

# Luton Council Style Guide



[www.luton.gov.uk](http://www.luton.gov.uk)

**Luton**

# Luton Council Style Guide



## Why this document matters

Most large organisations and councils have their own house style.

### Keeping to a consistent style of writing makes sure everything we write:

- is accurate
- is easy to read and understand
- is punctuated consistently and correctly
- describes things (such as departments and roles) in the same way
- uses the same style for things such as numbers and dates
- avoids common mistakes

2

This guide shows how you should write and present information from the council. It is based on good practice and plain English. Everything we write should follow this guide.

Having a clear and consistent style indicates that all our publications come from one organisation and helps to improve the public's perception of the council. You can read more about why style and tone of voice matters on the next page.

Style and tone of voice	Page 3
Abbreviations and acronyms	Page 4
When capital letters (upper case) should be used	Page 4
How to present figures and financial information	Page 6-7
How to write dates and times	Page 6 and 8
How to write about the council	Page 7
Religious festivals	Page 7
Correct use of apostrophes	Page 8
One word, two words or hyphenated	Page 11
At-a-glance guide to common mistakes	Page 11

If you have any questions about the content of this document, or any other aspects of how to prepare and present written information, the Communications and Marketing team will be happy to provide help and guidance.

## Striking the right tone

This guide is designed to help everyone working at Luton Council communicate in a simple, straightforward and consistent way. This will ensure we project a positive, engaging and professional image to our residents and partners.

As of 2018, the guide has been updated to take into consideration the latest recommendations for writing for audiences in a more engaging and conversational way as the web and social media play an increasingly vital role in our communications activity.

It's important to remember, however, that though our style will be consistent, tone of voice will be adapted for the relevant platforms and audiences. Legal or democratic reports, for example, would still take a more formal tone and structure.

The tone of your writing will tell people about Luton Council's attitude to its customers. Using the right tone, together with plain English, will help generate a positive image of the council and will also get your message across in the simplest way.

Using the wrong tone (or lots of jargon) can have a huge effect on how well your message is received because the reader will react negatively to the way you are writing.

**Before you create any piece of communication, consider your content and answer these essential questions:**

**Is the communication necessary?**

**What is the key message?**

**What am I trying to achieve?**

**Who is it for and what do they need?**

**If working online only - does this information exist somewhere else, and if so can I just link to it?**

## Put your most important point first

Where possible, get straight to the point. Most readers will look at the first few words of a paragraph and decide whether it's worth reading the rest. The majority of our online users access the site from mobile or tablet devices, making brevity even more important.

## Keep it concise

Big chunks of text act like a brick wall, particularly if your document is being viewed on a mobile device. Try to keep sentences simple with no more than 20 words. Use bullet points instead of a list in sentence form. Paragraphs should be no longer than four to five lines.

We aim to meet level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0.

See [usability.gov](https://usability.gov) for further advice on how to write user friendly content.

## Some top tips for all your communications:

1. Use 'I', 'we', 'your', 'our' where possible, it will make your writing sound more personal and sincere
2. Use everyday spoken language, not formal jargon (that's plain English)
3. Express sympathy, be caring and friendly where relevant – but don't patronise your reader
4. If you have to write a negative letter, be gracious and understanding, not imposing

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations can be convenient: they can also cause confusion if used incorrectly.

Very few abbreviations are universally understood. Even an abbreviation commonly used and understood in one area of the council may be unfamiliar to colleagues working elsewhere, and will almost certainly be unfamiliar to our customers.

Always use the full title in the first instance. If (and only if) you intend referring to the subject again later in the text, put the abbreviation in parenthesis after the first use, for example: 'The council runs a Childcare Voucher Scheme (CVS)'. Then use the abbreviation on its own for the rest of the document.

### Examples of common abbreviations that can be used without definition are:

NHS, BBC, ITV, UK, EU, MP, MEP

There may be others, but if you are in any doubt use the full title in the first instance.

Acronyms should use capital letters without full stops when each letter is representative of a word in the title, for example, Corporate Leadership Management Team would be CLMT.

Some acronyms begin with a capital letter, for example, Unicef or Unison.

### Council-related abbreviations

Do not use the abbreviation LBC for Luton Borough Council. Use Luton Council (as opposed to Luton Borough Council) wherever possible - this will now be the format of choice for the vast majority of communications. See 'Luton Council' for more on



page 6. Preferably, simply refer to 'the council' or say 'we' or 'our'.

### Other abbreviations

Never use the ampersand symbol (&) in general text or when describing council departments such as Place and Infrastructure. The ampersand should only be used when it is part of an organisation's official title, for example: Marks & Spencer.

Never use numeral abbreviations (2nd, 4th etc) in text.

**Use: This is the fourth time the council has sponsored this event.**

**Do not use: This is the 4th time the council sponsored this event.**

### Address

When addressing someone by name, for example, Dear James, sign off with 'Yours sincerely'.

When addressing someone by title or job, for example, Dear Chief Inspector, sign off with 'Yours faithfully'.

### Addresses should be written without punctuation, for example:

Luton Council  
Town Hall  
Upper George Street  
Luton  
LU1 2BQ

### Alignment

All text should always be left justify, including headings. Indenting of paragraphs is not necessary.

## Capital letters

Capital letters make reading more difficult and should only be used when necessary.

Do not use block capitals. EXTENSIVE RESEARCH HAS PROVED THAT TEXT WRITTEN ALL UPPER CASE (BLOCK CAPITALS) IS HARDER TO READ.

Always use lower case unless this guide indicates otherwise. Some common situations that cause confusion are made clear below.

### Use capital letters

When using the council's full title, or when naming specific departments, committees, divisions, offices or giving an individual's job title in full, for example:

- proper names – Luton Town Hall, Trevor Holden
- proper names of organisations – Luton Council, Citizens Advice Bureau
- full job titles in conjunction with postholder - John Smith, Refuse Collection Operative
- place names – High Town, Lewsey, Bury Park
- months, days and special days – June, Monday, Christmas Day
- languages and nationalities – English, Indian, Chinese, Italian
- using directorate names in full – Place and Infrastructure
- council services – only when used in full, for example Communications and Marketing
- committee names – established groups have initial capitals, for example, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but lower case when talking about scrutiny committees in general

### When writing about specific projects and schemes, partner organisations, outside bodies or government departments, such as:

- Building Schools for the Future, Luton Excellence
- Citizens' Advice Bureau, Active Luton, Luton Culture
- Farley Junior School, Luton Central Library, Stockwood Park Museum

- Department for Children, Schools and Families
- for titles that go before the name, such as President Trump (but Mr Trump is the president of the United States...)
- for abbreviations and acronyms (eg NHS)
- to start a sentence
- for names of buildings, streets, areas and deities eg God, but he, him etc rather than He, Him

### Don't capitalise:

- council - unless part of a full title, for example Luton Council
- government – never 'Government' unless part of a specific name, for example Local Government Association
- 'portfolio holder' – when referring to councillors' roles
- words like 'county', 'district' and 'region' unless they start a sentence
- when referring generally to jobs or positions, for example, managers, officers, members councillors, refuse collectors, librarians, social workers, headteachers
- when referring generally to local authorities, borough councils, district councils, parish councils, town councils, health authorities, police authorities
- general terms – leisure centres, libraries, councils, charities
- for the seasons of the year – spring, summer, autumn, winter
- for points of the compass eg in the north / south-west of Luton / north-east England / the north-east – unless they are part of a proper name such as South Ward
- for common digital words such as website, email and intranet
- for nouns that are not proper names
- for subject headings (apart from the first word)

## Do as they do

When organisations use a specific style in their official title it should be adopted, even if it is contrary to council style (eg easyJet, adidas, EastEnders).

## Councillors

Do not use capital letters when you write 'councillor' unless it forms part of a title, for example, Councillor Hazel Simmons.

Where you wish to use an abbreviation, use Cllr **not Coun**. We suggest you use the term 'councillor' as opposed to 'member', wherever possible as it is clearer for the public.

## Dates

### Use these formats when writing:

- dates: 18 September 2018, or 18 Sep 2018 in tables or where space is an issue
- date ranges: 2012 to 2018 (do not use a dash)
- financial years or school years: 2017/18
- 18 September 2018, **not September 18 2018**

## Emphasis

Use bold to emphasise a word rather than capital letters or underlining. This is easier to read and avoids confusion particularly as underlined text is often used to show links to internet pages.

## Italics

Do not use italics as they are difficult to read, as it's hard to recognise word shapes if all the letters are set at an angle.



## Finance

Use £ and p, not pounds and pence

**'The car park cost £5', not 'the car park cost five pounds'.**

Always spell out whole numbers when in text, for example, 'the bill ran into several hundred pounds'.

Write millions and billions as £2m, £30bn.

Write pounds and pence as £32.25 not £32.25p.

When quoting figures, do not include redundant zeroes - £1 **not £1.00**, 99p **not £0.99**

When quoting large figures, use the appropriate word rather than a string of zeroes - £2.5m, **not £2,500,000**, or £5.6bn.

Do not use K as an abbreviation for thousand (eg: £2,000, **not 2K**).

These guidelines apply when writing general text. They may not be appropriate if financial information is being presented in a table/spreadsheet format.

(See also 'Numbers' on page 7)

## Fonts

Ideally use Arial 12 point in Word documents (11 point minimum) to make text clear and easy to read.

## Web addresses

Style is simply [www.luton.gov.uk/etc](http://www.luton.gov.uk/etc) when written in text.

### When working online:

- don't display the link in full – use a hyperlink
- never just say 'click here' – the linked text must describe what it will link to for, example: Find out your bin collection days
- external links should open in a new window, internal links should open in the same window
- link to external sites with caution, as we can't govern the quality or accuracy of content

## Luton Council

Use initial capitals for the full name Luton Council, and when shortened it is 'the council'. Do not describe the council as 'the authority' or 'the Local Authority'. Wherever possible refer to us, we and our (see also Tone of Voice).

Use Luton Council for all purposes, apart from those set out below.

Use Luton Borough Council for constitutional or legal matters eg democratic services, agendas, HR, contracts.

## Numbers

Single figures are words, double figures are figures, so one to nine are written out, 10 upwards are numerals.

When quoting large (four or more digits) numbers, use commas for clarity.

**Luton Council has five directorates, 48 councillors and a total of 3,500 employees.**

**There are some exceptions where you should always use figures:**

- for numbers that include a decimal point, eg 5.75
- when giving page references, eg see story on page 8
- for ranges of numbers, eg children aged 8 to 12 months
- when giving financial information (see 'Finance' section on page 6)

Never start a sentence with a numeral. Write the number out in full, for example: 'Twenty people attended the meeting to discuss...', or rewrite the sentence to avoid the problem, for example: 'The meeting, attended by 20 people, discussed...'

Use per cent not percent. Percentage is one word.

Always spell out 'per cent' when quoting figures in text. Only use the % symbol when working in a table.

Avoid using fractions: convert them into decimals/percentages, for example: 70 per cent, rather than '7/10ths'. Where a simple fraction is more appropriate, write it out, for example: 'one third of council employees work in schools'.

When quoting a decimal figure less than one, put a 0 in front: 0.75 per cent, **not .75 per cent.**

## Religious festivals

All religious festivals, of any denomination, should be used with upper case (eg: Christmas, Diwali, Easter, Eid, Hola Mohalla).

## Subject verb agreement

Nouns denoting a single group of people, for example, council, government, team, public, use a singular verb, for example: the team is organising...; the public needs information.

If you prefer the plural form of a group noun, write 'members of' or personalise in some other way, for example: members of the team are organising; members of the public need information.

## Tables

Please bear in mind our online readers and try to avoid using tables in documents which will end up online, they can be difficult to navigate on a tablet or mobile device.

## Telephone numbers

In a sentence or email signature, use the word 'telephone' (lower case 't'), for example, telephone 01582 546000.

For internal documents where you include an extension number, write 'x3263' **not ext 3263**'.

For Luton telephone numbers write the area code first, leave one character space, and write the remaining digits eg. 01582 546000

The same applies to mobile numbers, for example, 07890 123456

For London telephone numbers write the area code first, leave one character space, write the next four digits, leave another character space and then write the last four digits, for example, 020 7527 2000.

## Verbs – active and passive voice

The clearest order is subject, verb, object.

Use the active voice whenever possible, subject before verb, for example, the manager called a meeting.

Avoid the passive voice (subject after the verb) as this is very unfriendly, for example, the meeting was called by the manager.

Only use the passive voice if there is no subject, for example, penalties will be applied.

## Weights and measures

Use decimal and metric systems.

Use abbreviations with figures and no spaces, such as 4mm, 10.2cm, 100m, 90km, 250gm, 5.5kg. Note, not 4mms or 10.2cms etc.

## Punctuation marks

### Apostrophes

This is not really a style issue, as there are clear grammatical rules. However, incorrect use of apostrophes is probably the single most common error made in written materials.

**Apostrophes are used to indicate one of three things:**

**1. That a letter (or letters) have been missed out. Examples include:**

- is not being shortened to isn't
- I cannot being shortened to I can't
- it is being shortened to it's

**2. To indicate ownership. In most cases, the apostrophe is followed by the letter 's'.**

**Examples include:**

- the council's priorities
- Luton's population
- the Mayor's speech

If the word ends with the letter 's', the apostrophe is added on its own at the end to indicate ownership. This applies whether the word is a plural or singular.

**Examples include:**

- the boss' instructions
- the senior managers' conference

NB: if an 's' is being placed after a number or abbreviation to make it a plural it does not require an apostrophe. Examples include:

The council owns thousands of PCs (**not PC's**)

Many people enjoy watching DVDs (**not DVD's**)

Alcohol should only be sold to over 18s (**not over 18's**)

**To show expressions of time: Thursday's meeting, seven days' notice, one week's pay**

Remember, don't use apostrophes with pronouns.

**The council's policies = Its policies**

'It's' with an apostrophe means 'it is' or 'it has', not 'belonging to it'.

## Brackets

Use brackets sparingly to add something to the sentence, for example, the resident (from number 10) asked a question. Often, commas will suffice.

The full stop comes outside the bracket unless what is inside is a full sentence.

Remember that any sentence in which you use brackets should still make sense if the bracketed information is removed.

## Colons

Colons are always used to introduce any list (see 'Lists and bullet points' on page 10), for example:

**Only three people turned up for the meeting: Sarah, Rachel and Jane.**

Colons can also be used to make a break when something explanatory follows:

**She had achieved her ambition: she was a member of the board.**

## Commas

Use commas:

- for a breathing pause in the sentence, for example, 'When they arrived, the meeting was over'
- in a list, for example, 'I went to the shop and bought bread, milk, cheese, tea and coffee'
- in pairs, in the same way we use brackets, for example, 'My line manager, John Smith, can help with this'

## Dashes

Use a single dash in the same way as a colon – to mark a break.

Use paired dashes – but only in the middle of a sentence – in the same way you would use brackets.

Make sure you use a dash (–) and not a hyphen (-).

## Exclamation marks

An exclamation mark is used to show strength of feeling. Use them sparingly.

## Full stops

Do not use full stops between initials, for example MP not M.P.

Do not use after abbreviations such as Mr, Ms, Dr, Ltd, Cllr or for eg etc and ie.

One space after a full stop is sufficient.

## Hyphens

Use hyphens to avoid confusion:

**Mother to be asked... is not the same as Mother-to-be asked...**

Use hyphens to distinguish between similar words, such as:

**Reform and re-form**

**Resign and re-sign**

Hyphens can also be used:

- in double-barrelled adjectives, such as middle-aged
- in phrases, such as t-shirt, door-to-door
- to avoid words with two consonants or vowels together, such as pre-empt, shell-like

## Inverted commas

Use double inverted commas to show direct speech. Otherwise, use single inverted commas. The full stop comes inside the inverted comma/s when what is inside is a full sentence. The full stop comes outside the inverted comma/s when what is inside is not a full sentence. For example:

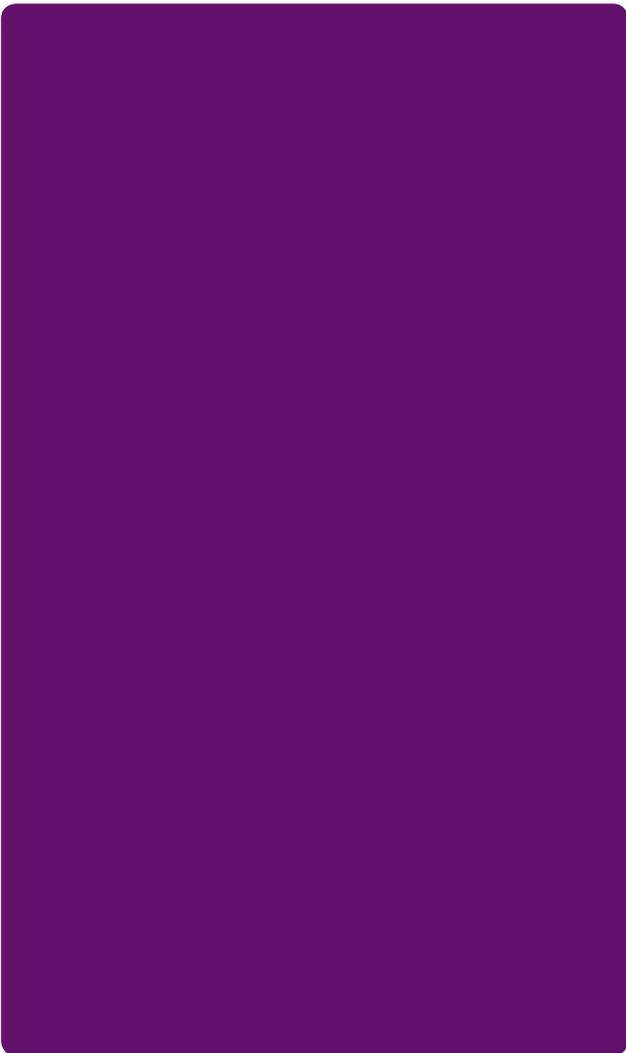
**The policeman said: "You were driving far too quickly."**

**Use single quotation marks when a quotation appears within a quotation:**

**She said: "Don't say 'I know what you mean,' you have no idea."**

**Use single inverted commas when quoting from a report, quoting a title of a book, play or film or when referring to a particular letter:**

- I have just finished reading 'Catch 22'
- 'Star Wars' was great
- The letter 'm' refers to meeting



### Numbered lists and bullet points

Try to avoid. However, a numbered list can be useful when guiding a reader through a process.

**The style is as follows:**

- 1.
  - 2.
  3. Etc
- And if needed
1. a)  
b)
  2. a)  
b) etc

### Question marks

Question marks are only used at the end of a direct question:

**How are you going to tackle the problem?**

**They are not used at the end of indirect questions or polite requests:**

**The director has asked how we are going to tackle the problem.**

### Semi-colons

The semi-colon acts as a weak full stop or a strong comma, to separate two very closely related sentences:

**We have studied this problem for several days; there are no easy answers.**

**I drive an old car; Steve drives a new one.**

## One word, two words or a hyphen?

Some words can be written either as a single word or hyphenated. Others frequently appear incorrectly.

**Below is a guide to the correct version of some common examples:**

- High Town
- antisocial
- bypass
- online
- email
- website
- headteacher
- playscheme
- fundraising
- co-ordinated
- co-opt
- by-election
- by-law
- two-bedroom house, or the house has two bedrooms
- per cent

## Right and wrong

An at-a-glance guide to some of the most common style guide errors (and how to avoid them).

Right	Wrong
Luton Council, the council	LBC, the Council
Cllr Hazel Simmons	Coun. Hazel Simmons
Luton Town Hall	Luton town hall
The council's policies...	The Council's policies...
Stockwood Park Museum	Stockwood Park museum
Farley Junior School	Farley junior school
Monday 21 July 2008	Monday, 21st July, 08
There are seven days in a week	There are 7 days in a week
There are 12 months in a year	There are twelve months in a year
The scheme will cost £25,000	The scheme will cost £25K
The total budget is £5.5bn	The total budget is £5.5b
Place and Infrastructure	Place & Infrastructure
online, email	On-line, e-mail
intranet, internet, website	Intranet, Internet, Website, Web site
PCs, DVDs, over 18s	PC's, DVD's, over 18's
Antisocial	Anti-social
Facebook, Twitter	facebook, twitter

# Luton Council Style Guide



 01582 547402  
(including out of hours service)

 [press.office@luton.gov.uk](mailto:press.office@luton.gov.uk)

 [www.luton.gov.uk](http://www.luton.gov.uk)

 @lutoncouncil

 lutoncouncil

Communications and Marketing  
Luton Council  
Town Hall  
Upper George Street  
Luton  
LU1 2BQ