Agenda – Executive Policy Committee – September 21, 2023

REPORTS

Item No. 8 Creation of a Plain Language Communication Policy

WINNIPEG PUBLIC SERVICE RECOMMENDATION:

1. That Council approve the Plain Language Policy, attached as Appendix A.

2. That the Public Service report back with a review on the effectiveness of the Plain Language Policy no later than July 2028.

3. That the Proper Officers of the City of Winnipeg be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On July 5, 2023, the Executive Policy Committee laid the matter over for 30 days.

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On January 17, 2023, the Executive Policy Committee granted an extension of time of 180 days for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back with respect to a plain language policy to be used by the City in all external communications and administrative reports.

David Grant submitted a communication with respect to the matter.

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On April 20, 2022, the Executive Policy Committee directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back in 180 days with respect to a plain language policy to be used by the City in all external communications and administrative reports.

COMMUNITY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On March 23, 2022, the Assiniboia Community Committee passed the following motion:

WHEREAS the City of Winnipeg Governance Review identified multiple recommendations citing a need for materials to use a simpler writing style to enable the public to understand City communications;

AND WHEREAS clear and effective communication is essential for the City of Winnipeg to deliver many services that are essential to daily life;

AND WHEREAS Winnipeg continues to grow through immigration, and English is not the first language of many new residents;

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

COMMUNITY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION (continued):

AND WHEREAS documents written using plain language are more likely to meet accessibility standards and are easier to have translated;

AND WHEREAS plain language helps improve the relationship between the government and citizens;

AND WHEREAS governments that adhere to plain language principles have reported increased access to services, compliance with regulations, and decreases in costs due to reduced phone calls and emails, enabling faster processing;

AND WHEREAS Corporate Communications provides recommendations to departments to reduce technical and industry jargon, but does not provide training, robust guidelines, or policies to ensure the use of plain language in materials;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Executive Policy Committee be requested to direct the Winnipeg Public Service to develop a plain language policy to be used by the City in all external communications and administrative reports.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Creation of a Plain Language Communications Policy

Critical Path: Executive Policy Committee – Council

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
D. Driedger	F. Wiltshire	N/A	M. Jack

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Service created a Plain Language Policy. The Policy will help make sure that the Public Service write things for members of the public in a way that they can understand.

It's important to use plain language so that residents can stay informed, act on important information, or take part.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council approve the Plain Language Policy, attached as Appendix A.

2. That the Public Service report back with a review on the effectiveness of the Plain Language Policy no later than July 2028.

3. That the Proper Officers of the City of Winnipeg be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

On April 20, 2022, the Executive Policy Committee directed the Public Service to report back in 180 days with respect to a plain language policy to be used by the City in all external communications and administrative reports.

On January 17, 2023, the Executive Policy Committee granted a 180-day extension.

Council approval is required for the adoption of a City Policy.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

If adopted by Council, the Public Service will implement the Plain Language Policy (Policy) across all City departments, and will review the Policy at a minimum of every five years.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

The City of Winnipeg (City) is a large organization that offers a wide variety of programs and services.

Communicating with members of the public is an activity undertaken by all civic departments.

The purpose of the Plain Language Policy (Policy) is to guide members of the Public Service on the use of suitable language in the City's public-facing written materials to ensure the intended audience can understand what is written, be better informed, and act on important information or participate.

While the *City of Winnipeg Writing Style Guide* is available to all civic employees, which outlines the importance of using plain language and offers guidelines, a policy did not exist until now.

The Policy includes an outline of requirements and restrictions, and responsibilities for members of the Public Service.

The Policy applies to public-facing written materials produced by the City, in both official languages (English & French), including but not limited to:

- Administrative reports (*Executive Summary* section only)
- Advertisements
- Correspondence
- Presentations
- Publications
- Signage
- Social media
- Website content

The Policy does not apply to written materials displayed on a property owned by the City but operated by a third party pursuant to a lease or other agreement. The Policy also takes into consideration legal, contractual, and technical language constraints, and does not apply to items, including but not limited to legal documents, agreements, disclaimers, engineering reports, and financial documents.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement **Date:** May 31, 2023

Project Name:

Creation of a Plain Language Communications Policy

COMMENTS:

There are no financial implications from recommendations in this report

Lioubov Gavrilova-Crozier, May 31, 2023

Lioubov Gavrilova-Crozier, CPA, CA
Manager of Finance & Administration (Campus)
Corporate Finance Department

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

- Legal Services

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

1.4 Integrated Knowledge and Resources
Coordinate inter-departmental systems, projects and resources, making the best use of internal and external expertise to better understand service needs, find the most appropriate solutions, optimize resources, and maximize community outcomes.

1.19 Equitable Service Access
Achieve best practice standards in equitable customer service and communications, enabling all community members to understand and navigate municipal service-delivery systems and decision-making processes, in the official language of their choice.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

Consideration was given as to whether this report connects to the Winnipeg Climate Action Plan (CAP), and it was determined that the CAP is not applicable to this specific report.

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

Consideration was given as to whether this report connects to the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and its Goals and Objectives, and it was determined that the PRS is not applicable to this specific report.

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Customer Service & Communications
Division: Corporate Communications
Prepared by: David Driedger
Date: June 2, 2023
File No: N/A

Attachments: Appendix A - Plain Language Policy