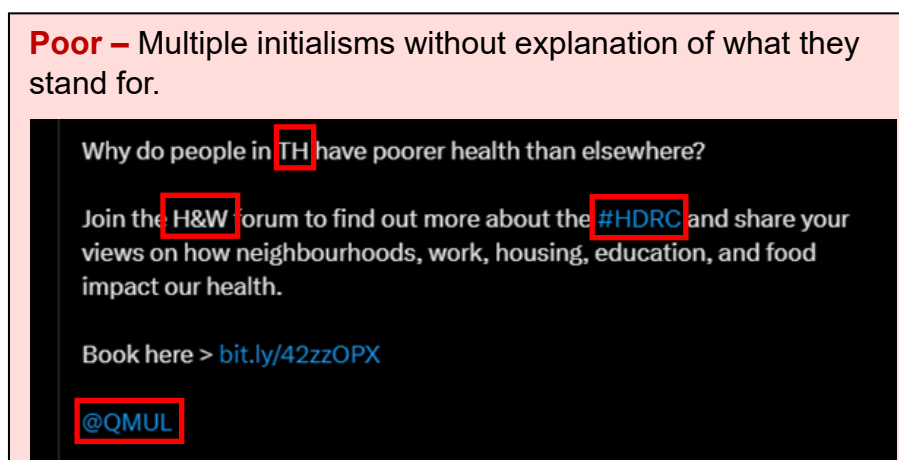
Characteristic: Abbreviations and initialisms

Use of abbreviations, acronyms and initialisms without explanation of what they stand for can cause barriers to understanding.

Issues and recommendations

- Don't assume that common abbreviations and initialisms are understood, for example DWP, BT, NHS.
- Always define them in their first usage within the communication.
- Consider whether the term requires further description or a link to further reading.

Example



Characteristic: Important information

Full details of events and services are important so that the reader can decide whether it is appropriate for them and if they want to attend.

Including accessibility information means that people with access needs do not have to spend extra time finding out whether they can attend.

Issues and recommendations

- Include contact information, ideally with more than one option, e.g., phone number and email address.
- Include accessibility information, e.g., wheelchair access, hearing-loop.
- Include details of where, when, and for whom the event or service is, and how to access it.

Section 3: Pictures

In this section we will look at various characteristics that can affect the accessibility of communications that incorporate pictures.

The presence of images and other media content can greatly enhance the look and design of a communication. The saying, a picture is worth 1000 words, can be true but, it is important to find a balance between text and images.

People are often drawn to look at pictures before reading the text. If the picture is inaccessible, it may stop the reader from continuing with the communication. They may not read the text at all.

Consider the following:

- Are the pictures relevant to the text?
- Are there distracting elements in the background of the picture?
- Are the pictures appropriately sized for their content?
- Are there too many pictures and does this distract from the text?
- Are there too few pictures and does this make the text less appealing, more difficult to read or understand?

Characteristic: Relevance and background

The relevance of pictures to the message is very important. People can become distracted or confused by pictures that are not directly relevant. Time is spent deciphering why the picture has been chosen.

Similarly, the background of a picture can distract from what you wish the reader to focus on.

For communications about events and services, where you are trying to attract people, it can help to use pictures that include people.

Issues and recommendations

- Use pictures that are directly relevant to the text.
- Avoid pictures that require additional thinking to understand why it has been used with the text.
- Avoid pictures with busy backgrounds that can distract the reader.
- Use pictures with people in for events and services.

Example

Integrated Urgent Primary Care

Offering urgent care services for residents and visitors in Tower Hamlets.

Poor

Although this picture shows a sign with the name of the service, the bulk of the picture is taken up with a picture of a road and building.



Integrated Urgent Primary Care

Offering urgent care services for residents and visitors in Tower Hamlets.

Good

This picture is more relevant to the service and shows people receiving healthcare.



Characteristic: Size and Detail

Using pictures to accompany text can help reinforce the message of the communication and help people understand it. But it is important to use pictures of appropriate size, so they do not overwhelm the text and distract from it.

Issues and recommendations

- Size pictures so they are balanced with the accompanying text.
- Ensure the size of the picture is appropriate for the level of detail within it.

Example

Poor – small picture with too much detail.

Two of these pictures are too small to discern the detail within the picture.

Ensure that pictures used are of a sufficient size to display the details you want your target audience to view.

Celebrating Health Spot's three-year anniversary

In-house GP surgery for young people Health Spot recently celebrated its three-year anniversary.

The event featured in-depth talks, a panel discussion, and a Q&A session with guest speakers from Spotlight, its partners, and service users.

The Care Group's Head of Primary Care Development, Maju Miah attended the anniversary event. He said: "The celebration was fantastic and an opportunity to hear about Health Spot's story, its impact and learning from those involved such as health professionals and young people."

Every Tuesday, between 4-6pm, young people can have a 15-30 minute consultation over the phone or via video, about health needs they may be experiencing.



Characteristic: Quantity

Pictures can be used to break up large bodies of text which helps with readability, attention and understanding. Though it is possible to use too many pictures and have the text overwhelmed or bypassed.

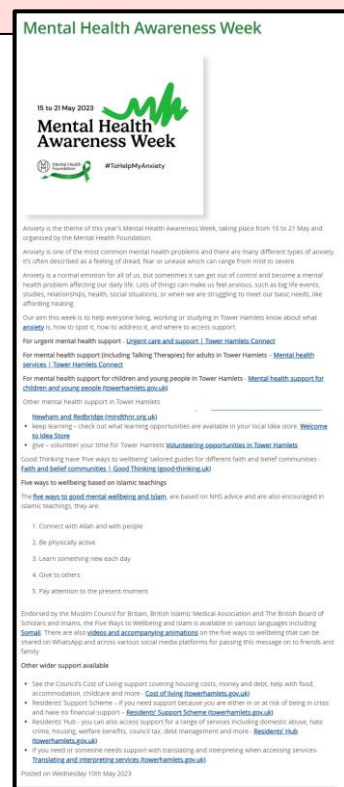
Issues and recommendations

- Use enough pictures to break up large amounts of text.
- Use pictures to separate sections of longer communications, e.g., websites and newsletters.
- Use pictures to support the text and reinforce its message.

Examples

Poor - too few pictures

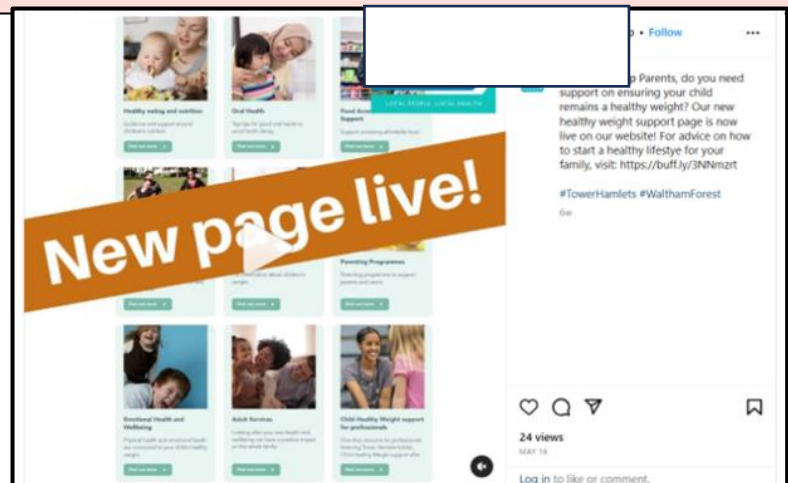
This article is continuous text and whilst broken up into manageable sized paragraphs, pictures could improve its readability.



Poor – too many pictures

This page has numerous pictures that form a gallery but are obscured by the banner on top of it.

The accompanying text in the post may be ignored due to the overwhelming number of pictures.



Section 4: Design

This section looks at elements of design which can affect accessibility. There may be design choices that look good on the page but make it harder for someone to engage with the content. It is important to think about the overall structure and *flow*, particularly for longer form communications such as websites and newsletters.

Consider the following:

- Are there clear headings and distinct sections?
- Is information grouped logically? For example, by topic or audience.
- Are there decorative elements that could distract or overwhelm the reader?
- Is there a contents page to aid navigation of longer communications?

Characteristic: Structure

Issues and recommendations

- Use headings which are formatted differently from the main body of text.
- Use shapes and highlights to separate different sections.
- If there are multiple audiences or themes/topics to a communication, group these together.

Example

The image shows a screenshot of a newsletter layout with several design annotations. The newsletter content includes:

- A paragraph about recognizing and understanding the impact of implicit and explicit racism, and implementing meaningful strategies to create genuinely inclusive workplaces.
- A link to Account3 leads the Tower Hamlets Women's Network and is part of the Tower Hamlets Equalities Hub and a valued member of THCVS.
- A blue header bar with the text "THCVS - Events, Workshops and Updates".
- A graphic with a balance scale and the text "INFLUENCING CHANGE" and the THCVS logo.
- A section titled "Tower Hamlets CVS AGM 2022" with the date "Tuesday 25 April / 1:30 to 3.00pm / On-line".
- A paragraph about creating real change through collaboration.
- A paragraph about hearing from those working to influence change.
- A paragraph about the Mayor's community grants fund.
- A blue button labeled "BOOK YOUR PLACE".
- A blue header bar with the text "#Equalities in Tower Hamlets".
- A teal footer bar with the text "SURVEY Your LGBT+ Rights" and "We want to hear about LGBT+".

Annotations on the right side of the image point to specific design elements:

- A green box labeled "Good" points to the blue header bar, stating: "The headings are distinct, helping to create sections and give a structure."
- A green box labeled "Good" points to the blue button, stating: "Distinct section separation".
- A green box labeled "Good" points to the blue header bar, stating: "Distinct headings".

Characteristic: Navigation

Issues and recommendations

- Consider how someone would read and interact with the communication.
- Use a contents section with clickable links to fast-track to content.

Example

The image shows a screenshot of a webpage for the Tower Hamlets CVS AGM 2022. The page has a blue header with the text 'THCVS - Events, Workshops and Updates'. Below the header is a large image of a balance scale with the text 'INFLUENCING CHANGE' and the thcvs logo. To the right of the image is a text block containing the event details and a 'BOOK YOUR PLACE' button. Red arrows point from green callout boxes to specific elements on the page, indicating good navigation features.

Good Flow of content

- Starts with a distinct heading, though the text could be larger
- engaging picture element
- distinct heading
- well-structured body, broken up into short paragraphs
- logical placement of hyperlink

THCVS - Events, Workshops and Updates

Tower Hamlets CVS
Annual General Meeting 2022
Tuesday 25th April
1:30pm - 3:00pm
On-line

INFLUENCING CHANGE

thcvs
Council for Voluntary Service

Tower Hamlets CVS AGM 2022
Tuesday 25 April / 1:30 to 3.00pm / On-line

We can only create real change if we collaborate, both within the voluntary & community sector and with statutory partners. How we can work together to influence change, create more equitable partnerships and address structural inequality in Tower Hamlets?

We will hear from some of those working to influence change in Tower Hamlets and have an opportunity to think about how we can strengthen the influence of the voluntary and community sector on decision makers, statutory partners, funders and commissioners.

We will also hear from Tower Hamlets Council about the results of the community consultation and launch of the Mayor's community grants fund, with a chance to ask questions.

BOOK YOUR PLACE

Characteristic: Colour and Shapes

Bright and bold colours can distract people or affect those with colour sensitivity.

Issues and recommendations

- Consider whether decorative elements of design enhance the communication's content.
- Try calmer, more muted colours.

Example



Poor

Heading accompanied by distracting shapes.



Good

Distinct heading, improving clarity.

Section 5: Digital Only Characteristics

This group of characteristics concern digital communications or elements of physical communications that require something digital to interact with them.

This includes websites and social media, but also some elements of flyers and posters.

Consider the following:

- Do pictures have alt-text?
- Are hyperlinks and QR codes explained?
- Do videos have explanations and subtitles?
- Do animated elements move too quickly or distract from the text?

Characteristic: Alt-text

Alternative text, or alt-text as it is commonly referred to, is a description that accompanies any digital picture to help people understand what the picture shows and means. It is particularly useful for people who have a visual impairment.

How alt-text is implemented depends on the platform being used for the communication. Guides for this can be found online.

Issues and recommendations

- All pictures should have alt-text.
- Briefly describe the picture and its meaning. The text need not capture every detail.
- Pictures sourced from elsewhere may not have alt-text embedded.
- Text within a picture should be repeated in the alt-text.

Examples

Poor – alt text not present or has poor image description.

Skaters.



Good – alt-text describes the picture briefly.

Three ice skaters on a frozen river lined with trees.



Further reading

How to write good alt-text: <https://supercooldesign.co.uk/blog/how-to-write-good-alt-text>

Characteristic: QR Codes

A QR code (Quick Response code) is a block of black and white squares or pixels set in a grid that stores data for compatible technology to read. A smartphone or camera can quickly process the information contained in a QR code's specific arrangement of pixels, making it a convenient way to store and access data.

Issues and recommendations

- A higher proportion of disabled people or people with impairments do not have access to technology that can read QR codes.
- Do not assume that anyone with internet access also has this technology.
- Ensure there is an alternative to a QR code.
- Ensure a QR code includes a text description of its purpose.

Example

In this example, there is no description of what scanning the QR does or any alternative to it.

It would be improved by having a hyperlink as alternative and a line such as:

Scan the QR code to visit our complaints website.



Publication date: May 2023

Characteristic: Hyperlinks

To improve the accessibility of hyperlinks, consideration should be given to how they are displayed and their quantity.

People may be more likely to interact with a hyperlink if it is clear what following the link will do – where it will take them.

Link shortening services, such as bit.ly, which replace the original domain name, can cause people to question the legitimacy of the link.

Issues

- Use hyperlinks that contain a recognised and trusted domain name.
- Avoid abbreviated and / or non-standard format alternative to domain names.
- Avoid using too many links in text paragraphs.
- Ensure a hyperlink also has a text description of its purpose. If required summarise them in a separate section.

Example - Avoid using too many links in text paragraphs.

Five ways to wellbeing

Evidence suggests there are 5 steps you can take to boost your mental health and wellbeing. Trying these things could help you feel more positive, especially during difficult times, and able to get the most out of life.

These are:

- connect with the people around you, family, friends, neighbours or your local community through – to learn more please see [Staying connected | Tower Hamlets Connect](#)
- be active: go for a walk or a run, garden, or join on of our sport and physical activities [Sports, dance and exercise activities | Tower Hamlets Connect](#)
- take notice - be curious and aware of the world around you - [Mindfulness | Mind in Tower Hamlets, Newham and Redbridge \(mindthnr.org.uk\)](#)
- keep learning – check out what learning opportunities are available in your local Idea store. [Welcome to Idea Store](#)
- give – volunteer your time for Tower Hamlets [Volunteering opportunities in Tower Hamlets](#)

Good Thinking have 'Five ways to wellbeing' tailored guides for different faith and belief communities - [Faith and belief communities | Good Thinking \(good-thinking.uk\)](#)

Poor – these links are well defined but there are too many of them embedded into the text. This can be distracting and make the text hard to read.

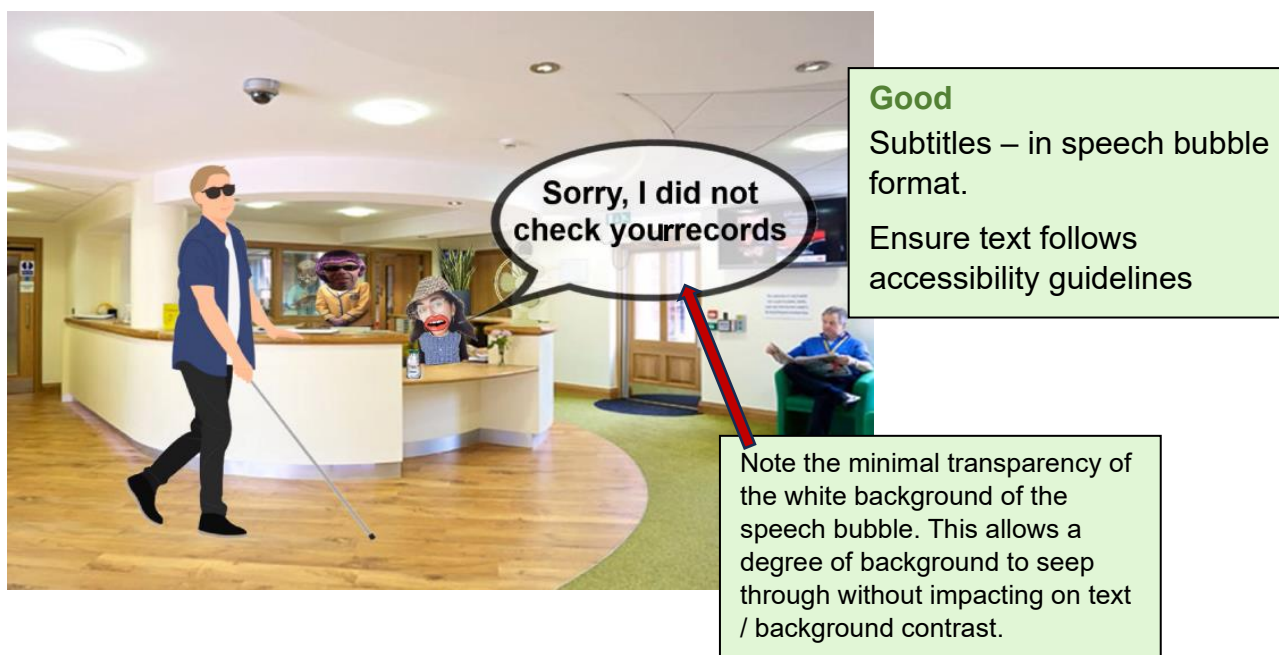
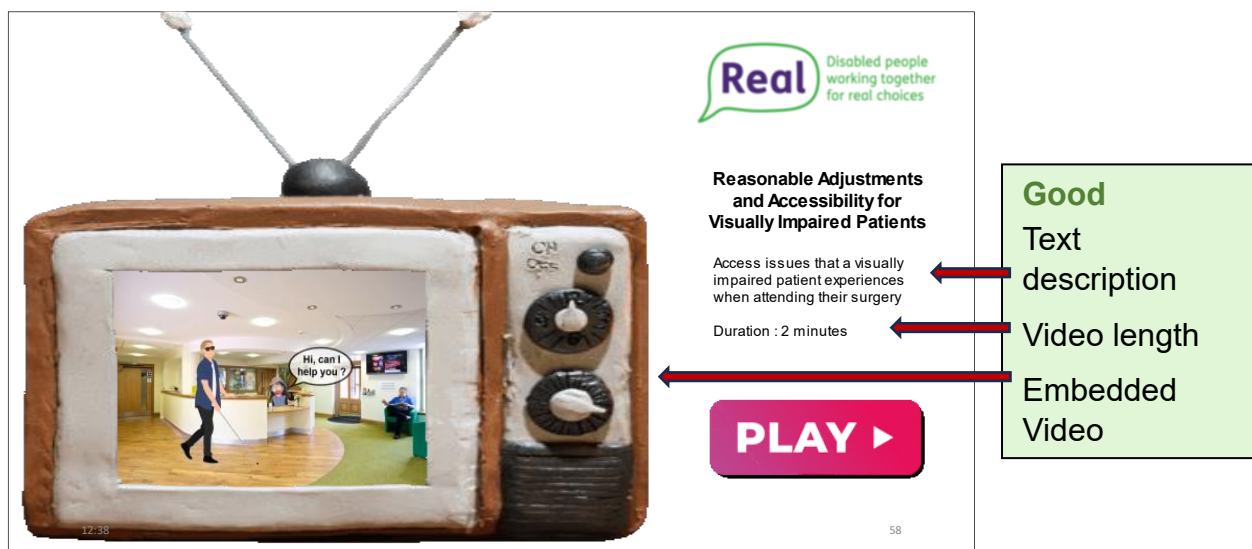
Characteristic: Videos

When using video content in a digital communication, there are some things to consider regarding their accessibility. Some people will feel uncomfortable playing a video unless they have an idea of what it's about and how long it is. Others will be unable to experience the video's sound without subtitles and audio description.

Issues and recommendations

- Include text description of the video's content and its length.
- Embed the video rather than link to an external site.
- Ensure the video has subtitles / captions and audio description.

Examples



Characteristic: Animations

Animations, such as scrolling banners on websites, may be inaccessible if they move too fast to read or understand their content. They can also distract from the text, cause anxiety, or overwhelm people, so consideration should be given to whether they truly enhance the communication.

Issues and recommendations

- Ensure the speed of any animated text is slow enough to be read.
- Avoid flashing animations which can trigger seizures.
- Consider whether the animation distracts from the message.
- Consider whether the animation enhances the message.

Further reading

Making your web animations accessible: <https://www.boia.org/blog/making-your-web-animations-accessible-5-tips>

Characteristic: Emojis and emoticons

Emojis and emoticons are not accessible to everyone. Not everyone understands what they mean, and some people may not be able to read them at all.

Screen readers can read aloud an emoji (e.g., 😊), but will emoticons (e.g., :) will be read as punctuation marks.

Issues and recommendations

- Avoid emojis other than commonly recognised smileys.
- Do not use emojis to replace words.
- If you must use emojis, place them at the end of sentences.
- Do not use emoticons.

Further reading

Emoji readability guidelines: <https://readabilityguidelines.co.uk/images/emojis/>

Accessibility Checklist

When producing a communication, or before publishing one, you can use the following checklist to help consider the communication's accessibility. Read through the questions. If the answer to any of them is *no*, and you cannot justify why it is necessary, you can revisit the relevant section of the guide to improve the accessibility.

Readability and Digital Accessibility

1. **Check the font. Are the typeface, size and colour contrast readable?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Font](#)

2. **Is text left justified?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Justification](#)

3. **Do images have alt-text?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Alt-text](#)

4. **Are hyperlinks and QR codes explained?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Hyperlinks](#), [Characteristic: QR Codes](#)

5. **Do videos have subtitles and a text summary?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Videos](#)

Messaging and Inclusivity

6. **Is the purpose of the communication clear? Are there multiple or mixed messages?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Clarity of audience and purpose](#)

7. **Is it clear who the target audience is?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Clarity of audience and purpose](#)

8. **Is the language simple?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Jargon and Complex language](#)

9. **Are any acronyms/abbreviations/initials and jargon explained?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Abbreviations and initialisms](#)

10. **Is there a balance of positive and negative messaging?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Negative/positive balance](#)

Design and Content

11. **Are there headings and clear separation of information?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Structure](#)

12. **Does the communication have a clear structure and flow?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Navigation](#)

13. **Is the important information included?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Important information](#)

14. **Are pictures relevant to the message and free of distracting elements?**

Relevant guide section: [Characteristic: Relevance and background](#)

Appendix

Project overview and partners

Project overview

NHS England defines health inequalities as, “[...] *unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population, and between different groups within society.*”¹

The Accessible Communications for All project was run under Real’s Engagement, Coproduction and Voice team and funded by the NEL health inequalities fund. The project investigated whether some of the health inequalities experienced by disabled people are exacerbated by inaccessible healthcare communications. Would disabled people have reduced levels of health inequality if information about healthcare was produced with greater consideration of disability access?

Are there elements of these communications that present a barrier to a disabled person’s understanding or engagement? This may be how they are designed, the content itself or the type of media platform.

For example, a leaflet about a primary care service written in too small a font, or with low colour contrast between text and background, or a campaign about healthy eating promoted solely on social media.

The project held 19 sessions reviewing media with 21 participants with a variety of disabilities and access needs. Sessions involved looking through the communications and having open discussions with participants about what does/doesn’t work about them; what would make them more accessible; what would make engagement with the information easier or more likely. 36 healthcare communications were reviewed generating almost 2000 comments and insights.

These insights were used to co-produce and co-deliver a training session on accessible communications and informed the content of this guide.

Project partners

The project involved local communications teams who agreed to send health or social care communications for review, and groups of local disabled people who conducted the reviews.

The communications teams:

- GP Care Group (<https://www.gpcaregroup.org/>)
- Tower Hamlets Council (<https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/>)
- Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (<https://thcvs.org.uk/>)

¹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/national-healthcare-inequalities-improvement-programme/what-are-healthcare-inequalities/#:~:text=Health%20inequalities%20are%20unfair%20and,that%20is%20available%20to%20them.>
(NHS England, 2022)

The co-production groups:

- Real's membership, pan-disability.
- ICM Foundation – a CIC that works with people with learning disabilities and difficulties.
- Tower Hamlets Autism Wednesday group – a peer group of autistic people from Tower Hamlets Autism Service.

Recognition and thanks

This guide would not have been possible without the contributions and hard work from the co-production participants and partner organisations. A huge thank you to everyone who has been involved at ICM Foundation, THAW and Real's membership.

It is the involvement and input from these groups that make the guide, and the training session that it accompanies, vital and valid. It is in everyone's interest, particularly in relation to health and social care, that communications are accessible for all.

Tower Hamlets Autism
Wednesday group

