

7. Producing content

Refer to the Web Style guide for more information on this section.

7.1 Text

Information must be accurate, up-to-date, and spell-checked.

Scrolling should not be excessive. If the publication of a lengthy document is unavoidable, (see also publishing documents) a contents list should be provided at the beginning of the document, with hyperlinks to specific sections in the text and 'back to top' links at the end of each section.

The WCM system does not allow underlining of text to avoid confusion with links.

Similarly italics are not possible due to potential reading difficulty. Upper case words should never be used for the same reason.

Font size, style and colour are pre-determined within the WCM system.

Alignment of text is left to assist on-screen reading.

When referring to a particular service or initiative, it is important to use the same word or phrase on each occasion – inconsistency leads to confusion for the user

7.2 Images

Images must enhance text, deliver a clear message and not be used as 'wallpaper' or vanity publishing.

Download time is regulated by a maximum image size enforced by the WCM system.

Where larger images are required eg photos, a link may be provided from the smaller version, indicating file size of the larger image.

Too many images on the same page will impact on download time.

Copyright issues must be resolved before any images are published (see also Data Protection issues)

7.3 External Links

External links should be used where they enhance the user experience. They are useful for:

- Adding value to the site by satisfying the full range of users' information needs
- Providing information in more depth on a particular topic
- Signposting users to other valuable sources of information
- Saving time and avoiding frustration by directing users away from our site when we do not provide the service or information required

However external links should be used with care to avoid:

- Directing users to inappropriate sites or sites of poor quality
- Losing users before they have fully seen the scope of our information
- Diverting users away from the subject-matter of their original quest

It is important that the relevance and content of external links is explained sufficiently for users to make an informed decision on whether to follow the link or not. The risks of spreading confusion and frustration are potentially serious.

External links must open in the same browser window.

Linked sites' urls, especially where there is deep-linking at lower levels, should be checked regularly to ensure they are still current. The e-Content Team runs regular checks to support this process.

The site disclaimer includes the following statement on external links:

"The Council is not responsible for the content of any external websites and does not endorse any product or organisation contained therein."

See also information on links in the Accessibility section

7.4 Maps

Where the physical location of a service point is indicated, the location must also be shown on a map. A GIS based web-enabled mapping system has been specially developed for the site and this is the standard to be used on all occasions.

7.5 Metadata

Metadata is 'information about information' and helps the site user find the right information quickly. A number of labels or 'tags' are applied to web pages and these help search engines retrieve relevant results or 'hits'.

For this reason it is particularly important to add metadata **subject** and **keyword** terms to web pages. These must be terms that are consistently used by all content publishers to ensure that the vocabulary used is controlled. In other words we must all use the same thesaurus for our metadata subject and keyword terms. This will become part of the content authoring process when the facility becomes available.

7.6 Publishing downloadable documents

The website is predominantly a collection of web pages designed to be read on screen and containing quick-reference information. The general rule is that content likely to be of interest to site users should always be included in standard web pages. There are risks associated with publishing content in non-web format:

- Download time may be unacceptable, especially to those on lower spec technology
- Dedicated software or a reader 'plug-in' may be required
- Speech reader software may not be able to interpret documents, thereby denying access to people with visual impairment (see accessibility)

There are, however, cases where the provision of downloadable documents is unavoidable or even appropriate. These include:

- Lengthy, detailed documents eg Structure Plan
- Frequently published documents with tight publication deadlines eg Committee papers
- Several versions of the same document eg draft document for consultation
- Documents likely to be of very specialist interest only
- Documents which users require in their original printed form eg leaflets, bus timetables
- Documents that are originated in other web-enabled applications eg delegated decisions

In the above cases every effort should be taken to ensure that summaries and the key points of such documents are provided on standard web pages. This will bring them to the attention of users and indicate whether their download is worthwhile.

Downloadable documents should by default be provided in pdf format. MS Office formats may additionally be provided to extend choice. All documents must be formatted correctly eg title, date and the file size must be indicated.

To keep download times to a minimum, care should be taken over file sizes. It is better to split up a large file into smaller ones than cause irritation with users whose browsers 'freeze' when attempting to download documents that are too big. NB There is no 'cancel download' button to abort the download.

Downloadable links must open in the same browser window.

7.7 e-mail addresses

The central enquiry e-mail address on the site – enquiries@nottsc.gov.uk – is displayed on the home page and on the Contact Us page. This is permanently staffed, enquiries are handled within a managed environment and performance levels are monitored.

E-mail addresses for specialist services may be contained within the context of service information pages. It is recommended that these be group-based as they are likely to be continuously staffed thereby providing a more responsive service.

Where appropriate eg where it is the norm within a particular service sector, it is permitted to include personal e-mail addresses, but continuous staffing must be assured eg using delegated access when the individual officer is unavailable.