

IS YOUR CURRENT WEBSITE AN ASSET OR LIABILITY?



SLCC's Website Accessibility Trainer, Alistair McNaught, discusses the issues surrounding local council websites.

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Your website is your window to the world, letting people see inside the local council and keep up with local issues. But many local councils have websites that are difficult or even impossible for people with disabilities to use. It's usually due to ignorance rather than intent but if you are locked out of local services and local information by an inaccessible website, you don't really care whether the discrimination is accidental or not. The thing that matters is that it is illegal.

From September 23rd, 2019 all new public sector websites must meet the following conditions. These apply equally to websites 'substantially updated' since Sept 2018.

- meet minimum accessibility standards specified by international standards and
- provide an accessibility statement (a model template is available online from Government Digital Services) that tells disabled users
 - how they can benefit from your accessibility practices
 - which bits of the accessibility requirement you haven't yet managed to meet
 - what you're doing about it and
 - what alternative support you offer people who struggle to use your website due to deficiencies in its accessibility.

It's worth noting the accessibility requirement applies to uploaded content (documents, PDFs, videos etc) as well as the actual web pages themselves.

By Sept 2020, ALL public sector websites (whether new or updated or old and jaded) will need to meet those requirements. If they don't your local council will be exposed to discrimination claims. The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 state that a "failure by a public sector body to comply with the accessibility requirement is to be treated as a failure to make a reasonable adjustment" (section 12).

This is serious territory. Hoping nobody notices your website is inaccessible is like hoping nobody notices your council facilities aren't wheelchair accessible. There is already a Google map marking the quality of accessibility statements on over a sample of over 100 council websites.

If you already have it all in hand with effective procurement policies, and an accessible documents sitting on a compliant website then well done; you are meeting your legal obligations and serving disabled members of your community.

If you haven't, time is running out and you might benefit from attending our online training on web accessibility awareness and practice.

Testimonial from the Website Accessibility Webinar:

"The webinar covered all the areas necessary for ensuring the website is accessible to people of all kinds of disabilities. It also made us more aware of disabilities which would not be immediately obvious, which might make online material less easy to read. It was helpful enough to make us take action to get our own website ready for the legislation."

