



2011 Local Government Web Standards Audit & ALGIM Assessment



New Zealand Government Web Standards

- **Government Web Standards and ALGIM assessment for New Zealand local government website homepages**



Government Web Standards assessment for New Zealand local government website homepages

Association of Local Government Information Management Inc.

Abstract

This paper reports on the results of a survey comparing the application of the New Zealand Government Web Standards for all council website homepages.

Overall the results indicate that the local government sector has improved its level of compliance to the web standards. However, there is still way to go to reach an acceptable level of compliance.

A large number of very simple standards are not being implemented, which brought together as a total sum, can lead to a very unsatisfactory online experience for our users. A lot of small actions can make council websites more accessible and usable.

The increased uptake of web standards to a site was also found to be only moderately associated with the population size a council serves. This indicates that some of the smaller councils offer services on their sites comparable to the sites of much larger Councils.

Introduction

Early in 2011, the Association of Local Government Information Management (ALGIM) commissioned its annual survey of all city, district, regional and unitary Council websites throughout New Zealand (a total of 78). The survey had three assessment components:

- Web Standard compliance and online features
- Accessibility test
- Enquiry response time test

There are two main objectives of the overall ALGIM survey:

1. **Identify a ranking of sites** - to celebrate organisations trying to achieve compliance with the web standards and provide justification for Council's wishing to improve their website, especially during any future redesigning or revamping of a website.
2. **To produce website survey instruments that form a potential basis for ongoing annual surveys of Council websites.** Survey results collected over a period of years

would allow the trends in making Council websites more accessible and usable to be tracked, analysed and reported.

Web Standard Compliance and Online Features Assessment

This assessment examined websites for compliance with parts of the New Zealand Government Web Standards (v2.0). The parts assessed included specific standards regarding after-hours contact information, navigation, content, images, fonts and web-page printing.

The online features were reviewed by examining the availability of property information including specific rating information and the provision of online rates payment and submissions on websites.

In ALGIM's previous annual audits, the information and service content of council websites was much more broadly examined. Elements assessed by earlier surveys included basic website features e.g. navigation and search, general council information such as council plans, meeting agendas / minutes, and specific council information such as building and resource consents.

In the 2010 assessment, ALGIM found that most council websites were compliant in the areas of basic, general and specific information (70% - 80% compliancy levels). These scores were accomplished in spite of the assessment of the web elements often becoming more stringently assessed over successive annual audits.

In the current 2011 survey, it was felt that there was little point in re-measuring information and service content elements which had already largely achieved compliance; so the audit was restricted to the online services and property information detailed above, as well as the enquiry response time and accessibility tests documented below.

The Enquiry Response Time Test

This test measured the speed of response to a straightforward email enquiry sent to the general email address provided on a council website.

For regional councils, the enquiry was sent mid-week in mid-February and for city and district councils the enquiry was sent mid-week in mid-March.

Responses to enquiries were monitored for five working days from when the enquiries were dispatched and response times recorded.

The Accessibility Tests

These tests assessed website features and characteristics which potentially could either facilitate or impede the effective use of the site by someone visually impaired. Features scrutinised included how headings and links were used on the site as well as provision of accessibility information and the luminosity contrast ration and visual contrast of elements on the site's web-pages. These tests were undertaken by the Royal NZ Foundation for the Blind.

Website Ranking Methodology

To facilitate the ranking of council websites, the scores achieved in each of the three assessment components of the audit were combined to form an overall score for each website.

Table 1 (below) details the percentage that each component contributes to the overall score. The table documents that the rank achieved by a particular website is strongly influenced by its conformance to standards and provision of property information and online services. In addition, accessibility features and characteristics are essential for a website to attain a high rank.

Table 1: Assessment Component contributions to the overall Ranking Score

Accessibility Test	Web Standards Compliance and Online Features	Enquiry Response Time
20%	75%	5%

Method

The survey was undertaken during the period of February 28, 2011 to March 31, 2011 using Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser (version 7) running on PCs with broadband internet connections. In addition please note:

- We only focused on the Councils main corporate website – not sub-sites or micro-sites (eg. library or museum sites).
- We did not attempt to explore every part of Council websites. This assessment was based only on the Council homepage and some online features.
- Website assessments are not an exact science, however we do try to be analytical and objective. There is bound to be an element of subjective opinion and viewpoints.
- Your website may have changed or improved since our review period.
- We have tried the best that we can to base our assessment criteria on parts of the NZ Government Web Standards (v2.0).
- Accessibility tests were undertaken by the Royal NZ Foundation for the Blind.
- This is a very light initial assessment and may not reflect the best or worst practices across a whole Council site.

This is the fourth time we have attempted to provide a benchmark across all Council websites in New Zealand. Please treat the findings as an initial snapshot of where we are today. There will be numerous opportunities to improve our methodology and expand the survey to include more web standards and online features.

New Zealand Government Web Standards 2.0

All Council website homepages were assessed on parts of the New Zealand Government Web Standards (v2.0) which apply to public sector websites in New Zealand. These standards were updated in March 2009 and are grouped into four sections:

1. Strategy and operations
2. Technical
3. Content and design
4. Legal and policy

Conceptually, it is useful to divide the standards into the **technical** and the **non-technical**:

➤ **Technical standards:** *directly from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)*

The Technical standards now comprise:

- the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 (level AA) standards, and
- a few standards specific to New Zealand, called the "New Zealand-specific requirements" (or the "New Zealand layer" for short).

The New Zealand layer is not separate to WCAG2.0, but rather modifies it for use in our government environment, as recommended by the W3C.

➤ **Non-technical standards:** *refreshed and updated*

The main changes in the non-technical standards are in the "About this site" part of required pages or sections and their content standard (more required links), the Privacy Statement standard and the new Terms of Use standard.

What we assessed

Within the specific NZ Government Web Standards 2.0, ALGIM and the Royal NZ Foundation for the Blind assessed the following for compliance:

- **Required pages or sections and their content:**
 - Homepage (includes contact us link, newzealand.govt link)
 - About this site (includes copyright, privacy, terms of use)
 - Contact information (includes after hours contact details)
- **Privacy statement**
- **Copyright**
- **Printing webpages**
- **Technical – WCAG 2.0**
 - Guideline 1.1 text alternatives
 - Guideline 1.4 distinguishable (includes resize text size and colour contrast)
 - Guideline 2.4 navigable (includes site map, alternative links to navigate, descriptive homepage link and correct use of heading tags)
 - NZ specific requirements (includes language)

More detailed descriptions of these web standards can be found in Appendix 1.

Results and discussion

Although the web standards are not mandatory for local government like they are for central government agencies, it is strongly recommended to ensure we provide usable and accessible websites for our users. Some of the accessibility tests were undertaken by the Royal Foundation for the Blind.

Web standards

✎ Required pages or sections and their content:

- Homepage (includes contact us link, newzealand.govt link)
- About this site (includes copyright, privacy, terms of use)
- Contact information (after-hours)

Homepage

In 2011, 17% of councils did not provide a logo link to home. This is a significant improvement from previous years. Refer to the below table for improvements.

Council logo link	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
No logo link provided	17%	29.4%	36%	40%
Logo link to home (without alt-text)	20%	8.2%	6%	5%
Logo link to home (with alt-text)	63%	62.3%	58%	55%

New Zealand Government portal link

69% of councils provide a link to the all-of-government portal (newzealand.govt.nz) either using a text or logo link. This is an improvement of 8% since the 2010 audit.

Government portal link	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
No link to portal	31%	38.8%	69%	78%
Text link to portal	26%	28.2%	14%	10%
.govt logo link to portal	43%	32.9%	17%	12%

Contact information

Councils are providing an extensive range of contact information for citizens and have reached compliance in this area. Categories that we continued to assess in 2011 include after-hours contact information and a link to contact information from the homepage.

**Note: there was an assessment change in 2011 and the 'contact us' links were more stringently assessed resulting in two councils obtaining a reduced score.

Contact information type	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
After-hours information <i>(no AHS info provided)</i>	32%	32%	33%	54%
Link to contact info from homepage <i>(does not link directly to contact info)</i>	2.5%**	0%	7%	14%

Web standards

Legal Information (this includes)

- Privacy / Copyright / Disclaimer
- Printing web pages

Privacy policy

77% of councils assessed now provide a privacy policy which continues to be a steady improvement over the previous three years.

Privacy Policy on website	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
Privacy policy	77%	70.5%	62%	56%

Copyright information

Most councils have some form of copyright information on their websites but some were penalised for having old dates attached to the rights – **the oldest recorded is still 1999!**

Councils continue to improve in this area with 74% now providing a copyright policy.

Copyright information	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
Incorrect date – not 2011	23%	30.5%	38%	38%
Copyright policy or statement	74%	68.2%	64%	54%

Printing

There has been a steady increase over the previous three years with councils offering a 'printer friendly' option from their website homepage.

Accessibility type	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
Print page complete (without option)	58%	55.2%	52%	78%
Print friendly option	36%	23.5%	18%	11%

Web standards & Accessibility

Technical – WCAG 2.0

- Guideline 1.1 text alternatives
- Guideline 1.4 distinguishable (includes resize text size and colour contrast)
- Guideline 2.4 navigable (includes alternative links to navigate and correct use of heading tags)
- NZ specific requirements (includes language)

Alt-text for images

Overall, the use of alt-text has increased over the last three years. Approximately 14% of councils still provide no alt-text on their homepage. However, there has been a slight increase from basic to good alt-text since 2010 and a significant increase since the audit first commenced in 2008.

Alt-text type	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
No alt-text	14%	14%	24%	39%
Basic alt-text (1-2 words)	24%	27%	34%	29%
Good alt-text (descriptive)	62%	59%	33%	28%

Text resize

There continues to be a steady increase with councils providing the ability for users to enlarge text size on their homepage including menus and headings.

Text size	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
Enlarge text size - including menu and headings	58%	52.9%	36%	26%

Luminosity Contrast Ratio and Visual Contrast (RNZFB)

The Luminosity Contrast Ratio (LCR) checks good contrast within a websites code. Over half of the councils provide good use of contrast (56.4%).

Visual score comments	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)
Excellent use of contrast - no errors or technical errors only	24.3%	57.6%
Good contrast - some errors reflect minor contrast issues	56.4%	34.1%
Some contrast issues - errors reflect some major issues in areas	19.2%	8.2%

Navigation

Overall, more than 70% of councils assessed in 2010 provided a site map on their website therefore compliance has been met in this area. However, we continued to assess the A-Z services list and found that there has been a slight decrease of councils providing this feature which led to some councils obtaining a reduced score. There was also a reduction in the number of councils being assessed due to amalgamations.

Navigation alternatives	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)	2009 survey results (comparison)	2008 survey results (comparison)
A-Z services	67%	72%	59%	54%

Links (RNZFB)

Only 6% of councils provided well described links to improve navigation for screen reader users. This is a slight decrease from 8.2% in 2010. The majority (62%) have only minor errors to improve with their descriptive links.

Links comments	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)
Well described links with no errors	6%	8.2%
Only minor errors with descriptive links	62%	71.7%
Critical links description	27%	16.4%
Some description links	5%	2.3%
No descriptive links	0%	1.1%

Homepage Link (RNZFB)

This test checks the inclusion of a descriptive homepage link. Councils improved in 2011 and have now reached full compliance in this area.

Descriptive homepage link	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)
Pass	100%	95.2%
Fail	0%	4.7%

Headings (RNZFB)

59% of Councils correctly use heading tags on a web page to improve the usability for screen reader users. This is a significant increase from the 2010 assessment.

Headings comments	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)
Perfect use of headings	59%	41.1%
Only minor errors with headings	8%	17.6%
Critical headings tagged correctly with some errors	9%	4.7%
Only use of some headings	8%	9.4%
No use of headings	16%	27.0%

Contact Page (RNZFB)

When using a contact form, if the fields are correctly labelled, it makes a large improvement to accessibility. 39.7% of councils were easy to make contact with via a web page while 42.3% had minor errors.

Contact Page comments	2011 survey - percentage of Councils
Fields accessible if used, easy to make contact via web page	39.7%
Minor errors with contact page but is functional with adaptive technology	42.3%
Critical functions working but difficult to make contact using adaptive technology	8.9%
Contact page inaccessible	6.4%
No contact information found	2.5%

Accessibility link from homepage (RNZFB)

Just under half of Councils (47.4%) have an accessibility link from their homepage.

Accessibility Link	2011 survey - percentage of Councils
Yes	47.4%
No	52.5%

Browser Resize (RNZFB)

Browser Resize	2011 survey - percentage of Councils
Pass	92.3%
Fail	7.6%

English language

Approximately 93% of Councils identify the primary language of English for their website homepage. Out of the 93%, there are 43% of councils who identify New Zealand English (EN-NZ) which is a significant increase from 2010. The remainder identify no language for their homepage.

English Language	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey results (comparison)
English Language (EN)	93%	84.7%
New Zealand English (EN-NZ)	43%	22.3%
No language	7%	15.3%

Online Features

- **Online Rates Payment**
- **Rates Information**
- **GIS / Mapping System**
- **Submissions / Consultation**

Online Rates Payment

Just over half of Councils (51%) have the ability for ratepayers to pay their rates directly online via credit card.

Online Rates Payment (credit card)	2011 survey - percentage of Councils
Yes	51%
No	49%

Rates Information

86% of councils have the ability for citizens to look up their rates information using a Rates Information Database or GIS / mapping system.

Rates Information	2011 survey - percentage of Councils
Yes	86%
No	14%

GIS / Mapping System

Over half of councils (56%) have the ability for citizens to look up their property information using a GIS / online mapping system.

GIS / Mapping System	2011 survey - percentage of Councils
Yes	56%
No	44%

Submissions / Consultation

Over half of councils (54%) offered an active submission form making it easy for citizens to lodge their submissions instantly online.

Submissions / Consultation	2011 survey - percentage of Councils
No PDF or online submission form offered	9%
PDF submission form offered	37%
Online active submission form offered	54%

Enquiry Response Time Test

Enquiry Response Time

This test measured the speed of response to a straightforward email enquiry sent to the general email address given on a council website.

Submissions / Consultation	2011 survey - percentage of Councils	2010 survey - percentage of Councils
Responded in less than 1 hour	37%	44%
Responded between 1 - 3 hours	35%	25%
Responded between 3 - 5 hours	9%	6%
Responded between 5 hours - 1 day	5%	11%
Responded between 1 - 2 days	2.5%	8%
Responded greater than 2 days	2.5%	2%
No response at all	9%	4%

Conclusion and future audits

Overall, compliance levels for tested web standards are improving which helps to make council websites more usable and accessible. However, once certain levels of compliance are reached and new web standards are added to the annual survey, this will skew future results and rankings. There is also a need to integrate the WCAG 2.0 levels of conformance in future audits: from A to AAA.

In addition, the presentation of these survey results continue to provide feedback on what web standards can be reasonably expected on a main council website. The results have helped to raise awareness, cause debate and generate discussion about what can be done to help councils implement the web standards.

This survey has again identified a need to try and standardise the label names and locations of key information on Council homepages – similar to the web standards set out for central government agencies. This will assist regular users and visitors to multiple council websites in accessing information and ensuring consistency across the sector. ALGIM recently approved the development of a thesaurus for NZ local government called “terms for councils”. This has huge potential in addressing this issue within the local government web community.

However, there continues to be numerous barriers for councils in fully implementing the web standards – from financial or people resourcing through to technological limitations. This is an opportunity for our sector to move forward to develop minimum standards we wish to achieve together.

In the long-term, by our sector adopting the web standards and trying to achieve a minimum conformance level in the first instance, we can help make our websites more usable and accessible for our users.

Appendix 1: NZ Government Web Standards (v2.0)

Copyright

↘ <http://www.webstandards.govt.nz/copyright/>

Standard

Minimum requirements

Every website under ownership of an agency must contain a copyright statement which states (as a minimum) that:

- ↘ the material on the website is protected by copyright; and
- ↘ anyone can utilise any of the material available on the website free of charge and without permission of the agency provided that the source and copyright status of the material is acknowledged.

Optional content

Agencies may also wish (but are not required) to:

- ↘ state, as a further condition of use, that the material should not be altered; the desirability of such a condition will depend on the nature of the information and the ways in which it may be utilised; and
- ↘ consider whether to regulate or prohibit any or particular forms of commercial use; there is no absolute position or presumption on this issue, the position taken on individual sites depending on the circumstances, and bearing in mind that certain forms of commercial use (e.g., mash-ups and other value-added services) can be beneficial not only to the corporate taxpayers concerned but to government, the public and the overall economy.

Mixed copyright ownership

Where an agency's website contains content or downloadable items in which the agency does not own copyright:

- ↘ that should be specified in reasonable proximity to the items; and
- ↘ any general copyright statement on the website will need to be qualified (e.g., "Unless otherwise indicated, copyright in material available on this website is owned by...").

Note

The copyright statement, or a link to it, must be placed on the About this site page.

Required pages or sections and their content

↘ <http://www.webstandards.govt.nz/required-pages-or-sections-and-their-content/>

Standard

Homepage

Homepage content must include the following information, or link directly to it.

- ↘ Contact information. See Contact information below for content details.
- ↘ About this site. See About this site below for content details.

The homepage must also contain the following:

- ↘ A link to the website newzealand.govt.nz
- ↘ The name and/or logo of the agency primarily responsible for the website.

About this site

Agency sites must provide a page or section called "About this site", or similar, which acts a convenient container of (or an index to) all site information.

The content of this section or page must contain as a minimum:

- ✎ Site owner. Clearly specify the site owner. Where the site is not the main agency site, link back to the main agency site.
- ✎ Copyright. Provide copyright information here, or provide a link to copyright information. See the Copyright standard.
- ✎ Copyright of third parties. Provide copyright of third parties information here if relevant, or provide a link to copyright of third parties information. See the Copyright of third parties standard.
- ✎ Privacy. Provide privacy information here, or provide a link to privacy information. See the Privacy statement standard.
- ✎ Contact details. Provide contact information here, or provide a link to contact information. See the Contact information standard below.
- ✎ Disclaimer. If a disclaimer is required, provide information here, or provide a link to disclaimer information. See the Disclaiming content standard.
- ✎ Terms of use. Provide terms of use (terms and conditions) information here if required, or provide a link to terms of use information. See the Terms of use standard.

Contact information

Agencies must provide clear contact information.

Email addresses

Agency websites must create the email addresses listed below. It is at the discretion of the agency whether these email addresses are published on the site.

- ✎ info@<domain>
- ✎ postmaster@<domain>
- ✎ webmaster@<domain>
- ✎ privacy@<domain>
- ✎ complaints by at least one of:
 - ✎ complaints@<domain>
 - ✎ abuse@<domain>
- ✎ general enquiries by at least one of:
 - ✎ enquiries@<domain>, or enquiry@<domain>

The agency must ensure email is monitored and, if requests for information are received, responded to in a timely way.

Physical location and telephone contact details

Agency websites must provide the following contact details for all offices, except where there are strong security or business reasons not to do so:

- ✎ Telephone numbers
- ✎ Street locations
- ✎ Additional contact information

Privacy statement

<http://www.webstandards.govt.nz/privacy-statement/>

Standard

All agency sites must carry a privacy statement. The statement must cover (as a minimum):

- ✎ the scope of the statement (eg, "This privacy notice applies to personal and other information collected on [the agency's] website: www.agency.govt.nz");

- ✎ the circumstances in which personal information is collected, by whom it is held (eg, your agency and/or third party agencies or web services) and any choices users may have as to whether such information is collected in the first place;
- ✎ the uses to which collected personal information may be put by the collecting agency and the circumstances in which it may be disclosed;
- ✎ the collection and use of statistical information, including users' IP addresses;
- ✎ a statement that cookies are used if that is the case and relevant implications of that (if any);
- ✎ users' rights to request access to or correction of personal information held by the website's owning agency; and
- ✎ contact details for such purposes.

Printing webpages

<http://www.webstandards.govt.nz/printing-webpages/>

Standard

A webpage's core information (usually the main page text) must be able to be printed in whole on standard sheets of paper.

Note that the following non-core content should be excluded from printing:

- ✎ Primary content navigation
- ✎ Secondary content navigation
- ✎ Department/agency/programme or thematic banner
- ✎ Breadcrumbs
- ✎ Search box

Pages should also print as black text on a white background.

Technical

<http://www.webstandards.govt.nz/technical/>

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0

1. Perceivable

- ✎ **Guideline 1.1 Text Alternatives:**
Provide text alternatives for any non-text content so that it can be changed into other forms people need, such as large print, braille, speech, symbols or simpler language.

- ✎ **Guideline 1.4 Distinguishable:**
Make it easier for users to see and hear content including separating foreground from background.

1.4.3 Contrast (Minimum) (Level AA)

Text and images of text have a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1.

Large text (over 18 point or 14 point bold) has a contrast ratio of at least 3:1

1.4.4 Resize text:

Except for captions and images of text, text can be resized without assistive technology up to 200 percent without loss of content or functionality. (Level AA)

2. Operable

- ✎ **Guideline 2.4 Navigable:**
Provide ways to help users navigate, find content, and determine where they are.

2.4.1 Bypass Blocks (Level A)

If a page has a proper heading structure, this may be considered a sufficient technique instead of a "Skip to main content" link. Note that navigating by headings is not yet supported in all browsers.

2.4.4 Link Purpose (In Context) (Level A)

The purpose of each link (or form image button or image map hotspot) can be determined from the link text alone, or from the link text and it's context (e.g., surrounding paragraph, list item, table cell, or table headers).

2.4.5 Multiple Ways:

More than one way is available to locate a Web page within a set of Web pages except where the Web page is the result of, or a step in, a process. (Level AA).

Using two or more of the following techniques:

- G125: Providing links to navigate to related Web pages
- G64: Providing a table of contents
- G63: Providing a site map
- G161: Providing a search function to help users find content
- G126: Providing a list of links to all other Web pages
- G185: Linking to all of the pages on the site from the home page

New Zealand-specific requirements

2.1 Technologies and techniques which must be used

- ✎ Language codes. Where English is the language of the page (WCAG2.0 3.1.1) or the language of part of the page (WCAG2.0 3.1.2), use the language code en-NZ. Where the language is Māori, use mi. For other languages, see the updated list at the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority.