Barriers to Communication
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About this booklet

A vital part of the equal opportunities policy is making sure that everyone in the community has the chance to get involved with the Council’s activities. And that means making sure information is as accessible as possible to all groups. This booklet has been designed to help services overcome any communication barriers that may exist because of a person’s disability or language. It also points to the support services that exist to help make services as accessible as possible.

For members of the community, it is a standard they can expect to receive from Council services as well as a useful guide to communication.
Why plain language?

Plain language improves communications.

Clackmannanshire Council has a Writing Style Guide which gives guidelines for writing in plain English. Copies are available from the Communications Unit, Clackmannanshire Council, Alloa.

Tel: 01259 452023 Fax: 01259 452117 email:mcochrane@clacks.gov.uk

The principles of plain language remain the same no matter the language or format being used to communicate (for example, Braille).

The full style guide gives basic tips on plain language, but here are the principal rules:

• Before you communicate, ask yourself: who is your audience?

• Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine they are across the table from you. What would you say to them?

• Seek to inform, not to impress. Remember your goal is to be understood - not to show how clever you are. Avoid the use of jargon. Explain any specialist terms you have to use.

• Avoid using language which may be offensive to particular groups.

• Keep your sentences short.

• Use everyday words whenever you can.

• Use “we” and “you” wherever possible.

• Use active instead of passive verbs – it’s more direct. For example:

Your application will be considered (passive) - compared to - we will consider your application (active).
Translating and interpreting minority ethnic community languages

This section is divided into three parts:

- General information about the main languages used in the Clackmannanshire Council area and the local minority ethnic population.
- The Council’s translation service
- Translation tips

General information

- Legally, the Council needs to communicate effectively with the minority ethnic communities in its area.
- Minority ethnic communities within Clackmannanshire Council area are small and scattered.
- The principal languages spoken are Punjabi, Urdu, Polish and Chinese (Cantonese, Hakka and Mandarin.)
- Punjabi speakers from India will use the written form of Punjabi (Gurmuckhi) whereas Punjabi/Urdu speakers from Pakistan use written Urdu. It is important to be aware of this distinction when seeking interpreters or translations.
- Chinese speakers may use one of several forms of spoken Chinese (for example, Cantonese, Hakka and Mandarin) which is significant when seeking an interpreter. Written Chinese is the same across all forms.
- Think through whether a translation is always appropriate. Some people may not be able to read their home language and an interpreter would be a better option.
• Trained, independent interpreters should always be used in preference to a family member or ‘friend’. This reduces the possibility of breaching confidentiality or of placing clients or their ‘interpreters’ in an embarrassing position.

• **Main reception areas and local offices have cards which you can use if you are unsure what language a person speaks. The cards have a simple message written in 28 languages so you can tell which language the interpreter needs to speak.**

• All staff including Managers and Heads of Services should be aware that interpreting and translating services are available. It is equally important that employees dealing immediately with the public are familiar with, and confident in, accessing these services. (See information on key contacts on pages 18 and 19.)

**The Council’s translation service**

Clackmannanshire Council has an agreement with Dundee City Council to provide interpreting and translation services.

This involves using a locally available pool of minority ethnic interpreters. They can also provide information on Braille or audiotape.

**How do we access the service?**

Francine Orr in the Chief Executive’s Service should be your first point of contact.

The Dundee Service provides written translation and will arrange for an interpreter to attend a planned meeting. For occasions where someone needs a response there and then, the Language Line 0171 713 0090 should be used. However, bear in mind that this line is expensive with charges starting at £4 a minute from 8am to 6pm and out of hours rates start at £5.50 a minute.

Each service has a code for Language Line to be quoted at the start of the call. This enables Language Line to bill the appropriate user.
The Council regularly keeps in contact with Dundee to make sure the system is working smoothly and to monitor the use of the service. Regular training sessions with front-line staff will take place to make sure they are familiar with using the interpreting service.

**What services are available from Dundee?**

They provide standard and specialised interpreting and translation services. This includes translating business reports, letters and other documents. Their interpreters will attend meetings in offices, hospitals, courts or any reasonable venue.

At least 24 hours notice is needed when requesting an interpreter and their normal office hours are 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, although emergency requests can be dealt with.

**What services are not available at Dundee?**

It does not provide sign language interpreters, lip speakers or deaf/blind signer. If any of these services are required contact Francine Orr on 01259 452018.

**Translations tips**

- What is the target group or individual? Would it be better to use an interpreter or is translation required? Also check the correct language or dialect. Consult your key contact person about the appropriateness of the information to be translated.

- Do not use slang or colloquial terms and phrases. These are not readily transferable into many other languages, may not carry the same meaning or message and in some cases, may even be offensive.

- Pay particular attention to terminology and make sure no terms or references are used which may offend different cultures and religions.

- Leaflet design, graphics and images should not caricature or stereotype different cultures and religions.
Tips on Providing Interpreters

• Make sure there is a match of language or dialect and of gender. The latter may be particularly important for Muslim women.

• Use only trained interpreters. Meet with and brief interpreters before the interview and establish their role.

• Give the interpreter as much background information as possible, for example, any specialist terminology to be used.

• Always allow extra time for an interview when an interpreter is needed. This prevents participants becoming rushed or impatient.

• Use short sentences and allow the interpreter to interpret before continuing. Look at the person you are communicating with and address them directly, rather than looking at and addressing the interpreter.

• Do not use jargon, slang or colloquial phrases. Where specialist terminology is essential, give the interpreter time to explain the meaning.

• When appropriate, allow time for de-briefing with the interpreter to evaluate the session.
Communicating with deaf people

It is estimated that up to 14% of the population experience hearing problems while about 1% is profoundly deaf.

For the purposes of this booklet no distinction is made as to the level of hearing impairment. All of the advice given is useful, whether the person is profoundly deaf or has mild hearing loss.

Simple steps can be taken to ensure members of the public with a hearing loss can rely on an efficient, friendly service. Similarly for staff, one easy example of good practice is to make sure that existing employees are offered awareness training prior to the arrival of a deaf employee.

Tips for communicating with deaf people

- Make sure you are in front of (1 to 2 metres or 3 to 6 feet) and on the same level as the deaf person.
- Position yourself with your face to the light and avoid placing yourself in front of a bright window.
- Keep background noise to a minimum.
- Do not shout - speak clearly, with a normal speech rhythm.
- Remember that sentences and phrases are easier to understand than isolated words.
- Rephrase rather than repeat.
- If a word or phrase is not understood, use different words with the same meaning.
- Allow time for the person to absorb what you have said.
- Keep your head still and if you turn away, stop talking.
• Keep hands, pens and the like away from your face while speaking.

• Do not eat while speaking.

• Avoid exaggerated facial movement or expression.

• Gestures can be helpful.

• If the deaf person is accompanied by a hearing person avoid conversing only with the hearing person and ignoring the deaf person.

Sign language interpreters are in short supply within the Council but we will try to help wherever possible. Contact Francine Orr on 01259 452018. There are services in Glasgow and Edinburgh that we can use but obviously this may not be suitable in emergency circumstances.
Specialist support services

There are a wide range of communication methods open to people with hearing difficulties. It is difficult for a council of Clackmannanshire's size to provide every service so we use a number of specialist national organisations that are listed at the back of this document.

The communication methods they offer include:

**Sign language interpreting**

Many deaf people use sign language as their first or only language so a trained sign language interpreter may be essential.

**Lip speaking**

Many deaf and hard of hearing people rely on lip reading to follow what people say. In face-to-face situations, it is often possible to lip read what someone is saying if there is good lighting and if the speaker is speaking clearly.

Trained lip speakers can provide support in large meetings or conferences. They repeat the spoken words accurately to lip readers, without voice, using facial expression and natural gesture to aid communication.

**Deafblind interpreting**

To ease communication between a hearing person and a deafblind person, use a deafblind interpreter. They will spell out what is being said directly on to the deafblind person's hand.

**Speech to text transcription services**

This is particularly useful at meetings, conferences and lectures where it is difficult to lip read. An operator uses a keyboard to convert what is said into text. This text then appears immediately on a computer monitor or large screen. A hard copy of the text can be printed out, in type or Braille depending on the equipment used.
**Notetakers**

When you are concentrating on lip-reading or following sign language, it is virtually impossible to take notes at the same time. Notetakers sit in on meetings, lectures or conferences and take notes on behalf of the person with the hearing difficulty. A notetaker can often be used in conjunction with other communication support such as a sign language interpreter. That way a deaf person can take an active part in a meeting and have an accurate record of everything that is discussed.

**Telephone communication**

Amplifiers and small loops can be attached to the telephone to help deaf people who have some residual hearing. A text telephone sometimes called a Minicom, which comprises a keyboard and small screen, can be used over the telephone system to enable deaf people to contact other users.

**Loop systems**

The loop system enables someone with a hearing aid to tune into what they want to hear without the interference of background noise.

For more information and advice see contacts list at the back of this guide.

**Acknowledgement**

Information from RNID material helped in the compilation of this section.
Communicating with people with visual impairment

General information on visual impairment

Approximately one person in sixty is blind or partially sighted. Many more people have problems reading small print or badly designed documents.

Two thirds of visually impaired people lose their sight as a result of an age-related eye condition, but there are visually impaired people in every age group.

Four out of ten visually impaired people rely on someone else to read some of their information to them. This does not have to be the case and most visually impaired people could be more independent if information arrived in a format they could read.

Very few visually impaired people see nothing at all. Print is therefore the most usual medium to pass on information.

Good, clear legible print is neither expensive nor difficult to produce.

Audio tape recording of information is useful both for those with a visual impairment and for people who cannot read for other educational, cultural or medical reasons. However, deafness or being hard of hearing limits its suitability among older people.

Braille is used by a quite small number of blind or partially sighted people. It is an important medium for those who can read it. Many blind people also know enough Braille to find it helpful on labels or signs, in lifts for example.
Hints on producing clear print

It is important to understand that visually impaired people can have different types of eye conditions. This means that what they can see differs greatly from person to person. It is impossible to set down a print standard that will meet everyone's needs. However, the following guidelines do describe a few inexpensive steps that can easily be taken to improve the legibility of all documents we produce.

- Good contrast is all important when considering print legibility. Contrast is affected by paper type, paper colour printing inks, type size and weight.

- Black type on white or yellow paper gives very good contrast. Avoid pale colour inks on coloured backgrounds and never use yellow printing inks; they are as good as invisible.

- Red and green as a combination causes problems for people who are colour blind.

- Reversing type (white text on a black background) is an acceptable way of emphasising titles, provided the typeface, size and weight are not too small or light.

- The type size you choose can greatly improve the legibility of documents. For general readership 12pt is recommended.

- For material intended for partially sighted readers a minimum size of 14 pt is recommended

- Sizes greater than 20pt are not generally recommended.

- Light typeface should not be used - use medium or bold type fonts.

- Do not use bizarre or indistinct typefaces for main text. Recommended type faces include Helvetica or Arial. These are known as san serif fonts - without the little 'flicks' on the end of the letters - like T, L and H.
• Use only left justified lines of text. Right justification of margins should be avoided.

• Avoid splitting words at the ends of lines; it is more difficult to maintain the shape of the word.

• Glossy paper can be difficult to read because of reflections so avoid using it. Very thin paper can also cause problems because text can show through.

• Capital letters are harder to read than lower case letters because words are recognised by shape not by individual letters so avoid using continuous capital letters in words.

• Leave space between paragraphs. Avoid fitting text round illustrations.

**Hints on producing audio tape**

Tape is an important and growing way of providing information to visually impaired people, but it has its limitations. Taped documents are, for example, not easy to refer to during a meeting, and it can be difficult to find your way around a document.

Tapes can also be helpful for people who have learning disabilities or who are dyslexic.

When recording a tape:

• use (if possible) an external microphone but try not to have to hold the microphone. Try placing it on a flat surface and sit facing the centre of a room instead of facing a wall to prevent the sound bouncing back.

• start your recording by clearly stating what the document is, what it is for and how long it is in minutes or hours.

• read clearly but not too slowly and vary the tone of your voice to make it sound interesting.
• pause briefly at the end of the paragraphs and sections to indicate to the listener that a particular part of the document has ended. Correct mistakes as you go along by taping over them. Spell out important or unusual words.

• remember to label your tapes.

**Hints on producing braille**

Braille is a tactile form of writing using raised dots. It uses eight words per line on average and is much more bulky and heavier than printed text.

Numbering of sections, indents, headings, paragraphs and lists are important because Braille is more difficult to scan than print.

• Braille pages are numbered in the top right hand corner.

• Always include a contents page at the beginning of the document to help the reader get a quick idea of the document’s structure and contents.

**Other technologies**

Computer technology is advancing all the time and improvements in communication systems are continually developing. However, remember that computer systems are only owned by a relatively small number of the blind and partially sighted people.

Many people with visual impairments will use assistive technologies to help them use their computer and the internet. These technologies include screen readers, which “speak” the information on the screen to the user, magnifiers, which magnify a section of the screen, and text enlargers, to make small text legible.
Things to consider when publishing information on the internet:

- Structured information helps screen reader users to navigate and to understand context;

- Screen readers can only “read” text - scanned images of text are utterly useless to a screen reader user;

- Colour contrast should be high;

- Avoid colours which might cause a problem for users with colour-blindness;

Information should be presented in such a way that resizing text doesn’t break the layout, or hide other information on the screen. Telephones provide a good way of communicating with visually impaired people. Three quarters of visually impaired people own a telephone. Information can be provided over the telephone on a one-to-one basis or via recorded messages on the end of helplines. The biggest advantage telephone information sources have is that the access to the information is immediate.

This is an important point for visually impaired people because much of their information is often delayed by the need for special products.

Video learning resources are becoming more accessible to students with poor or no vision thanks to work by The Scottish Sensory Centre (SSC). The SSC is for everyone in Scotland involved in the education of children and young people with sensory impairment and their families. It offers training for teachers and students as well as training resources and information.
Signs and symbols

To people who have reading and language difficulties or who have visual impairment, signs and symbols are very useful.

Whether inside or outside premises, signs with simple symbols can easily show what facilities are available and where they are located. They should show the most convenient and accessible routes to a location.

Remember that people who have difficulty communicating verbally or who cannot speak English may also rely on signs, since they are unable to ask for directions or other information such as opening times.

If people are unaware of a facility provided for them, for example an induction loop or adapted toilet, simple signs can help.

Engineers and Planners often provide information in plan format but it is easy to forget that many people have great difficulty reading plans. Think about providing on photographs or other means of describing what you are trying to represent. Although expensive, models are useful and have been used in large scale projects in the past.

Designing and placing signs

Signs should be clear and legible, easy to distinguish from the background and consistent. That means using the same format (colour contrast, light and text font, and symbols used). For example, the National Trust always use the same signs to direct visitors to the castle - no matter which castle in whichever town.

Within the Council there is a standard sign design for all signs associated with roads, pavements, footpaths and cycleways. These are prescribed by the Department for Transport and follow all of the criteria described in this publication. We do advise that signs in private car parks (for example supermarkets etc.) should also comply.
• Text, when used, should be backed up by universally recognised symbols, such as the wheelchair access symbol. Written directions on their own should be avoided whenever possible.

• When text is necessary it should be a mixture of upper and lower case letters, since words are recognised by shape and not by individual letters. Block capitals should never be used but plain language should.

• Letters, numbers and symbols should be at least 70mm high for internal signs and be in bold, simple typeface such as Helvetica Bold.

• The surface of the sign should be non-reflective and well lit. Colour contrast between background, sign face and text is more important than colour in the legibility of signs to visually impaired people because sensitivity to each colour varies according to individual eye conditions.

• The combination of colours chosen should be easily distinguishable by people who are colour blind as well! Remember, people with colour blindness cannot differentiate between red and green. White lettering on a dark background is recommended as this avoids glare.

The following table shows the Royal National Institute of Blind (RNIB) recommended colour contrast for signs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Sign-face</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red brick or dark stone</td>
<td>green/blue</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light brick or stone</td>
<td>black/dark</td>
<td>green/blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitewashed walls</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green vegetation</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>black/dark green</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Signs should be visible from both a seated and standing position ideally 1400mm above ground level. Where these are likely to be blocked - for example, by people standing - signs should also be provided above head height (minimum 2100mm clearance).

Signs should be located consistently throughout a building so people know where to look.

Braille, raised letters, numbers and symbols should be used on low level signs, however this is only effective where people with visual impairments know where to look and can find the sign.

Few blind people are proficient users of Braille, and it is difficult to read when set on a vertical plane, i.e. on a normal sign. Therefore it is better to restrict its use to a few letters or numbers in obvious locations such as beside controls for example, lifts, door numbers or at the end of hand rails to indicate floor levels. Raised numbers and symbols should be used in the same way. They are useful to people with visual impairment who cannot read Braille.
Useful contact addresses

National contacts

Scottish Sensory Centre
Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AQ
Tel: 0131 558 6501
www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
Tom Lister, Joint Mobility Unit,
10 Magdala Crescent, Edinburgh, EH12 5BE
Tel 0131 346 1966 Fax 0131 313 1875
email rnibscotland@rnib.org.uk
www.rnib.org.uk

Deafblind UK
Drena O’Malley, Development Manager,
21 Alexandra Ave, Lenzie, G66 SBG.
Tel 0141 777 6111 Fax: 0141 775 3311
www.deafblind.org.uk

Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID),
9 Clairmont Gardens Glasgow G3 7LW.
Tel 0141 332 0343
email help@rnid.org.uk
www.rnid.org.uk

Scottish Association of Sign Language
Interpreters, 31 York Place, Edinburgh EH1 3HP.
Tel 0131 557 6370
www.sasli.org.uk
The Regional Sign Language Interpreting Service,
Centenary House 100 Morrison Street, Glasgow G5 8LN.
Tel. 0141 420 5656
www.slis.org.uk

The Scottish Council on Deafness,
Central Chambers, Suite 62, 93 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 6LD.
Tel. 0141 248 2472
Fax. 0141 248 2479
www.scod.org.uk

Sense Scotland,
43 Middlesex Street, Kinning Park, Glasgow G41 1EE.
Tel. 0141 429 0294
Fax. 0141 429 0295
Text. 0141 418 7170
www.sensescotland.org.uk

Local contacts

Staff across the Council who use this guide, and may identify people who are vulnerable or need additional support because of sensory impairments, should talk to the Council’s Community Care and Child Care Teams.

They can offer people further support and an assessment, and can also assist with access to other services, specialist equipment and the like.

For community care telephone 727010 and for child care telephone 225000.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
Resource Centre,
Viewfield Place, Stirling. FK8 1NL
Tel 01786 451752
Forth Valley Sensory Centre,
Redbrae Road, Camelon, Falkirk
Tel 01324 590888
Fax. 01324 590889
email sensory@falkirk.gov.uk

The Communications Unit
Clackmannanshire Council
Greenfield, Alloa, FK10 2AD
Tel 01259 452023 or 01259 452027
email press@clacks.gov.uk
www.clacksweb.org.uk

Francine Orr
Policy Officer (Equal Opportunities)
Clackmannanshire Council
Greenfield, Alloa, FK10 2AD
Tel. 01259 452018
email forr@clacks.gov.uk

Clickclack Talking Newspaper
Shona McMillan
Tel. 01259 750193