



Town Clerk: Caroline Leet

EDENBRIDGE
TOWN COUNCIL

Written Style Guide

Adopted by full Council on 03 March 2025

To be used as part of branding guidance and Accessibility for its digital documentation, reports and social media.

Edenbridge Town Council's style guide has been produced to ensure consistency across Council documentation, publications and social media platforms. It covers style, spelling and grammar conventions for all content to be published.

Guidance has been taken from the government website where more in-depth detail should be referred: www.gov.uk/guidance/style-guide/a-to-z and the Guardian newspaper guide, as well as Cambridge and Oxford English Dictionaries.

This is not an extensive list and is designed to provide a guide to officers and councillors when producing documentation.

Capitalisation

Everything must be in lower case unless you are referring to a **specific** individual, their job title or council name.

Use lower case when using general terms, such as 'clerks', 'a council', 'councils often find that', 'councillors' etc. When titles are part of the name they are capitalised.

Use lower case when writing about local councils in general. Use capitals for the official name of a local council.

When referring to the council as a proper noun, or substituting the full name 'the Council' then capitalise on the 'C'. When using the term in general use, i.e. there are many council policies, then the 'c' is lower case.

Council and committees: when using in full name as a proper noun, capitalise the first letter of each part of its name, i.e. Open Spaces Committee, unless using in general terms then would be lower case (as above).

Use lower case when referring to the government unless it's a full title. For example: 'UK government', but 'His Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'.

the King: Upper case K, lower case t.

Do not use block capitals for large amounts of text as it's quite hard to read.

Qualifications capitalise the first 'Level', so it reads, 'students are able to achieve the Level 4 without pressure to proceed to level 5.' Or, A level.

Capitalise when referring to specific qualifications, i.e. an SLCC qualification level, Community Governance.

Other examples and style guides (listed alphabetically) include:

Abbreviations and acronyms: The first time you use an abbreviation or acronym, explain it in full on each page unless it's well known, like UK, DVLA, US, EU, VAT and MP. Then refer to it by initials. When referring to council always use in full first time in document then abbreviation i.e. Edenbridge Town Council (ETC). Do not use full stops in abbreviations.

Bacs (Bankers Automated Clearing System) is commonly used.

Addresses in the UK: Start each part of the address on a new line. You should:

- Write the town and postcode on separate lines.
- Not use commas at the end of each line.
- Write the country on the line after the postcode, not before.
- Only include a country if there is a reasonable chance that the user will be writing to the address from a different country.

Addressing the user: Address the user as 'you' where possible and avoid using gendered pronouns like 'he' and 'she'. Content on the site often makes a direct appeal to citizens and businesses to get involved or take action: 'You can contact HMRC by phone and email' or 'Pay your car tax', for example.

Bank details: When adding bank details:

- Do not use a table - use bullet points and a lead-in line instead.
- Use spaces rather than hyphens in sort codes - 60 70 80 (not 60-70-80).
- Avoid using spaces in account numbers unless they are very long (like an International Bank Account Number).

Bold and highlighting text: Only use bold to indicate interface elements in text that are explicitly telling the user what to do, for example:

- Select **Start**.
- Enter your information then select **Done**.
- Use inverted commas when referring to interface elements in non-instructional contexts, for example: "The 'Done' button will always be at the bottom of the page."

Use bold sparingly - using too much will make it difficult for users to know which parts of your content they need to pay the most attention to.

Do not use bold in other situations, for example to emphasise text.

To emphasise words or phrases, you can:

- Front-load sentences
- Use headings
- Use bullets

e.g., etc and i.e.: eg/e.g. can sometimes be read aloud as 'egg' by screen reading software. Instead use 'for example' or 'such as' or 'like' or 'including' - whichever works best in the specific context.

etc can usually be avoided. Try using 'for example' or 'such as' or 'like' or 'including'. Never use etc at the end of a list starting with these words.

i.e. - used to clarify a sentence - is not always well understood. Try (re)writing sentences to avoid the need to use it. If that is not possible, use an alternative such as 'meaning' or 'that is'.

Bullet points and steps: You can use bullets to make text easier to read. Make sure that:

- You always use a lead-in line.
- You use more than one bullet.
- The bullets make sense running on from the lead-in line.

- You use capital letter at the start of the bullet.
- You do not use more than one sentence per bullet - use commas or dashes to expand on an item.
- You do not put 'or' or 'and' after the bullets.
- You do not make the whole bullet a link if it's a long phrase.
- You do not put a semicolon at the end of a bullet.
- Each bullet point end with a full stop.

Where bullets may be used to list singular things, start with a capital letter and drop the full stops. For example, an application form would need:

- Name
- Address
- Email
- Mobile phone number

Steps

Use numbered steps instead of bullet points to guide a user through a process. You do not need a lead-in line and you can use links and downloads (with appropriate Markdown) in steps. Steps end in a full stop because each should be a complete sentence.

Dates:

- Use upper case for months: January, February.
- Do not use a comma between the month and year: 4 June 2017.
- When space is an issue - in tables or publication titles, for example - you can use truncated months: Jan, Feb.
- We use 'to' in date ranges - not hyphens, en rules or em dashes. For example:
 - Tax year 2011 to 2012
 - Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm (put different days on a new line, do not separate with a comma)
 - 10 November to 21 December
- Do not use quarter for dates, use the months: 'department expenses, Jan to Mar 2013'
- When referring to today (as in a news article) include the date: 'The Council announced today (25 February 2025) that...'

Direct Debit and Direct Debit Instruction: Upper case.

Email: One word. Lower case when it forms part of a sentence i.e. please email townclerk@

Election: Lower case, but upper case if referring to a specific election. For example, the 2023 General Election.

General Formatting: As councils are corporate bodies, please ensure they are always expressed in the singular, i.e. "The council is considering offering a grant once it has received more information."

When referring to the singular council, use 'it' or 'does' e.g. – "Does your council manage a play park?" If the council name has been referred to already, 'it' can be used - "It manages a play park".

Include sub-headings and small paragraphs to break up the text.

Please use 'and' and not "&" in a sentence.

Gender: Make sure text is gender neutral wherever possible, such as ‘them’, ‘their’ or ‘they’. If you do need to refer to gender, use ‘women’ and ‘men’ rather than ‘males’ and ‘females’.

Avoid terms such as businessmen, housewives, male nurse, woman driver, etc, which reinforce outdated stereotypes. If you need to use an adjective, it is female and not “woman” in such phrases as female bishops, female MPs, female president.

Use humankind or humanity rather than mankind. Similarly, avoid man hours or man years instead say person hours or person year.

Never say “his” to cover men and women: use his or her, or a different construction.

Geography and regions: Use lower case for north, south, east and west, except when they’re part of a name or recognised region. So, the south-west (compass direction), but the South West (administrative region).

Use lower case for the north, the south of England, the south-west, north-east Scotland, south Wales, the west, western Europe, the far east, south-east Asia.

Use upper case for distinct areas e.g. East End, West End (London), East Midlands, West Midlands, West Country, Middle East, Central America, South America.

Always write out the full name of the area the first time you use it. You can use a capital for a shortened version of a specific area or region if it’s commonly known by that name, like the Pole for the North Pole.

GOV.UK: All upper case.

Hyphenation: Use one word where possible. Where there are double of the same vowel next to each other like e, or o, use a hyphen.

Hyphenate:

- Re-evaluate
- co-ordinate
- co-operate

Do not hyphenate:

- reuse
- reinvent
- reorder
- reopen
- email

Do not use a hyphen unless it’s confusing without it, for example, when an adverb can also be an adjective (e.g. hard), the hyphen is required to avoid ambiguity – it’s not a hard, pressed person, but a hard-pressed one; an ill-prepared report, rather than an ill, prepared one.: (Guardian Style Guide.)

Use ‘to’ for time and date ranges, not hyphens.

Italics: As a general rule, do not use italics. Use ‘single quotation marks’ if referring to a document, scheme or initiative.

Italics for foreign words and phrases (with roman translation in brackets); poetry and scientific names.

Job titles: Specific job titles and ministers' role titles are upper case: Minister for Housing, Home Secretary.

Generic job titles and ministers' role titles are lower case: director, minister.

Lists: Lists should be bulleted to make them easier to read. See bullets and steps.

Very long lists can be written as a paragraph with a lead-in sentence if it looks better: 'The following countries are in the EU: Spain, France, Italy...'

In an alphanumeric list:

- Put entries that start with numbers before entries that start with letters.
- Order the numbers numerically in the correct order for the whole number..

local authority: Lower case. Do not use LA. When referring to local government, use local council instead of local authority where possible. See also use of capitalisation and council (above).

Maths content:

Use a minus sign for negative numbers: -6.

Ratios have no space either side of the colon: 5:12.

One space each side of symbols: +, -, ×, ÷ and = (so: 2 + 2 = 4).

Use the minus sign for subtraction. Use the correct symbol for the **multiplication sign** (×), not the letter x. (Hold Alt in your keyboard while pressing 0215: Alt + 0215 = ×.)

Write out and hyphenate fractions: two-thirds, three-quarters.

Write out decimal fractions as numerals. Use the same number format for a sequence: 0.75 and 0.45.

Measurements:

Use numerals and spell out measurements at first mention.

Do not use a space between the numeral and abbreviated measurement: 3,500kg not 3,500 kg.

Abbreviating kilograms to kg is fine - you do not need to spell it out.

Use 'grams' (not 'grammes'), for example: micrograms, milligrams.

If the measurement is more than one word, like kilometres per hour, then spell it out the first time it's used with the abbreviation. From then on, abbreviate. If it's only mentioned once, do not abbreviate.

Money:

Use the £ symbol: £75.

Do not use decimals unless pence are included: £75.50 but not £75.00.

Do not use '£0.xx million' or '£0.xx billion' for amounts less than £1 million or billion. The exception is when it's in a sequence where you're talking about amounts above £1 million or billion. For example: "There was £15.6 million spent in August 2024, an increase of £0.2 million". If you're using it outside of the sequence again, use £2 million. Write out pence in full: calls will cost 4 pence per minute from a landline.

Currencies are lower case.

Use Celsius for temperature: 37°C

N/A: Do not use N/A in empty cells in tables. Use 'no data' or 'not applicable' instead.

National Living Wage: Upper case.

National Minimum Wage: Upper case.

Numbers: Spell out from one to nine; numerals from 10 to 999,999; hereafter use m, bn or tn for sums of money, quantities or inanimate objects in copy, e.g. 5m tonnes of coal, 30bn doses of vaccine, £50m; but million or billion for people or animals, e.g. 1 million people.

Use 'one' unless you're talking about a step, a point in a list or another situation where using the numeral makes more sense: 'in point 1 of the design instructions'.

If a number starts a sentence, write it out in full (Thirty-four, for example) except where it starts a title or subheading.

For numerals over 999 - insert a comma for clarity: 9,000.

Spell out common fractions like one-half.

Use a % sign for percentages: 50%.

Use a 0 where there's no digit before the decimal point (for example, 0.5 not .5).

Use 'zero degrees' not '0 degrees' or 0°.

Use '500 to 900' and not '500-900' (except in tables).

Use MB for anything over 1MB: 4MB not 4096KB.

Use KB for anything under 1MB: 569KB not 0.55MB.

Keep it as accurate as possible and up to 2 decimal places: 4.03MB.

Addresses: use 'to' in address ranges: 49 to 53 Cherry Street.

Ordinal numbers: Spell out first to ninth. After that use 10th, 11th and so on.

In tables, use numerals throughout.

One-year-on: If used adjectivally, hyphenate and use one rather than 1.

Quotes and speech marks: In long passages of speech, open quotes for every new paragraph, but close quotes only at the end of the final paragraph.

Single quotes

Use single quotes:

- In headlines.
- For unusual terms - only for the first mention.
- When referring to words.
- When referring to publications.
- When referring to notifications such as emails or alerts.

For example: Download the publication 'Standing Orders' (PDF, 497KB).

Double quotes

Use double quotes in body text for direct quotations.

References: References should be easy to understand by anyone, not just specialists.

They should follow the style guide. When writing a reference:

- Do not use italics
- Use single quote marks around titles.
- Write out abbreviations in full: page not p, Nutrition Journal not Nutr J.
- Use plain English, for example use 'and others' not 'et al'
- Do not use full stops after initials or at the end of the reference.

If the reference is available online, make the title a link and include the date you accessed the online version: For example, the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) version December 2024.

Visit the Council's website [Edenbridge Town Council](#).

Semicolons: Avoid the use semicolons as they are often misread. Long sentences using semicolons should be broken up into separate sentences instead.

Sentence length: Do not use long sentences. Check to see if you can split them to make them clearer.

sign in or log in: Use sign in rather than log in (verb) for calls-to-action where users enter their details to access a service.

Do not use login as a noun - say what the user actually needs to enter (like username, password, National Insurance number). You can use it as a noun if it's part of a name such as GOV.UK One Login or NHS login.

south, the south of England: Lower case.

south-east, south-west: Lower case, hyphenated.

Spaces: One space after a full stop, not two.

standing order: Lower case unless used as the full title: Standing Order 22.

Telephone numbers:

Use spaces between city and local exchange. Here are the different formats to use:

01732 865368

020 7450 4000

0800 89 05 67

+44 (0)20 7450 4000

Mobile: - not Mob: 07891234234 (no space).

When a number is memorable, group the numbers into easily remembered units: 0800 80 70 60.

Times:

- use 'to' in time ranges, not hyphens, en rules or em dashes: 10am to 11am (not 10-11am)
- 5:30pm (not 1730hrs)
- midnight (not 00:00)
- midday (not 12 noon, noon or 12pm)
- 6 hours 30 minutes
- 24 hour clock use colon 17:30

Midnight is the first minute of the day, not the last. You should consider using “11:59pm” to avoid confusion about a single, specific time.

For example, “You must register by 11:59pm on Monday 15 March.” can only be read one way, but “You must register by midnight on Monday 1 March” can be read in two ways (the end of Monday 15, or end of Tuesday 16).

If the content or service helps users who are outside the UK, include “UK time”. For example, “Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm UK time”.

Council minutes record the opening and closing time of the meeting using the 24 hour clock, meeting opened 19:30.

Page titles should:

- Be 65 characters or less.
- Be unique, clear and descriptive.
- Be front-loaded and optimised for search.
- Use a colon to break up longer titles.
- Not contain dashes or slashes.
- Not have a full stop at the end.
- Not be questions.
- Not use acronyms unless they are well-known, like EU.
- Select a strong heading that draws the reader into the article.

Agenda titles may differ slightly due to the nature in that they pose questions; the above should be followed as a guide.

Travellers: Upper case because Irish Travellers are legally recognised as an ethnic group. New age travellers is lower case.

two-factor authentication: can be shorten as “2FA”. Do not confuse with “multi-factor authentication”.

UK government: Never HM government.

VAT: Upper case.

Webpage: One word.

web server: Not “webserver”.

WhatsApp: Use ‘WhatsApp’ with an upper case A. Do not use ‘Whatsapp’.

white paper: Lower case.

Wifi: Lower case, no hyphen.

Word document: Upper case, because it’s a brand name.

World War 1, World War 2: Upper case and numbers.

Style guide for articles, minutes, publications and social media written text

General

Make the first sentence as dramatic as possible, explaining what the article is about. Ideally, this should be no more than 25 words.

Avoid writing in plain, block text. Try to include graphs, tables, text boxes and bullet points etc, which add interesting detail to the page for the reader.

Sector 'jargon' and acronyms should have explanation.

Use clear English.

Further Formatting

As councils are corporate bodies, please ensure they are always expressed in the singular, i.e. "The Council is considering offering a grant once it has received more information."

When referring to the singular council, use 'it' or 'does' e.g. – "Does your council manage a play park?" If the council name has been referred to already, 'it' can be used - "It manages a play park".

Include sub-headings and small paragraphs to break up the text.

Please use 'and' and not "&" in a sentence.

When using bullet points, do not use semi colons or any punctuation at the end of each bullet point. For example:

- Make leisure, sporting and cultural opportunities easily accessible to children and young people.

References and Footnotes

Please ensure that you provide a footnote for every quote and any statistics used within your article, using the Harvard style of referencing. Here is an example of a footnote in the Harvard Style of referencing to an author/publication:

1. Last name, First initial. (Year published). Title. Edition. (Only include the edition if it is not the first edition) City published: Publisher, Page(s).

- " For the Harvard style of referencing, please visit <https://www.citethisforme.com/harvard-referencing>
- " Population figures can be found on your local area report at <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

Documents

All documents should be named.

For a PDF to be Accessibility compliant, it must be properly formatted so people with disabilities can interact with it. This means ensuring:

- Text is readable by screen readers.
- Images have alt text describing their content.
- Document structure (headings, lists, and tables) is logical.

Document Naming: use date in format YYMMDD, document name and version: 250201 Standing Orders V2.

Social Media

Keep articles short but informative. Use of emojis on Facebook, Instagram, X (formally Twitter) can be used appropriately.

Images/Photographs

Use of pictures and images should all have a brief description of what or who it is of.

Alt text: Alt text is an important component of web accessibility. Visitors have low vision and rely on screen reading software to hear an image's alt text description. To add alt text:

- 1) Do one of the following: Right-click the object and select Edit Alt Text. Select the object and then select the format menu for the object, for example, Picture Format. Select Alt Text. ...
 - 2) In the Alt Text pane, type 1-2 sentences in the text box to describe the object and its context to someone who cannot see it.
- Don't overthink it.
 - Consider key elements of why you chose this image, instead of describing every little detail.
 - No need to say "image of" or "picture of."
 - But, do say if it's a logo, illustration, painting, or cartoon.
 - Don't duplicate text that's adjacent in the document or website.
 - End the alt text sentence with a period.

Links on websites

Links need to be clear and not generic as each link which is downloaded has an identifiable name. Where there is a document to download this needs to be dated. Do not say just 'agenda'. Say, 'Council Agenda meeting 01.01.25'.

Accessibility

Refer to the Accessibility guidance for further information on naming of documents and images.