

Department of Adult Services

Public Information Strategy

**Produced by the Customer Relations Unit
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Foreword

Our department has an excellent track record in respect of producing public information in formats that are meaningful to our customers. We distribute information to a number of easy-to-reach access points throughout the borough, and monitor the take-up of information and its effectiveness. We can be proud that the high standard of our public information has been recognised in the last Joint Review, and the influence it has on corporate activities.

But we can't rest on our laurels – however good we are, there's always room for improvement. The importance of public information is increasingly recognised in legislation, national assessment frameworks, best value reviews and government guidelines, to name a few. Our practice is one of continuous improvement, and structural changes within the department and the council have led to an even greater need for co-ordination and consistency of standards.

This strategy rises to the challenges we now face in producing high quality information for the public. It recognises changes that have occurred since previous strategies, and reflects contemporary demands. It doesn't compromise in emphasising the importance of consulting with our customers to ensure that they receive necessary information as and when they need it. As I have stated in the previous strategy, information is empowering – it gives people the freedom to make important choices about things that can affect the quality of their lives and the lives of the people they care for. It helps people retain their independence and self-confidence.

This strategy, together with the ringbinder 'Communicating with the Public', mean that we now have an updated framework to guide staff about the production of public information in the future. It will go a long way to helping us provide information to the highest possible standards. I find the strategy easy to read, helpful and informative, and believe that all those who read it will do so as well.

On this basis, I recommend the strategy to you and hope that it is as helpful to you as it has been for me.



Bernard Walker
Director of Adult Services.

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1. About the strategy

The strategy of the department is to make sure that all our public information is:

- relevant,
- accurate,
- up to date,
- readily available to those who need it, and
- produced in formats appropriate to individual needs.

It contains a number of quality standards for all public information produced by the Department of Adult Services, or produced by us in partnership with other agencies. It's important, therefore, that staff within the department comply with these standards.

It succeeds previous strategies produced in July 2000 and January 2005, and subsequent reviews in 2001 and 2002.

2. Why we need a strategy

There are a number of reasons why we need a public information strategy.

1. It's an indication of the department's commitment to public information standards, and promotes information provision as a service in its own right.
2. Given limited resources, it's now even more important that the information we produce is of a high standard. This strategy promotes a number of standards.

3. There have been a number of changes to services and staffing structures since the last strategy. Information is not always channelled through a central source (the publicity manager in the Customer Relations Unit), and this strategy will help to make sure that information produced is consistent, corporate, and complements existing information.
4. We are legally required to inform people about our services, so we need a strategy to ensure our staff are aware of their role and our priorities. Some of the legislation covering our responsibilities for providing information includes:
 - Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
 - Children Act 1989
 - Race Relations Act 1976
 - National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990
 - Disability Discrimination Act 1995
 - Human Rights Act 1998
 - Data Protection Act 1998
 - Local Government Act 1972 and 2000
 - Freedom of Information Act 2000
 - Complaints legislation
 - National Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity
5. The strategy builds on council activities, such as Best Value Reviews, and is consistent with the council's corporate external communications strategy and plain English strategy – you can get copies of these from the intranet at <http://boston/pub/cexec/communication.htm>

3. Essential elements of the strategy

To be effective, our strategy needs to:

- be realistic
- allow flexibility
- influence practices
- be clear about its aims, objectives and priorities
- comply with corporate standards.

4. Definitions of information

For the purposes of this strategy, we have grouped public information into three categories:

1. Core information

General information about departmental services, which is relevant to all customers and should normally be available at *all* our area offices and establishments. This includes:

- A-Z of Adult Services (booklet)
- A-Z of Adult Services (poster)
- Customer Care: Tell Us What You Think (leaflet)
- Fair Access to Care Services (leaflet)
- Getting Help From Adult Services: The Central Duty Team (leaflet)
- Information About You (leaflet)

2. Key information

Information about services which will be of interest to a wide range of people. This information should be available at relevant offices and establishments. It includes:

- The Home Care Service (leaflet)
- Day Care Services (leaflet)
- Occupational Therapy Services (leaflet)
- Services for Older People (leaflet)
- Residential Care (leaflet)
- Services for People with Physical Disabilities (leaflet)
- Safeguarding and protecting vulnerable adults from abuse (leaflet)
- Choosing a Residential or Nursing Home (leaflet)
- Paying for Community Care Services (leaflet)
- Direct Payment Scheme (leaflet)
- Making Your Own Arrangements for Residential or Nursing Home Care (leaflet)
- Your Ethnic Background (multi-lingual leaflet)

3. Specific information

Information about individual teams, or which will be of interest to specific customers at relevant offices and establishments. Examples include:

- Tell us what you think about the gelp you get (pictorial leaflet for people with learning disabilities)
- Hospital Social Work Service (leaflet)

5. Role of the Customer Relations Unit

What does the Unit do?

The Unit works with customers and staff, with the aim of raising standards and reducing complaints. A key part of the work of the Unit is producing public information, and the publicity manager has lead responsibility for specific activities within the department. They include:

- positive promotion of the department and its services
- generic advertising, through a range of media
- making information available in a range of formats
- maintenance of the departmental publications list
- distribution of core and key information throughout the borough to a wide range of access points
- supporting staff in producing effective information
- editorial control of the department's external website.

What can the publicity manager do for you?

She can offer:

- a complete design and printing service
- advice on standards, corporacy and the use of plain English
- technical advice and support on print processes
- advice about information formats and access points
- support to promote your service in the local press and on radio
- help to promote your service in the council's magazine *Borough Life*, through her close links with the Public Relations Unit
- support in developing promotional material for exhibitions or events.

6. Quality Standards

Why have we set them?

We have set eight quality standards, to provide:

- a framework for producing good quality information
- guidance for staff responsible for producing information
- a way of making sure our information is consistent with the corporate image
- a means of monitoring.

Although the standards apply to all public information, they are not rigid and can be applied by staff in a flexible way to meet the relevant and specific needs of our customers.

What are our desired outcomes?

We hope that the quality standards we have identified will make sure that our customers (and potential customers of the future) have easy access to high quality public information, produced in ways that meet their needs.

The standards will also help to make sure our customers have an influence in deciding what information we produce.

Quality Standard 1

We will consult people about information we produce.

We will do this in a variety of ways:

1. Holding consultation meetings and events.
2. Producing questionnaires.
3. Using lay readers.
4. Using the Council's Citizens' Panel.
5. Developing interactive questionnaires on our website.
6. Including feedback forms with our information.
7. Personal interviews (face-to-face and by telephone).
8. Inviting comments – e.g. using the local press and radio, or more informal ways.

Good Practice:

- Refer to departmental and corporate consultation strategies.
- Use the right method of consultation for your audience.
- Find out about people's preferred means of communication – e.g. written English, audio tape or CD, Braille, large print, other languages.
- Use induction loops, minicoms, advocates and interpreters.
- Find out what people already know and what they want to find out.
- Consult *before* you produce or update information, at the draft stage and on completion.
- Identify staff, advocacy workers, voluntary and community groups who could invite people to take part in informal groups or networks.
- Consult both staff and the public (although not necessarily together).
- Learn from other people's experiences of consultation.

Quality Standard 2

We will produce accurate and relevant information.

We will do this by:

1. Identifying gaps in information through consultation.
2. Regularly reviewing information, its accuracy and effectiveness.
3. Keeping staff informed when information changes or becomes obsolete.
4. Planning and structuring our information.
5. Including contact details – phone numbers, minicom numbers, addresses, names of staff (where appropriate).
6. Including the publications date (month and year) on all information (usually on the back).
7. Passing final draft copies of information to the publicity manager for authorisation and inclusion on our internet site and publications list.

Good Practice:

- Refer to the 'Corporate Standards for Producing Public Information' on our intranet site.
- Refer to the 'Corporate Style Guide' on our intranet site.
- Give your information a title that gives a clear message and is meaningful.
- Compile information in a logical order.
- A question and answer format is helpful to the reader.
- Consider including relevant information from other agencies or departments.
- Once your information has been agreed and drafted, it can take up to eight weeks to get it professionally designed and printed. Give the publicity manager as much notice as possible.

Quality Standard 3

We will use plain language.

We will do this by:

1. Using words we use in 'everyday' language.
2. Using the 'jargon buster' on our intranet site.
3. Explaining unfamiliar words.
4. Asking for help, when necessary, from the publicity manager.
5. Explaining abbreviations and acronyms (words formed from initial letters of other words).
6. Getting key information Crystal Marked by the Plain English Campaign.
7. Attending the corporate Plain English training course.

Good Practice:

- Refer to the 'Corporate Standards for Producing Public Information' on our intranet site.
- Use active verbs (e.g. We are **investigating** the points you have raised, *instead of* 'The points raised are being **investigated**').
- Personalise your information with words like *you* and *we*.
- Avoid words which may cause offence – consult your audience to see what is and is not acceptable to them.
- Plan ahead for translated versions – keep sentences short and clear, and don't use phrases that can be misinterpreted or could mean something different to some people (e.g. hit the nail on the head).
- Consider whether or not writing is the best way to communicate your message.
- Refer to the Plain English webpages on our intranet site.

Quality Standard 4

We will produce information in formats that meet the needs of our customers.

We will do this by:

1. Asking our customers about their preferred formats for information.
2. Making information available in, for example – large print, ethnic minority languages, audio cassette or CD, Braille, video, and signed video, and using interpreters, signs and symbols and pictures.
3. Advertising the availability of information in other formats on key information and on our publications list.
4. Ensuring the content of information and illustrations used are appropriate for the audience.

Good Practice:

- Refer to the 'Corporate Standards for Producing Public Information' on our intranet site.
- Some photographs or images can have a religious significance, or can be inappropriate for your audience. Avoid photographs or images that reinforce stereotypes. Remember to consult with your audience beforehand.
- Seek advice from colleagues in other sections, departments and agencies, e.g. learning disability service, sensory team, publicity manager, asylum seekers team, health, police.
- Many of the difficulties that arise for people with communication difficulties come from frustration at not being able to make themselves understood. Take your time, be patient and use a variety of communication methods to try to overcome this.
- Don't use children as interpreters, and only use a service user's friends or family as a last resort.
- Let the publicity manager know of information you produce and in what formats, so that it can be added to the publications list.

Quality Standard 5

We will distribute information throughout the borough.

We will do this in a variety of ways:

1. Identifying relevant places for distribution of information.
2. Identifying people to distribute the information.
3. Making key information available at all our area offices.
4. Sending appropriate information to bases listed on the department's distribution list on our intranet site – e.g. day centres, mental health teams, sensory team, learning disabilities teams, asylum seekers teams.
5. Sending information to the publicity manager for inclusion on our internet site and publications list.
6. Using internal mail distribution systems of other departments and agencies to send out information – e.g. libraries service, health (for doctors' surgeries, clinics and health centres), Children and Young People's Services (CYPS – for schools), Chief Executive's Department (for councillors' surgeries).
7. Sending information to access points in the borough which have our leaflet racks or carousels – e.g. hospitals, benefits agencies, citizens advice bureaux.

Good Practice:

- Compile your distribution list *before* you produce your information – don't leave it as an after-thought. This will give you an idea of how many copies you *really* need.
- Consult with your audience about their preferred access areas.
- Make a list of where you have sent information, so that in future you can monitor the effectiveness of the location.
- Let people know how they can get further supplies of information.
- Ask the publicity manager for advice.

Quality Standard 6

We will positively promote our services.

We will do this in a variety of ways:

1. Sending information to the Customer Relations Unit for inclusion in:
 - *Borough Life* magazine
 - Council's information bulletin
 - the council's internet site
 - Wigan Metro Talking News.
2. Sending information to the Council's Public Relations Unit for press releases.
3. Holding open days and special events.
4. Advertising in relevant publications and on local radio.
5. Having information stands at events organised by partner agencies and voluntary organisations.
6. Producing posters for distribution throughout the borough.
7. Applying for Charter Mark status.
8. Applying for local and national awards.

Good Practice:

- Always send a proof of advertisements to the publicity manager for approval.
- Let the publicity manager know well in advance about planned promotional events – these can be highlighted on the home page of the council's internet site.
- If you are writing your own press release, ask the publicity manager or the council's Public Relations Unit for a copy of the corporate guidelines. You **must** then pass the press release to the Public Relations Unit for approval.

Quality Standard 7

We will produce joint information with other departments and agencies wherever possible.

We will do this by:

1. Involving representatives from other departments and agencies in consultation and planning meetings, when appropriate.
2. Considering if information produced jointly would be the best way of making it available.
3. Considering how your information could be included in information produced by other departments and agencies.
- 4.. Acting on recommendations for joint information following Best Value Reviews.

Good Practice:

- When producing information about your service, think about relevant details you could also include from a range of agencies – e.g. health advice, local support groups, helplines, housing, transport, financial information, educational and leisure opportunities.
- Seek agreement about who will be funding the information *before* the consultation and planning stage, so as not to raise people's expectations of information being produced.
- Seek advice from the publicity manager about which logos to use on joint publications.
- Say on the back of written information how people can get further copies.
- Ask contributors to let you know when information you have included changes or becomes obsolete.

Quality Standard 8

We will make sure we are aware of our responsibilities for public information.

We will do this by:

1. Referring to this strategy when we produce public information.
2. Making sure we read the information in the ringbinder 'Communicating with the Public'.
3. Making sure we read the guidelines in the translation and interpretation kit, and knowing where it is kept at our premises.
4. Attending relevant training courses.
5. Keeping up-to-date with departmental and corporate guidelines on our intranet site.
6. Liaising with the publicity manager as necessary and appropriate.

Good Practice:

- Make reference to the public information strategy and the ringbinder 'Communicating with the Public' in any induction or training you give to new staff.
- Ask your manager to nominate you for relevant training.