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Cockburn's new accessible websites "among the very best"

DIGITAL accessibility for all, whether that be for people with disability, those who are ageing, or residents who are culturally and linguistically diverse, is the aim of the City of Cockburn's main website.

Launched last week, the City of Cockburn website (cockburn.wa.gov.au) has been developed and audited to meet the internationally-recognised Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, Version 2.0 (WCAG 2.0), to Level AA.

The same level of compliance has also been achieved by the City of Cockburn's new Cockburn ARC website (cockburnarc.com.au), making the digital environments as easy to use as possible, by people of all abilities.

City of Cockburn Mayor Logan Howlett said the websites' Level AA compliance meant people living and working in the City would be able to meet their own information needs, independently and securely, without necessarily having to telephone or come into the City offices in person.

"This is critical for the inclusion of people who have traditionally been marginalised in our digital society," Mayor Howlett said.

"Enabling more people to fulfil their information needs independently from these websites means those people who do need personal assistance won't be faced with long waiting times. This improves the experience for all citizens in their dealings with the City."

Some of the main accessibility features of the City's new websites include:

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- Full accessibility for people who are blind or have low vision and use screen-readers and other assistive technologies
- All links and other user interaction are fully accessible with keyboard-only use, ensuring those unable to use a mouse are not disadvantaged
- People who use voice-activation technology, such as Siri or Dragon Naturally Speaking, can access the full website using that software
- Mobile-friendly while maintaining functionality to work with popular web browsers and mobile technology devices and platforms
- Based on Google Maps, the websites' maps have been significantly improved to allow greater contrast through turning on the 'accessibility' feature and a voice service reads the map information
- These maps have a textual capability which allows users of screen-readers and those unable to use a mouse, to interact with the maps to provide an alternative to the visual content
- All menus can be opened and closed without the use of a pointer-specific device such as a mouse
- All colours have been tested to ensure they meet the WCAG 2.0 Level AA colour contrast requirements
- All links have been provided with unique and understandable text rather than relying on the HTML URL's.

The City began work to update its circa-1999 website in 2015 under the guidance of award-winning internationally-recognised website accessibility expert, WA-based Dr Vivienne Conway.

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With her company Web Key IT, Dr Conway was contracted to provide digital accessibility consulting, training and auditing for both websites, from the tender selection process in 2015.

She worked with the City of Cockburn and Perth website developer Alyka to ensure accessibility was addressed at every stage of the process, rather than relying on an audit and remediation at the end of the sites' development.

"Among all the websites that Web Key IT has tested, including internationally, the new City of Cockburn websites are among the very best," Dr Conway said.

"In local government, we haven't found a more accessible website. One of our user testers who has been blind since birth stated "the website is so accessible and lovely to use, that it makes me want to move to Cockburn".

"I don't think you can get higher praise than that!"

The City is moving towards the bulk of its communication material, including its style and writing guides, being produced following the accessibility requirements laid out in the WCAG 2.0 level AA accreditation.

The City plans to hold workshops to demonstrate the accessibility features so users can make the best possible use of the websites, and will also ask for feedback via a link to Comment on Cockburn on the City's homepage.

This feedback will help the website evolve alongside accessibility testing for the first six months post-launch and then every 12 months to ensure it continues to meet AA requirements.

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Did You Know:

- The City of Cockburn first established a web presence in March 1999
- The City of Cockburn was one of the very first Local Governments to have a website, especially one that was regularly updated
- This first website won the Australian Municipal Association's Communications Award for Best Website
- Dow Digital (now Brand Agency) was our first website's designer, and it took 18 months to create with regular consultation with a large stakeholder group.

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