Minutes – Executive Policy Committee – September 21, 2023

REPORTS

Item No. 8 Creation of a Plain Language Communication Policy

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

The Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service, as amended, and recommended to Council:

1. That the Plain Language Policy, attached as Appendix A, be approved with the following amendments:

    A. In Section 3.1, add the following:

        i. "i. All 311 Services"

        ii. "The Public Service will mandate a plain language training program for all staff who write public facing materials as part of their job. The current training programs offered by the city will need to be modified to incorporate ISO standards."

    B. In Section 4:

        i. Delete Section 4.1 in its entirety and replace with the following:

            "4.1 Director of Customer Service & Communications

            The Director of Customer Service & Communications is responsible for administering this policy, including ongoing reviews every two years. The Director shall post the Plain Language Policy on the Customer Service & Communications webpage, along with an online mechanism to accept feedback on the policy."

        ii. In Section 4.2, delete the period after the words "follow this policy", and replace with the following:

            ", within 90 days. This position is also responsible for providing clarity on the requirements of this Policy."

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION (continued):

iii. In Section 4.3, delete the period after the words "follow this policy", and replace with the following:

", within 90 days."

iv. In Section 4.4, delete the period after the words "follow this policy", and replace with the following:

", within 90 days."

v. In Section 4.6, add the following:

"Responsible for identifying a key contact in their department that will be fully versed in plain language practices. They will help ensure that their departments are adhering to the updated plain language policy.

Complete mandatory training for staff who write public facing materials as part of their job."

C. Delete Section 5 in its entirety and replace with the following:

"5. The Policy will be reviewed, at minimum, every two (2) years via an administrative report brought forward to City Council. Performance will be reviewed using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)/ and or performance metrics that will be developed by the public service within 6 months upon the adaptation of the plain language policy.

This will ensure public-facing written materials will be at a grade 8 reading level or lower so that most individuals can understand the information."

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 Public Service be directed to report back to Executive Policy Committee within 6 months of adoption of the policy, outlining what Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and or performance metrics have been developed, as outlined in section 5 of the policy.

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION (continued):

4. That any new costs associated with the training referred to in section 3.1 of the policy be referred to the 2024 Budget Review Process.

5. 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:

Moved by Councillor Lukes,

WHEREAS governments have a responsibility to provide clear and understandable information to all members of the community, no matter their cultural background or educational level;

AND WHEREAS it is the right of all Winnipeg citizens to be informed in a transparent and user-friendly manner on City Hall practices, services, and projects;

AND WHEREAS the City of Winnipeg Governance Review has previously stated we must improve our communication and public access to information;

AND WHEREAS a plain language policy will help drive additional public awareness, engagement, and inclusivity in the democratic process;

AND WHEREAS the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) definition of plain language "A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information";

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service be concurred in, with the following amendment:

- In Recommendation 1, delete the period after the words "Appendix A" and replace with the following:

  ", with the following amendments:

  A. In Section 3.1, add the following:

     i. "i. All 311 Services"

     ii. "The Public Service will mandate a plain language training program for all staff who write public facing materials as part of their job. The current training programs offered by the city will need to be modified to incorporate ISO standards."

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

B. In Section 4:

i. Delete Section 4.1 in its entirety and replace with the following:

"4.1 Director of Customer Service & Communications

The Director of Customer Service & Communications is responsible for administering this policy, including ongoing reviews every two years. The Director shall post the Plain Language Policy on the Customer Service & Communications webpage, along with an online mechanism to accept feedback on the policy."

ii. In Section 4.2, delete the period after the words "follow this policy", and replace with the following:

", within 90 days. This position is also responsible for providing clarity on the requirements of this Policy."

iii. In Section 4.3, delete the period after the words "follow this policy", and replace with the following:

", within 90 days."

iv. In Section 4.4, delete the period after the words "follow this policy", and replace with the following:

", within 90 days."

v. In Section 4.6, add the following:

"Responsible for identifying a key contact in their department that will be fully versed in plain language practices. They will help ensure that their departments are adhering to the updated plain language policy.

Complete mandatory training for staff who write public facing materials as part of their job."

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

C. Delete Section 5 in its entirety and replace with the following:

"5. The Policy will be reviewed, at minimum, every two (2) years via an administrative report brought forward to City Council. Performance will be reviewed using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)/ and or performance metrics that will be developed by the public service within 6 months upon the adaptation of the plain language policy.

This will ensure public-facing written materials will be at a grade 8 reading level or lower so that most individuals can understand the information."

- Add the following new recommendatios and renumber the remaining recommendation accordingly:

"3. That the Public Service be directed to report back to Executive Policy Committee within 6 months of adoption of the policy, outlining what Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and or performance metrics have been developed, as outlined in section 5 of the policy.

4. That any new costs associated with the training referred to in section 3.1 of the policy be referred to the 2024 Budget Process."

Carried

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

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

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.

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.

DECISION MAKING HISTORY (continued):

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;

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