

EOC(3) AI 013

Equality of Opportunity Committee

EOC(3)-15-08 (p1): 20 November 2008

Accessibility of Documents for Visually Impaired People - Revisiting the Committee's Report

Introduction

1. The Equality of Opportunity Committee considered the accessibility of published documents for visually impaired people during its meeting on 2 July 2008. The Committee received a paper and oral evidence from DeafBlind UK¹. The paper outlined a set of guidance on improving the publication and access to published documents, whether in hard format or electronic, for blind, visually impaired and deafblind people. The paper also included recommendations regarding other support that should be made available for blind, visually impaired and deafblind people in accessing information.

2. Prior to the Committee meeting, the Chair asked DeafBlind UK to look at the accessibility of the National Assembly for Wales' website. During the discussion in Committee, DeafBlind UK made a number of suggestions as to how the website could be made more accessible.

3. The Committee decided to take a number of actions, including:

- Writing to the Assembly Commission to highlight areas for improvement on the website.
- Writing to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government or WLGA requesting information about how many of the Welsh local authorities have an accessible information policy and what they contain.
- Writing to the Minister for Health and Social Services asking for the same information in respect to the Welsh health authorities and local health boards.

4. It was also agreed that the Committee's Report would be sent to the i-change internal cross party group who are considering the future technological needs of the Assembly.

¹ Equality of Opportunity Committee Paper EOC(3)-10-08: P(1) 2 July 2008:

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-third1/bus-committees-third-eoc-home/bus-committees-third-eoc-agendas.htm?ds=7%2F2008&submit=Submit>

Responses to the Committees actions

5. In response to letters from the Chair, the Committee has reviewed responses from:

- The Welsh Local Government Association
- The Minister for Health and Social Care
- RNIB

6. These responses are attached as Annexs to this paper.

7. Members will have an opportunity to question Lorraine Barrett, AM, about the Assembly Commission's Accessible Information Policy later in today's meeting.

WLGA response (Annex 1)

8. The WLGA asked local authorities for details of their accessible information policies. At the time of the WLGA response, over half of the authorities had responded. In summary:

- Two local authorities stated that they had accessible information policies
- Three said they were in the process of planning or updating policies
- All of the remaining authorities have produced guidelines on the provision of accessible information which are either part of a broader corporate document or developed for specific service areas.
- They are all available on local authority internet and intranet sites.

9. The attached response from the WLGA provides further details of the alternative formats in which they make information available and of web accessibility issues. All of the authorities who responded to the WLGA reported that they met the WAI Standard². The WLGA paper also identifies some examples of good practice.

Response of the Minister for Health and Social Care (Annex 2)

10. The Minister for Health and Social Services has provided the Committee with a report, published in August 2008, entitled *Accessible Information Policies and Communication Methods of NHS Organisations in Wales – NHS Trust and LHB Responses*. The report states that the majority of NHS organisations in Wales do not have accessible information policies, although most have patient and information policies which include sections about accessible information. The report also includes examples of formats and methods used to support patients' communication needs. Provision varies across Wales.

² The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) works with organizations around the world to develop strategies, guidelines, and resources to help make the Web accessible to people with disabilities. For further details see: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/about-links.html>

11. Further details are available in the report which is attached as an Annex to this paper.

12. The Minister also informed the Committee, further to the findings of Deafblind UK that 58% of deafblind patients did not receive appointment cards in accessible formats, that she has asked NHS organisations in Wales to provide details of communication practices between primary and secondary care professionals and NHS Trusts and patients.

RNIB response (Annex 3)

13. The RNIB said they were delighted that the Committee had decided to look into the issue of accessible information. They have referred the Committee to a report entitled, *Policies into Practice*³ which found evidence of poor provision of accessible formats, despite the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995* having been in place for over a decade. The RNIB have sent a copy of their own accessible information policy, which is available from the Committee clerking team on request.

Recommendations

14. The Committee is invited to note this document, and to utilise it in scrutinising the Assembly Commission, in relation to its Accessible Information Policy.

15. Following scrutiny of the Assembly Commission, in relation to its Accessible Information Policy, the Committee is invited to consider whether it wishes to take further action on this matter.

³ RNIB *Turning Policies into Practice* March 2008: http://www.pollinationcampaigns.co.uk/pages/hub/about-us/media_releases/turning-policies-into-practice.asp