



Shetland Islands Council

Communications Corporate Styles and Standards

Chief Executive's Office
Town Hall
Lerwick
ZE1 0HB

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Introduction

The Council is keen to promote the use of communication that is easy to understand and accessible to all. It is committed to the principles of the Plain English campaign.

The Council has standards in the way it wishes to communicate internally and externally so that the way we communicate is professional and understood by those who it is intended for. Letters and other communications should be easily identifiable as coming from Shetland Islands Council.

This booklet has been designed as a guide to staff to make sure they are aware of these standards and gives examples of styles that are considered acceptable. It is important that all correspondence sent out from the Council is produced in this corporate format. The macros provided by the ICT Unit should be used at all times and no other format used. This will ensure that the agreed font, style and size are used at all times.

Further help on ensuring your communication reaches its audience successfully can be provided by contacting Nancy Heubeck at Adult Learning in the Old Library Centre, Lower Hillhead, Lerwick on 01595 743881.

A copy of these guidelines should be kept in a central location of all departments and brought to the attention of any new staff. A copy is also included in the induction pack sent to new employees. For extra copies or for copies in larger print please contact the Chief Executive's Office on 01595 744501 or e-mail anita.arthur@shetland.gov.uk.

If you have any questions with regard to the content of this booklet please contact Anita Arthur, Administration Officer, Chief Executive's Office, Town Hall, Lerwick on 01595 744501 or e-mail anita.arthur@shetland.gov.uk. If you experience problems with any of the macros which have been installed, please report this to the Helpdesk at the ICT Unit on 01595 744777 or e-mail helpdesk@shetland.gov.uk.

Any new requests for new macros should first be submitted to the Chief Executive's Office for approval. Any such requests can be forwarded to Anita Arthur.

Guidelines for Written Communication

All written communication has an impact and creates an impression. Adopting a common approach helps employees communicate effectively and consistently on behalf of the Council.

Many people find reading difficult. They may prefer information from tape or face to face. If you have to provide written material there are ways to make it easier to understand. Imagine you are talking to your reader. Write sincerely and personally in a style that is appropriate. Always check that your meaning is clear and that the tone is not bureaucratic. Staff in Adult Learning can provide help on how to achieve this.

Specific guidelines for electronic communications are contained in the Council's Electronic Communications Policy.

In addition to adhering to the corporate style, the following things should be considered when communicating by writing.

Tips to Make your Writing User Friendly

- **Date your communication:** Communications should be dated '19 September 2008', not '19th September' or '19.09.08'.
- **Introduction:** Begin with "Thank you for your letter of [date]" if in response to a letter. Make the purpose of your letter clear at the beginning.
- **Contact:** Include contact details (name, extension number, email).
- **Know your audience:** Think about your intended audience and its abilities and needs. This is key to producing accessible information.
- **Plan what you want to say.** Present the important information in a logical sequence, one step at a time.
- **Use plain English:** Plain language makes writing easier to understand for everyone.
- **Try to write as you speak:** Don't use jargon, unnecessary technical detail or abbreviations. If you need to use difficult words, include a glossary to explain them.
- **Keep sentences short:** If you remember to have only one main idea per sentence this will happen naturally. See if any sentences using commas or joined with 'and' could be broken into two.
- **Use simple punctuation:** Avoid semicolons, colons or hyphens, or sentences broken up with too many commas.
- **Give relevant information:** Ask what information is relevant to your intended audience. Cut out any confusing or unnecessary detail, while making sure the essential information is very clear.
- **Be consistent:** For important concepts use the same words or phrases consistently.
- **Use active or personal language:** Talk to your readers directly using active or personal language. Using 'you' and 'we' makes your writing more direct and understandable.

White space

- Too much dense text can put people off reading
- Columns too close together can cause confusion (some adults tend to read 'over' closely set columns)
- Short, clear chunks of text are easier to read

Type choice and size

- The agreed font and size for all Council correspondence is Arial 12.
- If producing for partially sighted people use Arial 16. There is no benefit in using larger than 20 point.
- Avoid reverse type (white on top of a colour). However, some partially sighted people find white on top of black easier to read

Use of capitals and lower case

- A mix of upper and lower case is easier to read than upper case only. The shape of the word helps us to read.
- Over use of upper case to crease emphasis is counterproductive. It is less likely that the text will be read. Sentences entirely in upper case infers that the reader is being shouted at, so should be avoided.
- Use bold type, bullet points or boxes to emphasis part of the text. Italics or underlining can make the words run together.

Illustrations and overprinting

- Illustrations, photos or diagrams help break up the density of text, especially useful if adjacent illustrations give a clue to the text itself.
- Use images such as photos, drawings or symbols to support your text. Aim to make the subject of your materials clear at a glance, ever to a non-reader.
- Don't put writing over the top of a photo or drawing.
- Flow charts are ideal for explaining procedures.

Posters, Boards and Leaflets

- Keep the design of leaflets simple. Background graphics can make text difficult to read.
- On leaflets or posters about events, keep essential information about time and place grouped together.
- On boards and posters, print lowercase rather than using joined writing.

Page layout and breaks

- Headings and new sections should come at the top of pages where possible.
- Sentences and paragraphs should not run over columns or pages.
- Lines between columns are helpful.
- Space between lines is important. If lines are too close, the reader may drop lines, if they are too far apart the reader will not be clear whether the lines relate to each other at all.
- Do not justify margins. Do not condense or stretch lines.
- Do no break up words with a hyphen at the end of the line.
- Write all addresses as they appear on an envelope, not on one line separated by commas.
- Use a contents list, clearly differentiated headings, rules to separate unrelated sections, anything to make the layout easier to follow.
- Use numbered paragraphs if a list of points is being made.
- Avoid fitting text round illustrations.

- On forms leave generous space to fill in details that have to be hand written, partially sighted people or people with poor motor skills tend to have larger than average handwriting.

Paper choice and colour

At the moment it is usual for all Council offices to use white paper. However if you are producing anything other than general correspondence (letters, memos, reports etc) you should take advice from the following points.

- Darker colours generally provide a more difficult background for reading, blue and purple are the worst.
- Make sure there is a good contrast between type and paper, especially if using coloured paper.
- Use good quality matt papers. The writing on the other side won't show through and there won't be a glare which makes writing hard to read.
- Black type on white paper is the best choice for people with sight problems.
- People with dyslexia often find it easier to read type from coloured paper. Cream paper is a good alternative.

Choice of words

- The passive voice is often more difficult to understand eg **this matter will be considered shortly**. Active voice is easier to understand. **We will consider this shortly**.
- Try to avoid grouping nouns and adjectives into large clusters eg Middle East hostage release negotiation drama.
- Use key words (of, it, to, and, is etc) are easy to recognise and provide a welcome relief from working out longer and more difficult words.
- Use you and we. Try to call the reader you: so **you must send us**, rather than **applicants must send us**. **We will tell you before we ...** instead of **we always tell customers before we ...** Similarly call the organisation **we**.
- Avoid jargon. Jargon is a type of language that is only understood by a particular group of people, such as an industry or a club.
- Use numbers not words eg 3 instead of three.

Use simple everyday words

Use	Instead of
Do	accomplish
Find out	ascertain
Send out/distribute	disseminate
Try	endeavour
Speed up	expedite
Help, make easier	facilitate
Work our, form	formulate
Instead of	in lieu of
Place	locality
Greatest, most	optimum
Plan	strategise
Use	utilise
About	as regards
Because	as a consequence

Now	at the present time
About	concerning
After	following
Soon	in the near future
It is clear	it is apparent
Aim/goal	objective
Extra	additional
Tell	advise
Start	commence
Fill in	complete
So	consequently
Prior to	before
End	terminate
If you ask	on request

Using Technology

Important information may need to be available on audiotape or video. Keep tapes short. Always say when to turn the tape over and when it ends.

If you send e-mails, remember that formatting can be lost. This can make material harder to understand.

However, please note that e-mails can be sent to a blind reader if they have access to speech software.

Readability Scores

When Microsoft Word finishes checking spelling and grammar, it can display information about the reading level of the document, including the following readability scores. Each readability score bases its rating on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence.

To set your spell checker to automatically check readability, go to Tools, Options, Spelling and Grammar, then tick the Readability request. Word will then show your readability score every time you spell check.

Flesch Reading Ease Score: Rates text on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard documents, aim for a score of approximately 70 to 80.

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Score: Rates text on a US grade-school level. For example, a score of 5.0 means that a fifth grader, ie a Year 6, average 10 year old, can understand the document. For most standard documents aim for a score of approximately 5.0, by using short sentences, not by dumbing down vocabulary.

Letterhead Stationery

Letterhead stationery is available from the Chief Executive's Office. Contact 01595 744511 or e-mail General Enquiry Office when supplies run low and delivery will be arranged. The Chief Executive's Office will journal departments for letterheads.

Letter Response Times

- Letters should be acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt.
- If a telephone contact is included in the letter you may wish to respond by telephone (this is often more friendly and reassuring than a letter).
- Any arrangements agreed by telephone contact should be confirmed in writing within 3 working days.
- Full responses to letters should be given within 10 working days.
- Where it is not possible to respond within 10 working days, a holding letter stating when a full response can be expected should be sent out within 10 working days and the customer should be kept updated regularly of process.
- It should be noted that the timescale for responding to a Freedom of Information request is 20 working days. Standard responses to FOI requests can be found on the Intranet. Corporate guidance on Freedom of Information will be issued from Legal and Administrative Services.

Responding to letters quickly indicates efficiency and good customer service. It is good for the Council's reputation and promotes the Council as a caring and competent organisation.

Access to Braille Transcription

Who can access Braille transcription?

Any Member of Council staff may access this service on behalf of a service user, or indeed a member of staff working for the Council's Community Planning partners, once more as long as this is on the behalf of a service user.

What should be transcribed?

Carefully consider what information you will require for transcription. Information regarding appointments and important information should be transcribed if at all possible. Please clarify if the service user can access e-mail information as this is a more direct route for provision of small amounts of information, provided the service user has access to adequate software and/or Braille printing facilities on their own computer.

If you do require to send a large report, etc, to a client in Braille format, then these documents can be transcribed into Braille via the Vision Service, part of the Children's Service, Education and Social Care. The manager of this service is Freda Leask, based at 2 Bank Lane, Lerwick.

What format should a document be in?

When requesting a transcription it is easiest, quickest and less costly if documents are prepared appropriately. Documents are best sent in e-format.

- Words in Braille are read continuously from the top of the page, from left to right, row by row. Words cannot be placed in a text box in Braille (eg newsletter layouts with headlines in boxes to make information easier to read does not help in Braille). Simple is best.
- Tables are not the most appropriate for accessing information if you are a Braille user. These are best removed and any information contained in them included in the main body of the text.

- Pictures and logos are best removed and acknowledged by verbal description if required.

Who do you send the transcription to?

Either Shona Barclay or Marie Lawson would carry out the action of transcribing text into Braille. They are both based at the Alternative Media Resource Centre at the Sandwick High School. Please send documents to both parties at shona.barclay@shetland.gov.uk and marie.lawson@shetland.gov.uk, with the material to be transcribed attached. Copy freda.leask@shetland.gov.uk into all correspondence.

- It is recommended that you consider password protecting any attached documents, sent via e-mail, containing confidential client information.
- If you prefer, you can also supply the name and address of the service user, if this is appropriate, and the vision service will send the information in Braille format directly to the service user. (Such items can be sent free using 'articles for the blind' labels).
- Transcription takes approximately 2 working days within standard school terms. This service is not available during school holidays.

Please note that a large report may take longer than 2 working days depending on the complexity, preparation of material and workload.

The cost of Braille transcription should be met from the requesting department. Costs are as follows:

£13.50 per hour
20p per sheet
(1 A4 sheet will produce approximately 3 Braille pages)

Ensuring that you send your documents in the appropriate transcription format will help to guarantee a more seamless service.



Shetland Islands Council

Chief Executive: Morgan H. Goodlad

Mrs A Anyone
123 Some Street
Any Town
Postcode

Executive Services Department
Town Hall
Lerwick
Shetland
ZE1 0HB

Telephone: 01595 744505
Fax: 01595 744509
chief.executive@sic.shetland.gov.uk
www.shetland.gov.uk

If calling please ask for
Morgan Goodlad
Direct Dial: 01595 744500

Our Ref: MHG/AMA CE/EX/2
Your Ref: 123/ABC

Date: 27 October 2008

Dear Mrs Anyone

Letter Style (This is the Letter Title)

The style of letter used by the Council is as shown in this sample. Letterheads are printed without any identification other than the name of the Council and the crest. Addresses and other relevant information are then printed on to the letterhead at the time the letter is prepared, using the appropriate macro for your department. The following points should be remembered when preparing letters:

- The designated font to be used is Arial 12. This is the case for all correspondence.
- The subject heading is in upper and lower case and bold print
- The Council reference comprises the initials of the author, the initials of the person preparing the letter followed by the identifying departmental reference
- All text is ranged to the left including headings, main text of the letter and closing information. Do not justify the main text of the letter.
- If an enclosure is to be attached to the letter, this should be indicated as show below
- Where copies of the letter are being sent to another individual, this too should be indicated at the end of the letter as shown

I trust this information will be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive

Enc

cc: Mr B Someone

Mrs A Anyone
27 October 2008

The text of the letter continues at this point, carrying on from the previous page.

There is no need to insert the page number at the top as this is done automatically in the letter macro.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive

Continuation Sheets:

The above is an example of a second page where a letter goes on to two pages. When this occurs the second sheet should follow the same format as the main body of the first page of the letter.

If you can almost get a letter on to one page, never force it. Take a few more lines over on to the second page so that the letter has plenty of room. It is much better to have two pages well spaced rather than one page that is cramped up.

Where possible try to end a page with a paragraph ending, but if you can't, just take it in mid-sentence.

MEMO

To: All Executive Directors

From: Chief Executive

cc: All Administration Officers

If calling please ask for
Morgan Goodlad
Direct Dial: 4500

Medium: E-Mail

Date: 27 October 2008

Our Ref: MHG/AMA CE/EX/2

Your Ref:

Memo Style (This is the Memo Title)

Internal memos are prepared using the macro provided in each department. Points to remember when preparing memos are as follows:

- The designated font to be used is Arial 12. This is the case for all correspondence.
- “Our Ref” is made up of the author’s initials, followed by the initials of the person processing the memo, followed by the departmental file reference.
- The subject heading is in upper and lower case and bold print. It should not be centred or underlined.
- All text and the heading should be ranged to the left.
- If an enclosure is mentioned, this shall be indicated below the title of the person signing.

Chief Executive

Enc



REPORT

To: Shetland Islands Council

14 May 2008

From: Chief Executive

Report No: CE-01-D1

Report Style (This is the Report Title)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The text of first paragraph starts here.
- 1.2 The report title should be in bold print and upper and lower case. It should not be centred or underlined
- 1.3 The text of the report should be ranged to the left and not justified.
- 1.4 Advice can be sought from Committee Services on agenda management and delegated authority.

2 Link to Council Priorities

- 2.1 This section should clearly show how the information or recommendations in the report will contribute to the achievement of the Council's priorities as outlined in the Corporate Plan.
- 2.2 Up to date advice on this can be sought from the Policy Unit.

3 Background

- 3.1 etc

4 Proposal

- 4.1

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 Budget codes should be stated in this paragraph.

6 Policy & Delegated Authority

- 6.1 This paragraph should state applicable policy (with minute reference) and whether the decision has been made by an officer or can be made under

delegated authority by Committee or, in the absence of authority, by the full Council.

7 Conclusion

7.1 State conclusion drawing from previous paragraphs.

8 Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee recommends to the Council that:

8.1 State recommendation(s), numbering consecutively.

Date: 10 May 2008
Our Ref: MHG/AMA CE/EX/2

Report No: CE-01-D1



Shetland Islands Council

Chief Executive: Morgan H. Goodlad

Executive Services Department
Town Hall
Lerwick
Shetland
ZE1 0HB

FAX Cover Sheet

Mrs A Anyone
Address

Telephone: 01595 744505
Fax: 01595 744509
chief.executive@sic.shetland.gov.uk
www.shetland.gov.uk

If calling please ask for
Anita Arthur
Direct Dial: 01595 744501

Number of pages 1

Date: 27 October 2008

Remarks: Urgent Reply ASAP Please Comment For Information

Fax Style

The message starts here and is prepared in the usual format using Arial 12. The subject heading should be in bold print and upper and lower case. It should not be centred or underlined. All text should be ranged to the left.



Shetland Islands Council

Chief Executive: Morgan H. Goodlad

Executive Services Department
Town Hall
Lerwick
Shetland
ZE1 0HB

Information Bulletin/Press Release

Telephone: 01595 744505
Fax: 01595 744509
chief.executive@sic.shetland.gov.uk
www.shetland.gov.uk

If calling please ask for
Morgan Goodlad
Direct Dial: 01595 744500

Date: 27 October 2008

Information Bulletins/Press Releases

This is an example of the format to be used when preparing information bulletins or press releases. Points to remember are:

- Use the macro normally used for letters, deleting 'Our Ref' and 'Your Ref'.
- The main heading, ie Information Bulletin/Press Release (where you would normally have the address), shall be in Arial 18, initial capitals and in bold.
- The subject heading shall be in Arial 12, initial capitals and in bold.
- The body of the text shall be in Arial 12, normal upper and lower text.
- Headings and all other text shall be ranged to the left.
- The body text should not be justified.
- You should end the bulletin/press release with 'Ends'.
- It is important that the person named above at 'if calling please ask for' is available to answer any questions from the press/staff etc.

Ends

Note: Press releases are sent out by the Chief Executive's Office. You should receive the approval of your Head of Service and Executive Director before passing a press release to the Chief Executive's office for release.



Shetland Islands Council

Chief Executive: Morgan H. Goodlad

Executive Services Department
Town Hall
Lerwick
Shetland
ZE1 0HB

Telephone: 01595 744505
Fax: 01595 744509
chief.executive@sic.shetland.gov.uk
www.shetland.gov.uk
Direct Dial: 01595 744 _____

With Compliments

Date: _____



Shetland Islands Council

Chief Executive: Morgan H. Goodlad

To: _____

Executive Services Department
Town Hall
Lerwick
Shetland
ZE1 0HB

Telephone: 01595 744505
Fax: 01595 744509
chief.executive@sic.shetland.gov.uk
www.shetland.gov.uk
Direct Dial: 01595 744 _____

From: _____

With Compliments

Date: _____

The above are examples of the style of compliment slips used throughout the Council. Again, these compliments slips are available along with your macros for letters and faxes. They should be printed 3 to a page.

Business Cards

Business cards will follow the style below.



You should get approval from your Head of Service, then forward the details to go on the card to the Chief Executive's Office. An order will then be placed with North Isles Industries who will print the cards. The Chief Executive's Office will journal departments for the cost of printing.



Shetland Islands Council

Chief Executive: Morgan H. Goodlad

To: _____

Our Ref: _____

Your Ref: _____

Executive Services Department

Town Hall

Lerwick

Shetland

ZE1 0HB

Telephone: 01595 744505

Fax: 01595 744509

chief.executive@sic.shetland.gov.uk

www.shetland.gov.uk

If calling please ask for

Direct Dial: _____

Date: _____

Hand Written Communication

To be used for brief hand written messages as a cover sheet for faxes when a PC is not available.

This page can be adapted from your usual letterhead macro.

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