



## Pack Introduction

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| <b>Version</b>        | 3.3                    |

### The council's public web presence

An introduction to the council's requirements and guidance pack for creating a consistent, accessible and well-managed public web presence.

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Council staff | • |
| Suppliers     | • |

- *target audience*
- *awareness desirable*

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Service managers    | • |
| Project managers    | • |
| System implementers | • |
| System developers   | • |
| Content authors     | • |

## Document history

| Version | Section | Date     | Name              | Comments   |
|---------|---------|----------|-------------------|--|
| 0.1     | ALL     |          | Andrew Jones      | Working version.   |
| 0.2     | ALL     |          | Valerie McFarlane | Corporate Communications approval.   |
| 1.0     | ALL     | 25/01/08 | Andrew Jones      | 1 <sup>st</sup> released version.  |
| 3.0     | ALL     | 15/10/08 | Andrew Jones      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> released version to account for restructuring of the overall pack. |
| 3.2     | ALL     | 11/11/09 | Adam Newman       | Cosmetic alterations & title updates   |
| 3.3     | None    | 17/05/10 | -                 | None   |

## Associated documents

| Reference | Document | Version | Date |
|-----------|----------|---------|------|
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## Definitions

| Term | Meaning |
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# 1 What and why?

Our website is the public face of South Gloucestershire Council on the internet. When producing information that appears on the website we must ensure we are providing a high quality, professional and reliable information resource for local people. As a local government organisation we need to pay particular attention to being inclusive to all our citizens. This is why accessibility and usability must be a key driving force for our overall web presence.

*We define the 'council website' as ANY site that presents information directly related to the council's business. This includes 3rd party hosted services such as the Consultations system and the Payments portal, forms such as School Admissions and sub-sites such as Jobs & Recruitment. Overall we describe this as the council's 'web presence' but for familiarity we will continue to use the term 'council website'.*

## 1.1 What is this pack?

South Gloucestershire Council is implementing a set of standards for web content publishing. These apply to:

- All council directorates, sections and service areas.
- Collaborative projects where the council is the majority funder or partner.

*This pack defines our target standards and offers guidance for achieving them.*

## 1.2 Who is it for?

We have developed this pack as a resource for staff and 3<sup>rd</sup> party suppliers who:

- Are planning to write content for new and existing pages/systems.
- Are looking to establish a new web presence for a service area.
- Are involved in a tender process to procure a new system.
- Are involved in a project to upgrade an existing system.

*The cover page of each document shows who the target audience is.*

## 1.3 Why is it important?

There are many important reasons why it is a good idea to have a set of standards:

- Publishing content in a consistent format and style goes a long way to achieving a high quality, professional, reliable and trustworthy resource.
- Creating a consistent usability experience inspires user confidence and is a key factor in delivering an accessible site.
- The council can demonstrate our commitment to achieving an accessible and usable website.
- Other councils have demonstrated that this approach works<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Salford Council won [Local Authority website of the year 2007](#).

## 1.4 Shaw Trust audit

In 2007 we commissioned an audit from Shaw Trust Disability Consultancy Services. This guidance and our standards are one of the council's responses to their report. By implementing this seriously we will stand a much better chance of overcoming the criticisms that were highlighted. Examples include:

- General accessibility compliance.
- Consistency of layout and navigation across sub-sites and applications.

*"Certain areas of the site do not have the same layout as others which may confuse certain users..."*

(Shaw Trust report referring to <http://jobs.southglos.gov.uk> in the context of our overall web presence.)

- Usability of online forms.

*"Labels are a very important feature for screen reader users who will often browse in forms mode and depend on properly marked-up form fields to provide them with the correct information. Correctly labeled forms are an essential component for accessibility."*

(Shaw Trust report referring to <http://consultations.southglos.gov.uk>, <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/Forms/UI/Public> and <http://www.e-paycapita.com/southglos>.)

## 1.5 Work the council needs to do

Many of the criticisms of the Shaw Trust report are directly solvable by the council's ICT Applications Development team. We are working to achieve compliance by the end of 2008 with a view to commissioning regular Shaw Trust reports on an ongoing basis.

This is the work we have identified:

- Resolve general accessibility issues that exist because of inadequacies in our content management system.
- Resolve accessibility and usability issues in our online forms system.
- Establish a set of standards and a package of guidance that we can use to help 3<sup>rd</sup> party suppliers overcome the criticisms and deliver a consistent approach.
- Work with 3<sup>rd</sup> party suppliers to implement our standards by early involvement at tendering, implementation and regular stages of their contracts.

## 1.6 What we ask of 3<sup>rd</sup> party suppliers

The Shaw Trust report considered our web presence as a whole and this increasingly includes systems and sites supplied and hosted for the council by 3<sup>rd</sup> parties.

*We ask that 3<sup>rd</sup> party suppliers pay attention to these requirements and guidance when working with us to deliver any online service to the citizens of South Gloucestershire.*

## 2 A word on accessibility and usability and identity<sup>2</sup>

*By following the corporate web standards (usability, accessibility and the council's visual identity) we are also helping to achieve many of the goals defined in the Council Plan (<http://www.southglos.gov.uk/NR/exeres/f9bc029f-5734-4a02-a923-1a2bc681aa8e>).*

### 2.1 Usability standards benefit all

A usable site supports its visitors to enable simple and efficient information retrieval. A usable site inspires confidence in the site and ultimately visitors will be keen to return again and again. In short, usability is absolutely critical to a web site's success.

Good usability can be defined as a product that is:

- intuitive to use
- efficient to use
- easy to remember
- enjoyable to use
- consistent in its behavior

*On a web site this means using well thought out content and design, and creating content that is easy to find and simple to navigate. Our current site was deigned by a consultancy that specializes in this field.*

There is no single style formula for ensuring usability. However, ensuring consistency is an important factor which is why these standards are so important.

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<sup>2</sup> This section has been adapted from guidance provided by Salford Council on their website pages about accessibility.

## 2.2 Accessibility standards benefit all

First and foremost South Gloucestershire Council is a public service provider and so we have to provide information that is accessible to all sections of our community, regardless of ability.

The Disability Discrimination Act has brought about new rights for disabled people. Employers and service providers must not discriminate against a person for a reason connected with their disability. They must also make reasonable adjustments to the way in which they offer their services. This applies as much to web sites as it does to ensure that that wheelchair access to council buildings is possible.

*The Government requires that all public sector web sites - whether for central or local government - should meet the W3C's guidelines on accessibility to WAI Level Double-A standard.*

But accessibility is not just about ensuring that disabled people can access information. It is also about ensuring that the wide variety of users and devices can all gain access to information, thereby maximising the potential audience and letting users experience the pages the way they choose to.

An accessible site is one that accommodates the full range of users. Designing for accessibility therefore means accepting that, for online information, there is:

- no standard information user, and,
- no standard device for browsing information

An accessible web site does not exclude anybody due to:

- their abilities, or
- the method they choose to access the web

Accessible web sites prioritise clear content, structure and ease of navigation over frilly aspects of design, however they also need not be visually unattractive, nor are they prevented from using the latest web technologies, provided that all information is still accessible to users.

## 2.3 A strong identity

*An organisation can help control its image by presenting itself and its activities in a consistent way. This means making sure there are clear links in the way printed<sup>3</sup> and electronic communications look.*

A consistent corporate image applied to a web site helps the user navigate the site and lends credibility to the origin and reliability of the information published. Importantly for any web site it provides a consistent and professional image.

Our web site is the public face of South Gloucestershire Council on the internet. When producing information to appear within the site we must ensure that we are providing high quality, professional and reliable service to the public.

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<sup>3</sup> Our printed media already strives to follow a consistent style across all service areas.

### 3 Pack contents

The overall pack is comprised of the following documents.

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1. An introduction to our package of guidance - **Introduction.doc**

*Here we explain what the pack contains and why we have created it.*

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2. A guide for content authors that has relevance to everybody - **Content.doc**

*Guidance for writing good quality web-based content that is also in the council style.*

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3. Web standards requirements - **Standards.doc**

*Requirements for meeting web standards, specifically in areas of accessibility and usability.*

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4. Implementing our website skin - **Skin.doc**

*Guidance for a consistent approach to implementing the council brand and site navigation.*

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5. Hosting requirements - **Hosting.doc**

Requirements for hosting systems with detail about domain names and security considerations.

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APPENDIX: Supplier specific guide - **Appendix-{Supplier}.doc**

*a supplement to the pack that is tailored to the individual system being provided by the supplier.*