

WE ARE
SANDWELL!

Enabling access

Making Sandwell Council events and meetings accessible



Introduction

This guidance contains some straightforward practices everyone can follow to make sure our events and meetings are inclusive as possible.

You should make accessibility an integral part of your plans at an early stage.

This guidance focuses on minimising barriers to people with disabilities.

It covers:

- Planning events and meetings
- At the venue
- Starting events and meetings
- Making event and meetings accessible
- Support to leave the venue
- An accessible event and meeting checklist.

Planning events and meetings

You should provide attendees with appropriate and accessible information to help them prepare in good time before the event or meeting takes place.

Give your contact details to individuals so that they can tell you about any additional needs they may have.

Always ask individuals to specify their preferred reading format. You must not assume that one standard format will be suitable for all.

If you are advertising the event online or using social media you should ensure you include English captions and BSL so that members of the Deaf community are able to access the information.



Attendees may request information in different formats for different purposes.

Examples include information sent electronically or provided in audio in advance, and accessible handouts at the event or meeting itself.

Once you have asked people to specify their requirements you must be prepared to meet these needs.

This may include staff to provide support at the venue, booking interpreters – including BSL, and reimbursement of transport costs.

Ensure you have a budget in place for this at the planning stage.

**Find out more about the
Accessible information
Standard (AIS)**

At the venue

Ensure staff or volunteers are available to help attendees navigate the venue. They will need to be clearly identifiable. This includes BSL interpreters if they have been booked.

You will also need to ensure staff or volunteers providing support at the venue are trained and feel confident to carry out this role.

Signpost attendees around the venue using large print signs including arrows. Sign colour must contrast strongly with the background colour and the surface of your signs should be non-reflective.

Pictures should be clear and as simple as possible. Use Live Captions facility on your mobile device to support communication with Deaf people who are attending.

Ensure the room layout is fully accessible with room between chairs to allow for wheelchair access and space for people who may need support to be guided to their seats.

You may need more volunteers to assist with refreshments or lunch. You will also need to ensure you have booked enough BSL interpreters to work throughout the lunchbreak.

Starting your event or meeting

The following is good practice for ensuring all council meetings open to the public are as inclusive as possible:

- Ensure support is available to complete the registration form if required. This should be positioned at an accessible height for a person in a wheelchair.
- Interpreters should be booked 30 minutes before the start of the event/meeting to ensure they are ready.
- Start by welcoming attendees and checking everyone's access requirements have been met.
- Describe the layout of the room and where facilities are located, including lifts and toilets. Attendees will need to know what to do in case of fire, where refreshments will be served and when there will be breaks. You should not use hand gestures alone or refer to locations vaguely.
- Always check attendees are comfortable with seating arrangements and that all equipment, such as loop systems, are functioning.

- Have additional copies of accessible paperwork to hand out if required.
- Introduce any facilitators and observers and explain their roles.
- During introductions, plenty of time must be allowed for interpreters to spell out names and organisations. If the meeting is expected to take longer than two hours and sign language interpreters are required, you must ensure two interpreters are available.
- If there are not too many people present, everyone in the room should take turns to introduce themselves.
- When taking turns to talk ensure speakers introduce themselves again before they begin.
- Remember to say when you are leaving, otherwise a person with visual impairment may not realise you have moved away!

Chairing a meeting

Start by reminding attendees of the purpose of the meeting.

- Go through the agenda to ensure everyone is clear about the items to be discussed.
- Remind attendees that no agenda items should be taken unless the relevant information has been circulated in advance.
- Always ask new attendees to identify themselves.
- Summarise main points, or action points, at the end of the meeting



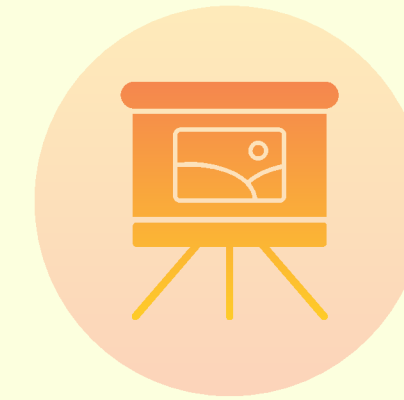
Presentations

For a presentation, the following guidelines should be used:

- The presenter should fully describe the content of any presentations used.
- Videos should include an audio description to describe any visual action taking place.
- If there are Deaf people at the event, make sure all presentations, videos, recordings have English captions. You can arrange to have information recorded on video in BSL in advance.
- The content of anything recorded on flip charts should be repeated regularly to remind participants of what has already been said.
- Handouts should always be provided in advance of the event or meeting in an accessible format to meet individual needs. This may include email distribution of information in Plain Text in Microsoft Word.



PowerPoint or slide presentations should be accessible to as wide an audience as possible.



Find out more about making presentations accessible for people with disabilities

- Aim for a minimum text size of 32 point.
- Do not underline text or use italics.
- Do not use large amounts of block capitals.
- Ensure you have a good contrast between text and background colour.
- Do not put text over images or a textured background.
- Always use left alignment
- Emphasise headings by using a larger font size.
- If you are sending the presentation out by email ahead of or after the event, ensure you have included Alt text (alternative text) with any visuals that you have included.

After the event or meeting

At the end of the event or meeting attendees may require some support to access transport, for example booking taxis.

Ask individuals if they require any support, and if so, what kind of support is most helpful.

Remember, it is just as important to meet support needs on leaving the event or meeting as on arrival. Any BSL Interpreters should be booked to stay 30 minutes after the meeting/event.

Ensure that you provide accessible minutes, reports and any other feedback for attendees.



Before the event

Have you...

- Risk assessed the venue where the meeting is taking place to ensure it is accessible, including ramp access, ample parking space?
- Asked individuals who are attending to specify their information needs (format) and any support needs they may have well in advance?
- Provided information in accessible formats before the event? Examples: minutes and papers of council, committee, and cabinet meetings.
- Followed this through with a phone call if appropriate?
- Provided enough time for attendees to read information and prepare?
- Planned how you will meet additional needs, such as interpreters?
- Budgeted for any travel reimbursements for attendees?
- Ensured you have trained staff volunteers to provide assistance if required?

At the venue

Have you...

- Ensured staff or volunteers providing support are available if required, and ready before attendees arrive?
- Ensured the venue layout is fully accessible with room between spacing of chairs for wheelchair access/people who require assistance?
- Provided signposting around the meeting venue in large print?
- Ensured sign colour contrasts strongly with background colour on a non-reflective surface
- Ensured staff and resources are available to meet all support and information needs identified? Examples may include a functioning loop system, easy access to plug points for assistive technology.

Starting the event

Have you...

- Carried out introductions, described the layout of the room, location of fire exit routes, toilets and fire drill routine?
- Briefed the facilitators: people raise hands when they wish to speak so the facilitator can prompt people when it is their turn to talk, and to introduce themselves again before they begin?
- Ensured any visual aids, flip charts or presentation materials meet accessibility guidelines
- Ensured routes to accessible toilets are not blocked or obscured?
- Allowed enough time for breaks from concentrating and reading and writing?

Support to leave the venue

Have you...

- Planned/organised how people will vacate the premises safely- does this need to be done in stages?
- Ensured support guides are available to assist people to exit the venue if they need support with this? For example - booking taxis, supporting or signposting to leave the premises safely.

Further information

[Making meetings and events inclusive for people who are deaf or hard of hearing](#)

[Making meetings and events inclusive for people with learning disabilities](#)

[Making meetings and events inclusive for people with physical disabilities](#)

[Making meetings and events inclusive for people with visual impairments](#)

Making sure your events are inclusive for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing

Always find out if communication support is required. If you are responsible for arranging this, make sure it is done as soon as possible. If you are using a booking platform such as Eventbrite make sure that Access Needs can be stated and details of an event/meeting contact person are included.

Communication support includes:

- British Sign Language (BSL)
- Interpreters – make sure the correct number of interpreters are booked
- deafblind interpreters
- lipspeakers
- Assistance dogs
- notetakers and;
- speech-to-text reporters.

You will need to ensure the venue has:

- clear signage/way finding information
- a functional loop system

Check the venue prior to booking the meeting or event.

Induction loop systems can be used to help the listener to concentrate on the important sounds without the distraction of excessively high background noise levels. Make sure the venue organisers know if these systems are required, so they don't make a last minute change to your room arrangements

Inviting people who are deaf or hard of hearing to events or meetings

Information about the meeting or event must be available in accessible formats.

Invitations and ways to reply should be accessible and provided in appropriate formats, for example sent electronically.

Any website or on-line information should be less than '3 clicks away' to make it as easy as possible to access.

Once you have asked people to specify their requirements you must be prepared to meet their needs. This may include interpreters and reimbursement of transport costs.

Make sure all presentations, videos, recordings that you plan to use at the event have English captions and BSL. Ensure you have a budget in place for this at the planning stage.

Interpreters will also need information ahead of the event or meeting. Remember, if the meeting time is changed or cancelled, the interpreter will still need to be paid.

You should book Interpreters to attend 30 minutes before the start of the event/meeting to be at the registration desk on time, and 30 minutes after the event end time. They will also need to be available during breaks/lunch/networking.

► NRCPD: The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deaf Blind People www.nrcpd.org.uk

Greeting people

Make sure there is someone to meet people on arrival. An intercom or telephone to enter the building isn't accessible. Use the Live Captions facility on your mobile device.

Staff and volunteers in a support role must be clearly identifiable. This includes BSL interpreters. Speak to directly the person and avoid jargon! Speak clearly and never shout, as this will affect the shape of your mouth for someone who lip-reads.

Make sure all of your face can be seen and that you don't have anything in your mouth, such as chewing gum. Use facial expressions and gestures.

Top tips for getting a Deaf person's attention:

- ▶ Tap on the shoulder or appropriate areas
- ▶ Wave in front of them
- ▶ Switch the lights on and off
- ▶ Tap the table
- ▶ Floor vibrations e.g. stomping foot
- ▶ Text them or use appropriate contact methods – RelayUK, Text, or video call BSL.

At the event or meeting

- Make sure that your position is good relative to a light source. Good and properly positioned lighting helps with seeing speech and signs.
- If the interpreter needs to be on-stage, reserve seats for BSL users.
- Aim to minimise background noise, as this can interfere with communication.
- Make sure the interpreter is introduced, sits opposite their client and has regular breaks.
- People using personal listeners will need to have appropriate seating at the event/meeting.
- Make sure the room temperature is not too cold, it's not easy to sign with cold hands.
- Make sure only one person talks at a time during group activities and discussions.
- Always announce a change of subject.
- Make notes on a flip chart or board for participants to refer back to.



Making sure your events are inclusive for people with learning disabilities.

Make sure the time and place where the meeting is being held is ok with people with learning disabilities.

Think about:

- What support do people need to get to the meeting?
- Is the building on a bus route?
- Do the attendees have any caring commitments?

Lots of people with learning disabilities feel comfortable in a formal meeting as long as they are well supported.

However, people who might be less confident or less experienced may prefer to work around small tables.

Supporting people with learning disabilities to prepare for the event or meeting

People with learning disabilities should have support to prepare before the meeting. This means they have any papers, minutes and presentations explained to them.

Agendas, minutes, papers and presentations should come out at least 2 weeks in advance of the meeting so people have enough time to prepare.

All meeting papers should have a front sheet which includes:

- A summary of the paper
- What the person writing the paper wants the meeting to do. For example do they want to just give the meeting some information. Or do they want the meeting to make a decision. If so, explain what decisions the meeting need to make.
- It can help to have papers in different colours so people know which paper is for which subject, but always ask first.
- Don't put too many topics on the agenda.

Your invite letter should have:

- A picture of the place where the meeting is being held
- The time of the meeting using a clock face
- Information about what the meeting is about

Remember, some people might have difficulty in reading, so sending an invite out without checking with the person in other ways might mean they don't attend.

At the event or meeting

The chair person should remind everyone what the meeting is about at the beginning. Some people go to lots of meetings, and they might not remember what the meeting is about.

- Everyone should introduce themselves and where they work.
- Remember to use easy words to explain what your job is.
- Name cards or labels should be used at the meeting.

Support in the meeting

People with learning disabilities have people who sit with them in meetings so they can:

- explain hard words and difficult ideas being discussed
- support them to contribute to the meeting
- support them to use their red card if the meeting is difficult

This doesn't mean other people in the meeting should not be supportive; it is everyone's responsibility to make the meeting accessible. Always use easy words at the event or during the meeting, and use the same easy words all of the time. Do not use initials such as 'NHS', always give the full title first.

Bin for hard words

Some organisations who work with people with learning disabilities suggest putting hard words that are used at an event or meeting into 'the bin'. This can be drawn onto a flip chart and used each time. This means everyone can see the words and avoid using them again. Always find an easy word to use instead.

Red cards

Another tool that you may wish to use is red cards. These are taken to to the meeting for each person and can be used if people want to stop the meeting if it is going too fast or if they don't understand something.

Breaks

Ideally there should be a short break every hour.

Having a co-chair with a learning disability

If a person with a learning disability co-chairs, they must be treated as an equal.

This means:

- They should have equal importance in the meeting.
- Any letters or papers which come to the co-chair without a learning disability must also come to the person with a learning disability.
- The co-chair with a learning disability must prepare the agenda with their fellow co-chair.
- They should have an equal say in setting the agenda and checking the minutes.
- It is useful if the co-chairs summarise the actions agreed after each item.

If you are responsible for organising regular meetings for people with learning disabilities it is good practice to have a co-chair with a learning disability.



Making events and meetings inclusive for people with physical disabilities

Check the venue prior to booking to ensure it has:

- clear signage/way finding information.
- accessible car parking, and good public transport routes if possible.
- accessible pedestrian approaches and ramps.
- accessible entrance doors, space and seating in reception/waiting areas.

Assess how disabled people will be able to move around the building and use the facilities including routes, accessible toilets, accessible lift, accessible eating areas, and so on.

Make sure the venue organisers know that disabled people are attending so they don't make a last minute change to your room arrangements.

Carefully plan meeting start and finish times to allow for different disabilities, support needs and fatigue conditions.

Inviting people with physical disabilities to events or meetings

You may need to provide information in a range of formats, such as in audio or large fonts. Invitations and ways to reply must be accessible.

Travel arrangements

You may need to provide information about accessible transport to the venue, including where possible information about low level (wheelchair accessible) bus timetables. Ensure the venue has capacity to enable attendees to bring a personal assistant, or supporter, along with them if required.

Greeting people

Some disabilities are “hidden”; you may not know that you are talking to a disabled person unless they tell you. Do not rush somebody with a speech impairment, or finish sentences for them.

Never pretend to understand what someone is saying if you do not.

At the event or meeting

Ensure the room layout is accessible with room between chairs to allow for wheelchair users.

People may need frequent breaks, for example to take medication.

Be aware that individuals may have different communication needs, and that people may have more than one impairment. For example, a mobility and sensory impairment.

Always ask before providing support. Ask questions like "would you like any assistance?"

Don't be afraid to ask what works best for each person.



Making your events as inclusive as possible for people with visual impairments

Check the venue prior to booking the meeting to ensure it has:

- clear signage/way finding information.
- accessible pedestrian approaches and ramps.
- entrance doors, space and seating in reception/waiting areas should be kept clear of obstructions.

Ensure staff or volunteers are available to help attendees navigate the venue.

Signpost attendees using large print signs including arrows. Sign colour must contrast strongly with the background colour and the surface of your signs should be non-reflective. Pictures should be clear and as simple as possible.

Make sure the venue organisers know that visually impaired people are attending so they don't make a last minute change to your room layout.

Inviting people who are visually impaired to events or meetings

Provide attendees with accessible information in good time before the event takes place. Give your contact details so individuals can alert you to any additional needs they may have.

Always ask people to specify their preferred reading format. You may need to provide information in different formats for different purposes.

Examples include information sent electronically or provided in audio before the event, and handouts in large print or braille at the event itself.

Once you have asked people to specify their requirements you must be prepared to meet their needs. This may include deafblind interpreters and reimbursement of transport costs.

Ensure you have a budget in place for this at the planning stage.



Greeting people

Communication is **everyone's responsibility**. Describe the layout of the room, exit routes, location of toilets and fire drill routine and assembly point. You should not use hand gestures alone or refer to locations vaguely.

If there are not too many people present, everyone in the room could take turns to introduce themselves. When talking ensure each speaker introduces themselves again before they begin.

Remember to say when you are leaving, otherwise a person with visual impairment may not realise you have moved away.

At the event or meeting

Ensure there is room between chairs to allow people who may need support to be guided to their seats. You may need more volunteers to assist with refreshments or lunch.

Provide water for guide dogs.

At the end of the event attendees may require some support to access transport, for example booking taxis. Ask individuals if they require any support, and if so, what kind of support is most helpful.





If you would like this information in plain text format to adapt for large print or Audio transcription, please contact: **ASC_Communications@sandwell.gov.uk**

Content co-produced by Sandwell Council, SVI (Sandwell Visually Impaired), Sandwell Deaf Community Association (SDCA), and Adult Social Care Disability Services.

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