

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

READING COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD

4 SEPTEMBER 2020

QUESTION No. 2 in accordance with Standing Order No 36

Francesca Rolle to ask the Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board:

Communications for People with Visual Impairment

Unfortunately no one is able to attend the meeting on the 4th September due to current furlough/annual leave arrangements. However, could we please put forward the question of how any “alert messaging” and other essential communications will be made sure to reach people with a visual impairment (who may not access the information in the same way as others), and in an appropriate format for them to be able to access the information depending on their needs?

We would also like to highlight our website pages detailing ways that individuals and organisations can support people with sight loss during the Covid-19 pandemic: <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/covid19/assisting-people-with-sight-loss>

Many thanks,
Francesca Rolle
Engagement Officer, South West
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Chair of the Outbreak Engagement Board):

One of our key priorities identified during the pandemic is to support the people who are most vulnerable and isolated in our communities.

We are working hard to ensure all our methods of communication are as assessable as possible - for example, we have worked closely with Reading Deaf Centre to provide BSL video translations and we have also created a page dedicated to information in other languages. We are also currently working on a project to provide audio and subtitled video information on coronavirus safety messaging, which would include translations.

Our main channels of communication with residents are accessible for people with a visual impairment. The Reading Council website www.reading.gov.uk is one of our main channels for providing up to date information for the public.

We strive to ensure our website is as easy as possible for everyone to access and supports the use of assistive technologies, for example, screen readers and browser controls eg text resizing (www.reading.gov.uk/accessibility). The website has information on our latest coronavirus updates and guidance at <https://www.reading.gov.uk/coronavirusinfo> . We also have a section specifically on wellbeing <https://www.reading.gov.uk/coronavirusadvice> which signposts residents to where to find information in alternative formats.

We are encouraging residents to sign up to our regular eNewsletter at www.reading.gov.uk/enewslettersignup Our news emails have a text size that can be increased by the reader if needed.

We use social media to regularly update residents who can follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. We follow best practice when posting on social media including the use of alternative text tags for images and the use of CamelCase for Hashtags.

We have also recently set up a Council Nextdoor App account which we would encourage residents to sign up to. Nextdoor is the neighbourhood hub for trusted connections and the exchange of helpful information, goods, and services: <https://nextdoor.co.uk/> Nextdoor is also accessible for screen readers and has dynamic font size for better readability: <https://engblog.nextdoor.com/accessibility-nextdoor-4f1375bf5240> We intend to use Nextdoor as another channel to make important announcements to residents.

In the event of a major outbreak in Reading, we would use as many communication channels as possible to reach as wide an audience as we can. Depending on the situation we may also include the use of radio and TV broadcast.

The Council holds a register of all the residents in the borough registered either as sight impaired (partially sighted) or severely sight impaired (blind). During the lockdown, in partnership with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), we wrote to all those on the register to provide useful information about services/help specifically available to those with sight loss. We have also contacted everyone receiving a care package with a welfare call to ensure their wellbeing.

We are also always happy to provide all our material in alternative versions on request. If the material specifically relates to coronavirus, people can email cv19notifications@reading.gov.uk or call 0118 937 2707.

We are also very keen to work further with local partners at The Guide Dogs for the Blind, RNIB and Berkshire Vision and to explore ideas for improving the accessibility of our communications. We would also welcome linking up to use partner channels to communicate urgent messages via their channels and community links. The communications team can be contacted via cv19notifications@reading.gov.uk