# CIH copy style guide

July 2026

This guide outlines our writing standards to help colleagues create clear, concise and consistent content that respects all those working in the housing profession and those they serve and support. These rules apply to all content published on the CIH website and in our email communications to members. Follow this guide as much as possible when posting on social media.

## Our tone

- Professional but approachable
- Authoritative yet relaxed
- Informative, concise and clear.

Our tone is deliberately flexible and will shift depending on the content and channel. For example, policy explainers – including our 'What you need to know' documents – are typically more direct and formal, while blogs and newsletters are usually more conversational in tone.

## General writing principles

- Keep sentences simple and avoid big words where possible
- Keep paragraphs short
- Write about **homes**, not units, stock, assets or properties
- Write about **residents** and **tenants**, not customers
- Write about the housing **sector**, not the housing industry
- Use British spelling (e.g. **organisation** not organization, colour not color)
- Treat organisations, institutions, and collective entities as singular (e.g. The government **is** pushing through new housing legislation) unless the sentence clearly focuses on the individuals within them (e.g. The organisation's staff **have** differing views about the new proposals)
- Write **CIH**, not the CIH (but the Chartered Institute of Housing).



# Capitalisation

## Capitalise:

- Job titles, political titles and honorific and academic titles when the title directly precedes a name (e.g. Chief Executive Gavin Smart, Prime Minister Keir Starmer, President Julie Haydon)
- Job titles, political titles and honorific and academic titles when used in formal contexts, such as at the end of a letter
- The official/formal names of government statements, documents, legislation, funding schemes, taxes, benefits etc. (e.g. Autumn Budget, Awaab's Law, Universal Credit – but the budget, the law)
- Government departments and public bodies (e.g. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; Regulator of Social Housing; Housing Ombudsman – but the ministry, the regulator)
- The full, officially recognised legal name of a public boards and committees (e.g. the Housing, Communities, and Local Government Committee – but the committee)
- The official/formal names of individual regulatory standards (e.g. the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard – but the standard)
- Regions (e.g. South East, North West, North, South London, North East London)
- Specific parliaments/assemblies or when referring to a specific parliament/assembly without further description (e.g. Houses of Parliament, Scottish Parliament, in Parliament today – but the parliament in England, the parliament in Scotland)
- Black, White, etc. when referring to racial groups
- Qualifications and qualification levels (e.g. **Level 2** not level two or level 2)
- Parts or sections of a legal document (e.g. Section 21 (S106), Part 3).

## Don't capitalise:

- Job titles, political titles and honorific and academic titles when used in a descriptive or explanatory sense (e.g. Gavin Smart, the chief executive, said it was important to adhere to house style; The new president of CIH announced her campaign; Chloe Fletcher, head of policy and external affairs, CIH)
- Any post without reference to the name of the post-holder (e.g. The prime minister will be out of the country for several days)
    - **EXCEPTION**: The King/the Queen when referring to King Charles III/ Queen Camilla only
- Organisational boards and committees (e.g. the governing board convened earlier this month; CIH's audit and risk committee met last month)
- The stages a bill passes through on its way to becoming law (e.g. first reading, committee stage)
    - **EXCEPTION**: Royal Assent.



**QUICK TIP**: Generally speaking, If the word or phrase functions or is part of a proper noun (i.e. something that refers to a specific person, place, organisation or thing) cap it up!

## Titles and headings

### Use title case for:

- Conferences
- Award ceremonies and award categories
- The name of a series in the title of a webinar or conference session (e.g. **Building Better Boards**: Culture change and the tenant voice)
- CIH qualifications
- Products
- Books
- Publications (e.g. The Guardian, Housing Today, CIH Unlocked).

**EXPLAINER**: Title case means all words are capitalised except conjunctions (e.g. and, but), articles (e.g. a, an), small prepositions (e.g. at, to) and proper nouns.

### Use sentence case for:

- Titles and headlines of blogs, articles, reports, documents and Knowledge Hub pages
- Standalone webinars
- Standalone conference sessions
- Training courses
- Subheadings.

**EXPLAINER**: Sentence case refers to the standard capitalisation rules you follow when you write a normal sentence.

### Rules for all titles and headlines:

- Capitalise the first word after a colon (but not in body copy)
- Avoid using dashes where possible (but use an em-dash (–) if necessary).

## Common abbreviations

- Dr
- etc.
- e.g.
- i.e.

**NOTE**: Never use '&' unless it is part of an official name, and avoid honorifics such as 'Mr' and 'Mrs' in general copy.

## Bullet points

- Start all bullet points with a capital letter
- Avoid where possible making bullet points so long that they resemble paragraphs
- Number bullet points if the order is critical
- Add a full stop to the end of the final point in a list only (a single bullet points that stands alone without an introductory phrase or sentence does not require a full stop).

**NOTE**: Bullet point lists can include full sentences, sentence fragments or questions – but a list should ideally stick to one format.

## Dates and numbers

- Write **1 January** (never 1st January or 01 January or January 1)
- Use **2026/27** for a 12-month period split between two calendar years
- Use **2026–2028** for longer periods
- Write % not per cent or percent (e.g. 78%, 4.2%)
- Write numbers one to nine in words; 10 and above as numerals
    - **EXCEPTION**: Always use numerals when referring to parts/sections of legal documents
- Always write out numbers in words at the start of a sentence
- Write **£100 billion**, not £100bn
- Write **£100 million**, not £100m
- Write **£100,000**, not £100k.

## Time

- Use the 24-hour clock (e.g. 17:00) in event listings
- Use the 12-hour clock (e.g. 5pm) in general copy.

## Acronyms and initialisms

- Never put full stops between letters (e.g. **UK** and **EU**, not U.K. and E.U.)
- Other than widely used and understood acronyms and initialisms, such as AI and UK, spell out the full term on first use and introduce the acronym in brackets (e.g. anti-social behaviour (ASB).)

## Quotation marks

- Never use double quotation marks in headlines and standfirsts
- Use double quotation marks for speech quotations in body copy
- Use single quote marks when drawing attention to a particular word or phrase, particularly if it is new or unusual (e.g. The sector is determined to turn NIMBYs into 'YIMBYs')
- Use single quotation marks when referencing smaller bodies of work, such as:
    - Sections within reports
    - Chapters
    - Articles
    - Blog posts
    - Individual papers within a wider collection.

## Italics

- Use italics for the titles of larger bodies of work, such as:
    - Reports
    - Policy publications*
    - Journals
    - Books.

***This rule doesn't apply to media publications, magazines, etc. (e.g. Inside Housing, Housing Today, CIH Unlocked).**



**QUICK TIP**: If you're referencing the title of a larger body of work – such as a book rather than a chapter – put it in italics. If what you're referencing is part of a larger body of work, put it in single quote marks.

## Hyphens

- Hyphenate groups of words directly preceding and modifying a noun or noun phrase (e.g. five-year plan, non-compliant organisation)
    - **EXCEPTION**:
        - Write net zero/zero carbon (e.g. net zero strategy)
        - Write private rented (e.g. private rented sector)
        - Write social rented (e.g. social rented sector).

**NOTE**: Hyphens differ from en-dashes (-), which connect numbers and dates, and em-dashes (—), which are used for parenthetical asides.

## Word endings

Some words change slightly when you add endings such as -ed, -ing or -er, and it can be difficult to know when to double up a consonant before a word ending is added. The traditional grammar rules that dictate this can be confusing, so for the purposes of this guide, we will outline the most common examples you'll see or use in your writing:

- Benefitted/benefitting
- Focused/focusing
- Combatting
- Levelled/levelling
- Labelled/labelling
- Panellist
- Traveller
- Counsellor
- Finalist.

## Framing

Framing in communication means influencing how people understand something by choosing what details and words to highlight or leave out. It's the difference between saying something has a 90% chance to succeed or a 10% chance of failure.

Where possible, we apply the 'How to talk about homes' framing principles in our content and delivery.

FIND OUT MORE

## AI

AI tools may be used as a writing aid, but not as a substitute for subject expertise, original thought or editorial judgement. All published content must ultimately reflect human authorship and accountability.

When revising copy that has been created with AI assistance, look out for an overuse of the following stylistic devices and revise accordingly:

- Dashes
- Bullet points
- Adjectives.

When sending your text over please advise if it has been co-authored or authored entirely by AI.

## Additional writing principles

- If a company or organisation styles their name in an unconventional way (e.g. all in lower case or lower case), follow their convention unless doing so is impractical
- Feel free to write **CEO** or **chief executive** – but be consistent within an individual piece of work
- Use the Oxford comma where its omission would cause confusion or ambiguity (e.g. The prime minister thanked his friends, the chancellor, and the housing secretary)
- For the names of people and places, add 's to a singular noun ending in –s if the possessive is pronounced with an extra 'iz' sound (e.g. Jones's, James's) but leave it out if the 'iz' sound is not pronounced (e.g. Griffiths')
- Limit the use of bolding in articles and blogs
- Avoid underlining (hyperlinks are fine)
- Write **amid**, not amidst, **while** not whilst, etc.
- Write **the government** (but government legislation, government employees, etc.)
- Write **colleagues** not staff
- Write **front-facing** colleagues, not frontline colleagues.



# Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Our mission is to inspire, equip and support housing professionals to create a future in which everyone has a place to call home. To do this, we use language that recognises people's dignity, agency and diverse identities.

## The golden rule: Individual preference

Language is personal. If you are writing a case study or interviewing a member and it is relevant, ask how they prefer to be described. If you are editing content they have written, retain their choice of descriptive language. Their personal choice overrides the general guidelines below.

## People-first versus identity-first language

There are two main ways to describe things like disability, health conditions or neurodivergence:

- People-first language: Describes a person as having a characteristic (e.g. a person with a disability)
    - The goal is to emphasise that the person is not defined by their condition (often preferred in clinical or formal policy settings)
- Identity-first language: Places the descriptor first (e.g. a disabled person, an autistic person)
    - Many people prefer this because they view their disability or neurodivergence as an inherent, proud part of their identity rather than an external 'burden' they carry.

Both of these are valid, and different groups have different reasons for their preference. Good practice is to use the terminology preferred by the specific community you are writing about. Avoid, however, writing 'the' followed by a descriptor (e.g. the disabled, the blind), as this turns people into a monolithic group and is dehumanising.

## Community-informed preferences

When writing for a general audience, use the following community-preferred defaults:

| Group | Preferred approach | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Neurodiverse community** | Identity-first (autism), person-first (ADHD) | Autistic person, autistic colleague, person with ADHD |
| **Deaf community** | Identity-first | Deaf person, British Sign Language (BSL) user |
| **Blind/visually impaired** | Identity-first | Blind person |
| **Disability** | Identity-first | Disabled person, disabled colleague |
| **Learning disabilities** | People-first | Person with a learning disability |
| **Health conditions** | People-first | Person with diabetes, person with cancer |
| **Housing status** | People-first | People experiencing homelessness |

## Ethnicity and race

- **Be specific and avoid umbrella terms whenever possible:** If your writing is about a specific group, name them (e.g. Black African residents)
- **Avoid the term 'global majority':** While used in some academic contexts, as above CIH prefers 'ethnic minority'*, as this aligns with current UK policy and data reporting standards
- **Avoid the terms 'BAME' and 'BME':** These acronyms can hide the different experiences of various ethnic groups
- **Capitalisation:** Capitalise specific ethnic and national groups (e.g. Black, Asian, Roma, White).

***We follow the preference of our EDI board by using 'ethnic minority' or 'minority ethnic' as our standard collective terms.**

## LGBTQ+ (sexual orientation and gender identity)

We aim to be inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities:

- **Acronyms:** Use LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and others)
- **Gender-neutral terms:** Where a person's gender is unknown or irrelevant, use gender-neutral language (e.g. partner, spouse instead of husband, wife)
- **Pronouns and allyship:** We support the use of pronouns* (e.g. in email signatures), but this is voluntary**
- **Singular 'they':** If a person identifies their pronouns (e.g. they/them), respect and use them
    - We generally and grammatically accept using 'they/them' to refer to a single person, which can be a helpful way to remain inclusive when a person's gender is unknown.

***Including your pronouns when your gender is the same as your sex at birth is an act of allyship. It normalises the practice and signals to LGBTQ+ colleagues and customers that you won't make assumptions about their identity.**

****We don't force or mandate the display of pronouns. Forcing disclosure can have the unintended consequence of 'outing' someone or forcing them to use pronouns that do not align with their identity to avoid questioning. We prioritise the safety and privacy of the individual above all.**

## Age and career stage

We aim to be inclusive of all life stages, from those just starting out to those who have concluded their formal working lives:

- **Older people**: Use **older people** or **older residents**, not the elderly, seniors or OAPs
- **Young people**: Use **young people** or **young adults** (typically 16–24), not youths
- **Career stage vs. age**: We prefer terms that describe a person's professional journey rather than their biological age (e.g. **early career professionals**, not young professionals)
    - Use 'established professionals' to refer to those with significant experience in the sector
- **Retired members**: Use 'retired members' or 'professionals in retirement' to acknowledge that an individual's professional identity and expertise remain valuable to CIH and to avoid treating their retirement as the primary identifying characteristic.

## Disability and neurodiversity

When discussing how people interact with information, environments and society, we focus on removing barriers and respecting identity:

- **The social model:** CIH supports the social model of disability, which suggests people are 'disabled' by barriers in society rather than by their impairment
- **Sensory:** For the deaf and blind communities, identity-first language is standard as it reflects a cultural identity
- **Physical:** When discussing mobility write **wheelchair user**, not wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair, as these terms suggest the chair is a restriction rather than a tool for independence
- **Neurodiversity:** Use 'neurodivergent' to describe individuals (e.g. a neurodivergent colleague) and 'neurodiverse' to describe a group (e.g. our neurodiverse workforce)
- **Avoid medicalised language:** Write neutral terms such as **has, lives with**, not suffers from, afflicted by, victim of
- **Cognitive preferences:** While we use identity-first for autism, we use people-first for learning disabilities (e.g. person with a learning disability) to align with major UK advocacy preferences.

# When we get it wrong: A learning culture

Language is constantly evolving, and despite our best intentions, we will all occasionally make mistakes. At CIH, we value growth. We want to move away from a fear of getting it wrong and toward a culture of getting it right through open, honest dialogue.

We would rather you engage in conversations about EDI and make an occasional mistake than stay silent out of fear. We are all learning together.

## The intent-versus-impact principle

While your intent might be friendly and professional, we must always prioritise the impact our words have on others. If someone tells you a word is hurtful or exclusionary, we respect their experience and adapt our language accordingly.

**If you make a mistake:**

1. If you realise you have used an outdated term, mispronounced a name, or used the wrong pronouns, don't panic
2. Acknowledge and apologise – a brief, sincere apology is best (e.g. I'm sorry, I meant 'they' instead of 'she', thank you for correcting me)
3. Correct it – fix the error in the document, or use the correct term moving forward in the conversation
4. Learn and move on – take the opportunity to understand why the term was incorrect, then continue with your work.

**If you are corrected by someone else:**

- Being corrected is an act of trust – it means the other person believes you value inclusion
- Listen with curiosity and avoid becoming defensive
- Thank them – this will help to build allyship (e.g. Thank you for letting me know, I appreciate the correction)
- Lead by example – if you see a colleague struggling with a term, a gentle, private nudge is often better than a public correction.

## Miscellaneous words and phrases

- 20th century
- 21st century
- adviser
- advisory
- Affordable Homes Programme (AHP)
- Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP)
- affordable rent
- All-Ireland Summit
- anti-social behaviour (ASB)
- Autumn Budget
- Awaab's Law
- bachelor's degree
- bed and breakfast (B&B)
- Back the Bill [campaign]
- Better Social Housing Review (BSHR)
- Bluesky [social media site]
- borough
- Building Safety Regulator
- Build to Rent
- Buy to Let
- Cashflow
- CIH Futures
- ChatGPT
- CHOOSE HOUSING [presidential campaign]
- CIH Unlocked [publication]
- co-creation
- code of practice
- college
- Competence and Conduct Standard
- compulsory purchase order (CPO)
- consumer standards
- cooperation, cooperative
- coronavirus
- cost of living
- cost-of-living crisis
- council
- COVID-19
- Decent Homes Standard
- Department for Communities
- dollar
- domestic abuse
- domestic violence
- energy performance certificate (EPC)
- euro [currency]
- Fellow [CIH membership grade]
- First Homes scheme
- Future Homes Standard
- general election
- government
- governing board
- green paper
- Grenfell Inquiry
- HACT
- Help to Buy
- Holyrood
- Home Office
- homeownership
- Homes England
- House of Commons
- housebuilding
- House of Lords
- housing association
- Housing Matters [newsletter]
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- Housing Rights [publication]
- intermediate rent
- internet
- intranet
- judgement (judgment if legal)
- Knowledge Hub [CIH educational resource]
- levelling up
- LinkedIn
- local authority
- local election
- Local Housing Allowance (LHA)
- Make a Stand [originally a presidential campaign]
- manifesto

- master's degree
- Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES)
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Northern Ireland Executive
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Passivhaus standard
- placemaking
- pound [currency]
- private members' bill(s)
- private registered provider (PRP)
- professional standards
- registered social landlord (RSL)
- Right to Buy
- Rooted in Resilience [presidential campaign]
- rough sleeping
- Royal Assent
- Scotland's Housing Festival
- Scottish Housing Regulator
- Scottish Parliament
- Senedd
- shared ownership
- skilfully
- Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP)
- socioeconomic
- spatial development strategies
- Spending Review
- Spring Statement
- TAI [conference]
- temporary accommodation
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)
- The CIH Podcast
- The Housing Community Summit (THCS)
- the King's Speech
- the Renters' Rights Act
- Tpas
- TPAS Cymru
- two-child limit
- university
- vice chair
- vice president
- violence against women and girls (VAWG)
- wellbeing
- Whitehall
- white paper
- wifi
- X [formerly Twitter]



**Don't forget to check out CIH's web content best practice guide for more tips and hints.**

## Support and approvals

### The communications and marketing teams will proof, check and upload or design all content.

## Who to email

If your content is intended for the 'publications', 'blogs' or 'news' sections of the website, send to press@cih.org; for anything else (e.g. events pages, qualifications pages, graphics and visuals) send to marketing.communications@cih.org.

If you would like to amend or update existing content, please email content@cih.org.

**Please allow 24–48 hours for all content to be approved and published.**

**If you have any questions about this guide, please email liam.turner@cih.org**