**Agenda – Executive Policy Committee – December 9, 2025**

## REPORTS

**Item No. 6 Plain Language Communications Policy Review**

WINNIPEG PUBLIC SERVICE RECOMMENDATION:

1. That this report be received as information.

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

COUNCIL DECISION:

On September 25, 2025, Council concurred in the recommendation of the Executive Policy Committee and adopted the following:

1. That an extension of time of 90 days be granted for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on the two-year review of the Plain Language Policy.

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

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On September 16, 2025, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Winnipeg Public Service with the following amendment:

- Delete the words "to September 2026" and replace with "of 90 days"

and submitted the matter to Council.

COUNCIL DECISION:

On September 29, 2023, Council adopted the Plain Language Policy, which includes 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."

# ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

**Title:** Plain Language Policy Review

**Critical Path:** Executive Policy Committee

## AUTHORIZATION

| Author | Department Head | CFO | CAO |
|---|---|---|---|
| D. Driedger | D. Driedger | N/A | J. Dunford |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 29, 2023, Council approved the Plain Language Policy (Policy).

The Policy says that any material for the public must be written clearly so people can understand it and know what to do. It encourages writers to write materials at a grade 8 reading level or lower so that most individuals can understand.

Since the Policy was approved, 421 employees participated in plain language training.

The Public Service developed key performance indicators to measure the success of the Policy. It also measured grade level readability scores to determine how easy materials are to read.

Most materials met the policy, including:

- Advertisements;
- Presentations;
- Signage;
- Social media;
- Website content; and,
- 311 scripts.

Administrative report executive summaries and publications did not meet the Policy. Executive summaries in administrative reports improved year-over-year since the Policy was implemented. This is a positive step in the right direction.

Publications are a noted area for improvement.

Correspondence was not assessed. This is because:

- It's not centrally tracked;
- It doesn't follow a standard format that can be compared; and,
- It is subject to privacy expectations in some cases.

Winnipeggers are able to submit Policy feedback using an online form created on November 21, 2023. None has been submitted to date.

Overall, the Policy has:

- Promoted better writing habits;
- Increased awareness of audience-focused communication; and,
- Improved measurement and tracking of how easy materials are to read.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be received as information.

## REASON FOR THE REPORT

On September 29, 2023, Council approved the Plain Language Policy (Policy), directing that it be reviewed every two years using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure its success.

Council further directed the Public Service to report back to the Executive Policy Committee within six months of the adoption of the Policy, outlining what KPIs and/or other performance metrics have been developed.

On March 12, 2024, the Executive Policy Committee laid the matter over and further directed the Public Service to report back within 90 days on the following:

1. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and any additional performance metrics to evaluate the success of the Policy as it applies to the other public-facing written materials noted in section 3.1, namely:
    - Advertisements
    - Correspondence
    - Presentations
    - Publications
    - Signage
    - Social media
    - Website content
    - All 311 Services

2. Confirmation that the directions outlined in section 4 of the Policy have been satisfied

The matter was subsequently laid over at several meetings of the Executive Policy Committee.

On December 4, 2024, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Public Service and received the Plain Language Key Performance Indicators administrative report as information.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no direct implications to receiving this report as information.

## HISTORY/DISCUSSION

On September 29, 2023, Council approved a Plain Language Policy (Policy).

The Policy requires that public-facing written materials are written in a way that the intended audience can understand and act on important information.

It encourages writers to write materials at a grade 8 reading level or lower so that most individuals can understand.

When writing for members of the public, writers are encouraged to use clear, plain language and avoid long sentences, jargon, and complex words. If technical terms must be used, writers are encouraged to explain the concept in plain language.

The Policy directs writers to verify and assess the grade level readability of their written content.

**Writing assessments**

Once the Policy was adopted, Council directed the Public Service to develop key performance indicators to measure its success.

On December 4, 2024, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Plain Language Key Performance Indicators administrative report (KPI Report), which outlined and formalized what and how the Public Service intends to measure the Policy for its information.

A review assessed various types of public-facing materials for readability, including administrative reports (executive summaries), advertisements, presentations, publications, signage, social media, website content, and 311 scripts.

The Public Service measured grade level readability scores of the written materials to determine how easy they are to read.

Using grade level readability scores was a straight-forward concept to help explain and encourage better writing habits and to reinforce the value of audience-focused communication with writers throughout the Public Service.

Materials assessed at or below grade 8 met the Policy while materials written above the grade 8 reading level did not.

The review tracked and compared materials from the year before the Policy was implemented, and two years after, with Year 1 running from September 29, 2023, to September 28, 2024, and Year 2 from September 29, 2024, to September 28, 2025.

The review of web content looked only at materials posted using our new content management system, which went live in November 2022.

The review also only assessed new 311 scripts written post-Policy implementation.

In total, the assessment involved reviewing over 1,900 separate written materials.

Because of the volume of materials involved, some readability scores may appear higher (i.e. harder to read) because it wasn't always possible to remove legal or technical sections, proper names, or replicate original formatting. On the other hand, scores may appear lower (i.e. easier to read) when maps, tables, or image labels were assessed as short text.

This applies to all assessed materials.

Materials that met the Policy post-implementation include:

- Advertisements;
- Presentations;
- Signage;
- Social media;
- Website content; and,
- 311 scripts.

Materials that did not meet the Policy post-implementation include:

- Administrative reports (executive summaries); and
- Publications.

Correspondence was not assessed. This is because:

- It's not centrally tracked;
- It doesn't follow a standard format that can be compared; and.
- It is subject to privacy expectations in some cases.

**Detailed summary of assessments**

**Advertisements**
The review looked at one random sample from each advertising campaign produced by the Marketing & Branding Division.

In total, a sample from each of 47 campaigns was assessed, as outlined in the table below:

| Campaigns Per Year | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 12 | 13 | 22 |

The review assessed the headline as well as the body of the randomly selected advertisements for grade level readability, and calculated the average score by year, as outlined in the following tables:

| Average Grade Readability Score by Year – Ad Headline | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 6 | 6 | 7 |

| Average Grade Readability Score by Year – Ad Content | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 6 | 6 | 6 |

Assessed materials met the Policy.

**Presentations**
The review looked at the grade level readability score of all public engagement presentations (including information boards, also called storyboards) as part of this assessment. Some public engagement initiatives do not require presentations, so not all public engagement initiatives are represented. In total, 29 presentations were assessed:

| Presentations Per Year | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 11 | 12 | 6 |

The assessment calculated the average score of the materials by year. Assessed materials met the Policy, as outlined in the table below:

| Average Grade Readability Score by Year – Presentations | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 6 | 5 | 5 |

**Signage**
The review looked at all signage produced by the Marketing and Branding Division. The analysis consisted of reviewing signage in each of the three assessment periods and assigning an average grade level readability score.

In total, 31 examples of signage were assessed, as outlined in the table below:

| Signs Per Year | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 12 | 10 | 9 |

The review calculated the average score of the materials by year. As outlined in the table below, the grade level readability score improved since the Policy was implemented:

| Average Grade Readability Score by Year – Signage | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 10 | 5 | 4 |

**Social media**
The review looked at 12 randomly selected social media plans per year. The average score was calculated for each year.

As outlined in the table below, materials assessed met the Policy, post-implementation:

| Average Grade Readability Score by Year – Social Media | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 9 | 8 | 8 |

**Website content**
The website content review included all materials posted between November 2022, when our new content management system launched, to the end of September 2025.

In total, 1,256 webpages were assessed for grade level readability score.

Of those webpages, 93 percent meet the Policy.

**311**
As outlined in the Plain Language Key Performance Indicators administrative report, the success of the Policy as it applies to 311 services would be measured on the number of scripts that have been updated and rewritten to comply with the Policy.

Since the Policy's implementation, 311 rewrote five scripts. These all meet the Policy.

**Administrative reports (executive summaries)**
While conducting the review, the Public Service randomly looked at up to three administrative report executive summaries per Standing Policy Committee (SPC) and Executive Policy Committee meeting. A total of 521 executive summaries were assessed:

| # Administrative Reports Assessed by Committee | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| SPC on Community Services | 23 | 33 | 27 |
| SPC on Finance and Economic Development | 27 | 33 | 28 |
| SPC on Property and Development | 32 | 33 | 33 |
| SPC on Public Works | 27 | 30 | 33 |
| SPC on Water, Waste and Environment | 19 | 28 | 24 |
| Executive Policy Committee | 27 | 32 | 32 |
| **Total** | **155** | **189** | **177** |

The average grade level readability score was calculated by SPC. Averages have generally improved since the Policy was implemented:

| Average Grade Level Readability Score by Committee* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| SPC on Community Services | 16 | 14 | 11 |
| SPC on Finance and Economic Development | 14 | 14 | 13 |
| SPC on Property and Development | 14 | 13 | 12 |
| SPC on Public Works | 15 | 14 | 12 |
| SPC on Water, Waste and Environment | 15 | 13 | 13 |
| Executive Policy Committee | 15 | 14 | 13 |

**Of the administrative reports assessed at random*

While it's acknowledged that more work needs to be done to meet the Policy, the results demonstrate that executive summaries are moving in the right direction.

**Publications**
The Public Service reviewed publications posted and shared on the City's Strategic plans & policies webpage for grade level readability score.

Only three publications were posted post-Policy implementation: two in 2024, and one in 2025. Each document was assessed at a grade 13 readability score (i.e. post-secondary).

Only one document had an executive summary, which came in at grade 17 readability score (i.e. post-secondary)

There were none posted in the year preceding the implementation of the Policy.

**Plain language training**
The Public Service was directed to mandate a plain language training program for all staff who write public-facing materials as part of their job.

The Public Service offers a training program in plain language. The following is a summary of course completions:

| # Of Participants Per Year | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Pre-Policy** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** |
| 38 | 300 | 121 |

The Public Service will continue to identify positions whose primary roles include writing materials that fall under the Policy and will add the training program to their learning plans.

**Online feedback form**
The Public Service was directed to create a form to accept feedback on the Policy.

Winnipeggers are able to submit Policy feedback using an online form created November 21, 2023. None has been submitted to date.

**Process improvements**
The following process improvements have been implemented to help ensure greater accountability when drafting and reviewing materials:

- Updated various document templates to include a checkbox to confirm readability assessments were conducted and whether the content meets the Policy. If not, writers must explain why (i.e. exceptions identified in the Policy).
- Introduced website publication verification tool to include a checkbox to confirm readability assessments were conducted and whether the content meets the Policy. If not, writers must explain why (i.e. exceptions identified in the Policy).
    - Introduced an audit feature to check compliance

These improvements are expected to make it easier to monitor and ensure public-facing materials meet the Policy.

The Policy has led to measurable improvements in how the Public Service communicates with members of the public.

Promotion of Plain language training will continue within the Public Service. Further, specialized tools and materials are planned to assist administrative report writers bring their executive summaries in alignment with the policy.

While there are areas for improvement, the overall results show a positive shift towards better writing habits and an increased awareness of audience-focused communication.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

## Financial Impact Statement

**Date:** October 17, 2025

# Project Name:
# Plain Language Policy Review

**COMMENTS:**

There are no financial implications in receiving this report as information.

*Randy Bernard*

Randy Bernard, CPA
Manager of Finance & Administration (Campus)
Corporate Finance Department

## CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

- The Office of the CAO
- Human Resource 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, Interim Director, Customer Service & Communications
Date: October 24, 2025