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**Comprehensive Guidance on Website Accessibility for Local Councils**

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WCAG stands for **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines**. These guidelines are developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to ensure that web content is accessible to people with disabilities. They provide a set of recommendations for making web content more accessible, covering a wide range of disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities. The current version, WCAG 2.1, includes criteria that help web developers and designers create websites that are accessible and usable for everyone.

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**Introduction**

This document combines key insights from three comprehensive sources on website accessibility to provide a unified, detailed guide for local councils. It covers the essential requirements, practical steps, and ongoing responsibilities to ensure your council's website is accessible and compliant with current regulations.

**What is Website Accessibility?**

Website accessibility ensures that a website or mobile application, and the information published on it, is accessible to all users, including those with disabilities. This includes users with impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, deafness, or impaired hearing. Accessible websites enable users to interact with content through assistive technologies, such as screen readers or specialized hardware.

**Legal Requirements**

Since 23 September 2018, all UK public bodies, including parish, town, borough, and city councils, must comply with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. These regulations mandate compliance with the WCAG 2.1 AA standard by September 2020.

**Key Components of Website Accessibility**

1. *Accessible Design and Content*

* Websites must be coded and designed to be navigable and usable by assistive technologies.
* Text should be resizable, with sufficient contrast and clear layouts.
* Images should have alternative text (ALT TEXT) descriptions.
* Links must be descriptive and inform users about their destination.

2. *Accessibility Statement*

* Councils must publish an accessibility statement on their website. This statement should outline the website’s accessibility status, highlight any non-compliant areas, and provide a plan for addressing these issues. It should also explain how users can request accessible formats of information.
* An example template can be found on the Government’s Digital Service website <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sample-accessibility-statement>

3. *Regular Audits and Monitoring*

* Conduct regular audits using tools like WAVE by WebAIM, Google Lighthouse, or Siteimprove. These tools help identify accessibility issues and monitor compliance.
* Engage community members who use assistive technology to test and provide feedback on your website’s accessibility.

**Step-by-Step Guide to Achieving WCAG 2.1 AA Compliance**

1. *Domain and Hosting*

* + Ensure your domain is registered in the council’s name.
  + Use a hosting provider that adheres to security best practices, such as Cyber Essentials Certification.

2. *Website Development*

* + If commissioning a new website, ensure the brief includes WCAG compliance.
  + Choose a developer experienced in creating accessible websites.

3. *Content Management*

* + Maintain a structured format with clear headings and minimal use of styling.
  + Ensure all documents are accessible, especially PDFs and Word documents. Use accessibility checkers in software like Microsoft Word before publishing.

4. *Document Publishing*

* + Documents like agendas, minutes, and financial statements should be available in accessible formats.
  + Provide a clear process for users to request information in alternative formats.

5. *Ongoing Maintenance*

* + Regularly update and review the accessibility statement.
  + Perform periodic checks of new content and overall website accessibility.

6. *Transparency Code Compliance*

* + Publish required documents under the Transparency Code, including end-of-year accounts, governance statements, and expenditure reports.
  + Ensure these documents are also accessible.

**Future Considerations and Resources**

* + Stay updated with changes in accessibility standards and guidelines, such as potential updates to WCAG.
  + Utilize resources from NALC, SLCC, and Government Digital Service for ongoing support and guidance.

**Conclusion**

By following these guidelines, local councils can ensure their websites are accessible, inclusive, and compliant with legal requirements. Regular monitoring and updates will help maintain accessibility standards and provide a better user experience for all community members.

*For further information, please refer to:*

Government’s Accessibility Requirements for Public Sector Websites and Apps

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>

NALC’s Transparency Code and What Councils Must Publish

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/other#transparency>