

Report

Top five most common accessibility issues

faced by UK council websites

July 2020



Introduction

Socitm publishes today (6 July 2020) its latest UK council website rankings following accessibility testing.

In July's BetterConnected+ audit, conducted by Socitm's accessibility partner, Silktide, a number of key issues were highlighted that negatively affect assistive technology users' ability to either navigate through a website, easily find information, or input information into web forms.

While some issues were identified on a majority of council websites, some councils improved their overall web accessibility dramatically between June-July.

New reports are available to Socitm members and in the Silktide Index on the first Monday of each month.

What is web accessibility?

Accessibility is the practice of making your website usable by everyone, regardless of ability or disability. It is about inclusion, no matter what a user's circumstances may be.

Silktide's audit looks at how accessible a website is, and measures against the latest international standard for web accessibility, WCAG 2.1. In the UK and the EU, this is the latest standard required of all public sector websites by 23 September 2020.

Each month, accessibility testing results are published across a range of UK public sector websites and made publicly available in the Silktide Index.

Testing methodology

Every month, a sample of up to 125 web pages are gathered from each main council website in the Silktide Index. Those pages are tested for around 200 key accessibility criteria. Tests cover all unambiguous criteria in WCAG 2.1. This means that scores are only produced for WCAG criteria that a computer can reliably assess by itself.

Each WCAG 2.1 level is rated out of 100.

The website's overall accessibility score is a weighted combination of all three levels (45% for Level A, 40% for AA, 15% for AAA).



Common issues discovered

1. Missing 'Skip to content' navigation (57.95%)

Over half (57.95%) of council websites failed to include a 'Skip to Content' option. This is a major problem for users of assistive technologies, such as screen readers, who are using tabbed browsing to access websites.

The 'Skip to content' link is usually very high on the page, and allows users to bypass the menu and navigate directly to the main body of the page. Without it, users with limited vision may be forced to tab through tens or hundreds of navigational links before reaching the main content, resulting in a very long-winded and frustrating experience.

2. Failure to identify form fields (87.05%)

Over 87% of websites tested had at least one instance of failure to correctly label form fields with the type of data being collected. More commonly known as 'autocomplete', correctly labelling forms allows a user's web browser to pre-fill information such as name, email address and postal address.

Autocomplete helps:

- › People with cognitive disabilities who may not immediately know the purpose of the field, because the label used by the author is not familiar to them.
- › People with limited movement or tremors who may struggle entering data using a keyboard.
- › All users who wish to save time by having form fields automatically filled in for them (this is especially useful on mobile devices).

3. Using the same link text for different destinations (94.87%)

Almost all websites failed this test on at least one page. Screen readers cannot understand the context of text on a page. This means that if you have two links on a page navigating to different places, but they are both labelled the same, the user has a 50% chance of navigating to the wrong page.

For example, your website may contain two News sections, located at different URLs:

```
https:// .../product/news/
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https:// .../company/news/
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If both links are labelled "News", screen readers will not be able to distinguish between them. The solution is to label one link "Product News" and the other, "Company News".

4. Text with insufficient contrast (74.08%)

The following users are affected by text, which is not easy-to-read, because its colour does not contrast enough with the background it is placed on:

- › Users with low or blurred vision.
- › Users with visual colour deficiencies.
- › Users of devices in bright sunlight.

The contrast ratio must be at least 4.5:1 for body text and 3:1 for large text.

Three-quarters of the websites tested have at least one failure against WCAG AA 1.4.3.

5. Not marking navigation as lists (73.84%)

Almost three-quarters of council websites were found to have, at least one failure to mark navigational elements as list items.

Users of assistive technologies can skip an entire list in one step. In some cases, they can even search inside a list. These aids are not available where links are written outside of a list.

Failing to write links semantically, for example using the or tags, can force users to have to step through hundreds of links, one at a time.

Highlights and improvements

Just because these issues have been highlighted does not mean that UK Councils are, overall, performing poorly with regards to accessibility. In fact, almost 70% of councils score over 70% in the Index tests in July.

Three notable highlights, showing vast improvement between May and July, include Blaby District Council (from 69 to 96), London Borough of Ealing Council (from 55 to 86) and Rother District Council (from 67 to 86).

Summary

With under three months left until the EU Web Accessibility Directive deadline of 23 September 2020, UK councils have some room for improvement.

Accessibility is a complex topic, and no single individual can be expected to understand the challenges of creating a fully compliant website to WCAG 2.1 standards.

The Silktide Index was created to help public sector organisations understand more about the accessibility challenges they face. It highlights areas for improvement and starts a conversation within public sector organisations about the importance of accessibility.

The reports are based on a small sample of each website (up to 125 pages) and provide a flavour of the overall accessibility performance. More in-depth reporting is available by becoming a paid Silktide user.

Socitm members have free access to the Index reports, which contain more information and recommendations than the public reports.



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