

Extracts from the Welsh Government's response to the report by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee on inequality during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 35 – The Welsh Government should provide swift guidance to reopening businesses on physical and communication accessibility.

Welsh Government response to recommendation:
Accept

The Welsh Government has developed guidance that aims to help businesses and employers and provided practical considerations on how they could operate. The guidance is based on five principles for workplace safety:

- Care: Our health and well-being comes first
- Comply: The laws that keep us safe must be obeyed
- Involve: We all share the responsibility for safe work

- Adapt: We will all need to change how we work
- Communicate: We must all understand what to do

The Welsh Retail Consortium (WRC) has informed us that in April, they highlighted the steps retailers had taken to accommodate disabled consumers to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission. We understand that in these discussions, they were able to explain the reasonable steps retailers had taken to accommodate disabled consumers within the constraints of social distancing protocols.

Members of the WRC have had regular contact with disability charities and organisations. As a sector, there have been three teleconferences from the middle of May, between all major retailers and the charities. The WRC report that these have been a great opportunity to explain steps retailers have taken and refine communications to staff in stores and communication for disabled consumers. They note that feedback from the charities, including Age UK, Alzheimers Society and the RNIB has been

very positive and have welcomed a regular opportunity to raise issues on behalf of their members.

The WRC have also reported that members have thought carefully about the operation of their stores during the crisis and refined their practices in liaison with the major charities. The key steps they have taken are: many retailers offering dedicated hours for elderly and vulnerable consumers as well as NHS staff and carers who look after them; retailers understanding queueing was not appropriate for all consumers and briefed their greeters and queue marshals to prioritise disabled consumers; from the start of social distancing, allowing carers to shop with vulnerable consumers, even where they were restricting numbers; they are being careful to ensure signage in store on social distancing is legible for all consumers; and being careful when redesigning stores to ensure social distancing was possible for all consumers.

Retailers have also implemented additional training for colleagues, supported by regular internal communications, to ensure all store workers were aware of the spectrum of impairments and available to help where required.

As the economy reopens the Welsh Government expects the accessibility needs of the public to be fully met wherever possible, and where 2 metre distancing makes that difficult, adequate alternative arrangements to allow access should be put in place.

Recommendation 36 – The Welsh Government should establish a priority grocery delivery scheme for disabled people who are not shielding (similar to Defra/RNIB scheme in England).

Welsh Government response to recommendation:

Accept in principle

The Welsh Government welcomes the effort retailers have made to expand their on-line

ordering and home delivery operation, especially where they are offering this service to a wider group than those shielding. They are also voluntarily introducing initiatives such as prepayment cards to facilitate shopping on another's behalf and several provide food box schemes which can be delivered directly to people's homes. If people need practical help and do not have family or friends locally to provide this, the Welsh Government suggest they contact their local authority or local voluntary council for practical support.

We are also pleased that retailers have committed to supplying priority online slots for those advised to shield once after the shielding period ended.

Recommendation 37 – The Welsh Government should appoint an accessibility lead within the Welsh Government to oversee the production of all key public health and other information in accessible formats

Welsh Government response to recommendation:
Accept

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring that all Welsh citizens are informed and aware of how to follow rules and stay safe during Covid-19. That is why we ensure the presence of a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter at each of our Covid-19 news conferences and ensure that large print and braille are available on request alongside other accessible formats on key products, such as the shielding letters from the Chief Medical Officer.

We have set up an Accessible Communication Group, which met for the first time in June, to discuss and overcome the barriers stopping people from accessing information during this time. This Group includes a wide range of organisations, who have testified to the difficulties that those who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, with learning difficulties or are autistic experience when trying to access clear and concise information during the coronavirus pandemic. The

Group also includes organisations who represent refugees, children and the Gypsy, Roma Traveller community.

Although having a live interpreter at public broadcasts is a good starting point, we know that there is much more that needs to be done.

Providing more information in plain English and Welsh, producing content in BSL and in an 'Easy Watch' format, and making better use of videos and QR codes are all suggestions currently being considered or implemented by the Welsh Government. We are also aware of the need to produce easy read versions of guidance and avoid too many idioms, metaphors and technical terms that may cause confusion for those with learning difficulties.

The need to consider offline modes of information sharing has also been raised at meetings of the Accessible Communications Group, as well as the need for producing braille, audio and large print resources for blind or visually impaired people.

Taking this feedback into consideration, we have made an active effort to improve the accessibility of our Covid-19 communications, which can be seen in the suite of accessible materials available for resources such as our Test, Trace, Protect campaign.

A proposal for future accessible communication policy is also currently being developed, which will ensure all Welsh citizens receive clear and comprehensible information.

As well as the immediate improvements we have made, we are also working on a document which will set out the standards that Welsh Government will meet in the future to make sure that communications are accessible and meet the needs of people across Wales.