

The Highland Council
Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities
Committee 25-3-15

Agenda Item	4
Report No	CPE 2/15

Plain English Update

Report by the Corporate Communications Manager

Summary

To provide an update on progress against the commitment to provide information to the public in clear language, to the 'Crystal Mark' plain English standard and the proposal to embed this standard in all The Highland Council's communications.

1. Background

1.1 The Highland Council's Programme "Working together for the Highlands 2012 – 2017" has a commitment that: "The Council will provide information to the public in clear language, to the 'Crystal Mark' plain English standard."

1.2 Membership

The Council took out Corporate Membership of the Plain English Campaign in June 2013 at the initial cost of £2,000. The subsequent annual membership charge is £1,000. Organisations do not need to be members to use Plain English services, but the main benefits of membership are a reduction in training and editing charges. This includes ten free online training courses each year and a 20% discount on Crystal Mark editing charges. Membership was renewed in September 2014.

It was agreed at committee in October that training would be undertaken during the course of this year's membership and that due to the costs and time delays in the crystal marking process, no further documents will be crystal marked.

The commitment to communicating in plain English will continue through training and corporate standards. Membership enables us to use the "Committed to clearer communication" Plain English logo on all our publications.

2. Progress update

2.1 Training and training materials

The Council has 20 free online Plain English training course places available (10 from 2013-14 and 10 for 2014-15). These places have been allocated to relevant staff across Council Services and the Corporate Communications Team. 29 staff have been identified for training. 19 staff across all the services have now completed training and a further 6 are currently undertaking training or have dates booked for training. The remaining staff have been contacted to arrange training dates.

The Council's Learning and Development Service covers Plain English in their Effective Business Writing course and in training on Preparing and Presenting Committee Reports. Links to the Plain English website are provided from their e-Learning on Committee Reports and also e-learning on Presentation Skills. Copyright has also been purchased to allow the use of Plain English resources to be available on our intranet.

The Corporate Communications Office provides information to staff on Plain English through the council's Intranet on the A-Z [Plain English](#), [Corporate Communications](#) and [Graphic Design](#) pages.

3. Communication Strategy

Commitment to the use and promotion of plain English is part of the Corporate Communication Strategy.

3.1 Employee Development Review (EDR)

Copyright is being purchased to upload the Plain English Guidelines to the staff intranet and once this is in place, it will be publicised. Line managers will be encouraged to consider staff development opportunities and Plain English as a core skill, as part of the EDR process.

4. Implications

4.1 **Resource:** Membership costs £1000 per year, but there are considerable resource implications, both financial and staff time, in continuing to crystal mark documents, or to train staff beyond the 20 free places. Continued membership (2015/16) would provide a further 10 free training places. However, training and EDRs allow for further development of staff skills using Plain English resources.

4.2 **Equalities:** Improving access to information through the provision of information in an easy to understand format is important for many groups of service users. Commitment to staff training and publicising corporate standards will benefit a wider range of publications and information materials, including reports and planning documents.

4.3 **Gaelic:** The Corporate Communications Office has had assurance from the Plain English Campaign that the Council's policy on the [use of Gaelic in council publications](#) is acceptable within the Crystal Marking standards.

4.4 There are no Legal; Climate Change/Carbon Clever; Risk and Rural implications.

Recommendation

To note the progress made to date in the Council's commitment to embed staff training and corporate standards for Plain English.

Designation: Corporate Communications Manager

Date: 13 March 2015

Author: Ruth Cleland,

Background Papers:

References:

["Working Together for the Highlands – A Programme for The Highland Council" 2012 - 2017](#)

Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee, 13 June 2013 Report number CPE 27/13: [“Committed to clearer communications by becoming corporate members of Plain English Campaign.”](#)

The Plain English Campaign: <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/>