



A guide for everyone

Our tone of voice

magna.org.uk



**Bringing our brand
to life with words**



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Tone of what?

As well as a visual identity, every strong brand has its own written identity. A way of speaking to its audience that's unique, consistent and reinforces what it stands for. A tone of voice.

Magna has one too. And, like a real person, it's defined by our characteristics. They guide the words we choose and how we come across to our customers, partners and each other – be it on a website, in conversation, in a tweet, a leaflet or in a letter.

Because our tone of voice is not just what we say, it's how we say it.

Finding our voice

Just as a person can change and evolve over time, so too can a business. And, sometimes, the business you've become – and what you mean to customers – isn't represented by your original tone of voice.

We're updating our tone of voice to better reflect where we are today and where we want to be. It's more human, more approachable and more...well, us. It will bring to life how we go about our business and our values. How we're creating great homes together.

And that's better for everybody.





Never a truer word written

We've put these guidelines and practical tips together to help everyone write in a consistent voice that captures the real Magna.

So, while we need to stick to them as closely we can, we shouldn't feel restricted by them. Quite the opposite. This is a chance to embrace how we work and establish an authentic voice, internally and externally, that truly reflects what we do and who we are.

It's a chance to capture the empathetic, empowering spirit we all bring to work every day.

Creating great homes together

This is what our brand is built on. It's everything we stand for and everything we want to achieve. So, its spirit needs to be in everything we write. To help you understand exactly what it means, we've broken it down into two parts:

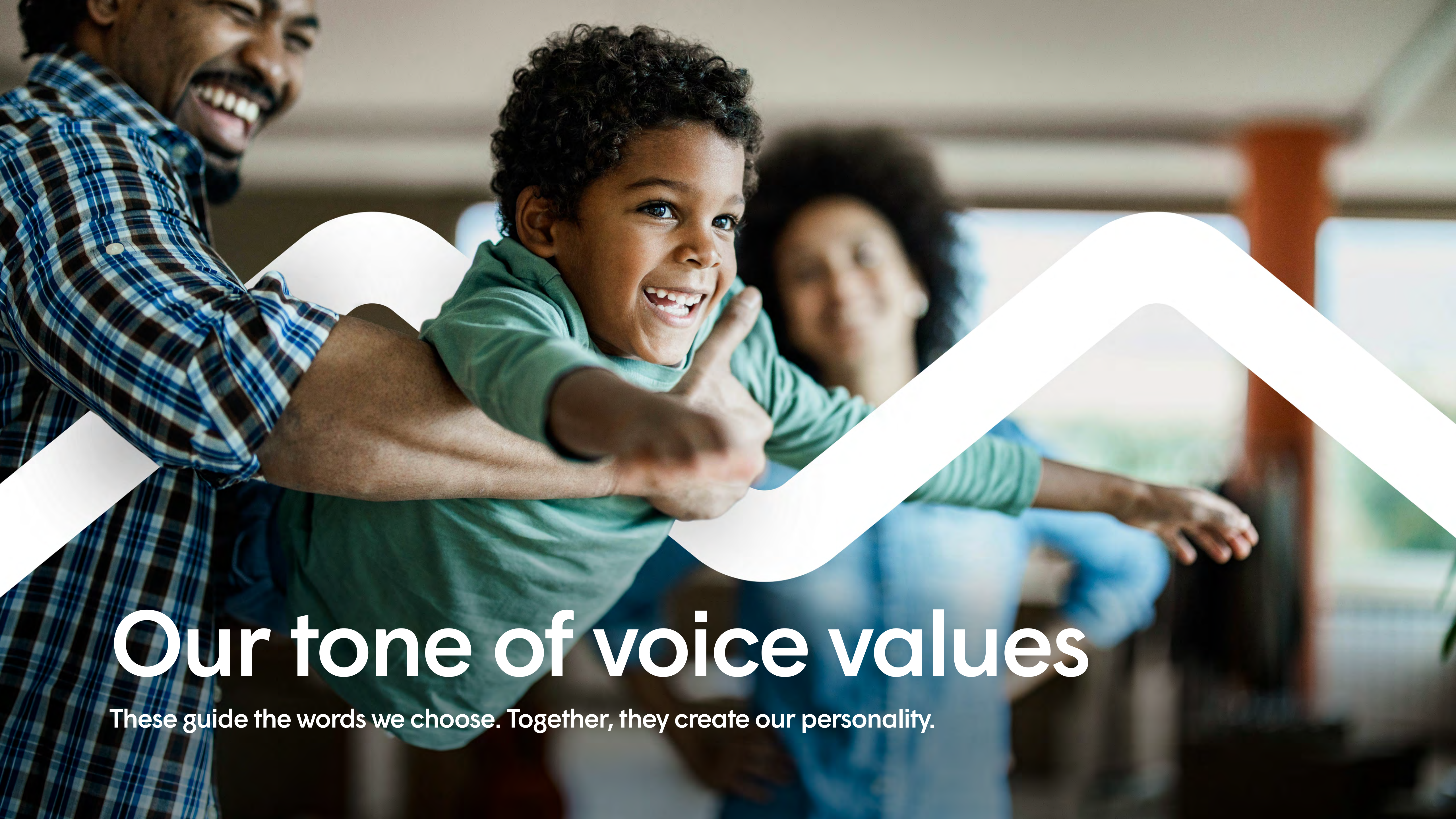
Creating great homes...

To feel 'at home' you need more than four walls and a roof. You need a sense of belonging. We create that by listening and responding to people's different needs. By investing in spaces and facilities that create communities. We empower our customers to have homes not houses.

...together

We take a collaborative approach to delivering these homes. Working closely with colleagues, with customers and with partners we trust. Together we're stronger. We can share our outlooks, our expertise, our compassion. We can shape homes for everyone.





Our tone of voice values

These guide the words we choose. Together, they create our personality.

Value 1: Positive

We're doers, simply because we know it can be done and will always find a way. We go above and beyond for our customers and anyone else who engages with us – because making people feel at home is what sets us apart. We're always upbeat and enthusiastic in what we say.

Here's how...

Focus on actions

Use outcome-oriented language that points to actions and finding solutions – to helping people. Use committed, definite phrasing ('we will', 'we have', 'you can'). It will build confidence that we're making the right decisions to help.

Share every success

Focus on what people can do, not what they can't – we want to empower and encourage our customers, not dishearten them. Provide options and clear routes forward. Help them to face the future with optimism

Use an active voice

An active voice keeps things moving forward with energy. It's the difference between 'We've made a decision' (active) and 'A decision has been made' (passive). The passive feels slower, stiffer and less accountable. The active makes it clear who's behind the action.

Value 2:

Approachable

We care about the people we're providing homes for. We want what's best for them. So, we need to be empathetic in our language, show that we're on their side. Build trust by being modest and down-to-earth. It's never 'look at what we've done'. It's 'look at what we've achieved together'.

Here's how...

Be open and inclusive

We need to use everyday language that everyone can understand. And, though we're happy to get technical when we need to, we should never get bogged down in jargon that can intimidate and alienate people. It's being direct and clear, building trust with total clarity.

Make it relevant

Make it more about them than us. Put everything in the context of the customer and what our homes and expertise mean for them. Speak to their needs and focus on what they care about most: finding somewhere comfortable to live they can be proud of.

Never judge

It's impossible to know every customer's story, so we should avoid inadvertently making assumptions about who they are. Instead, speak of how we can help whatever the situation. Be open-minded and impartial. It will put our customers at ease.

Value 3:

Knowledgeable

The exceptional service we provide is built on our knowledge and our willingness to share it. People choose us for our expertise and passion for providing great homes. This depth of understanding – about our industry, about our customers’ needs – must be in everything we write.

Here’s how...

Empower don’t overload

Knowledge gives people the power and confidence to make the right decision. But too much information can overwhelm. Ask yourself: what does the customer need to know? Then remove anything that doesn’t fit the question. Write (and re-write) with purpose. Short but sweet.

Be simple not simplistic

Simple doesn’t mean dumbing down. It’s having the expertise to explain the complex in a way that helps real people. Make your words easy to digest: use punchy paragraphs, descriptive headings and bullet points to get your point across efficiently. That’s true expertise.

Share with passion

Information and knowledge (especially policies and process) shared on their own can feel robotic and unengaging. Give everything a human context. What does it mean for the customer? Pre-empt their questions. We should always be proactive and one step ahead.

Value 4:

Friendly

We're the friendly next-door neighbour. Always around to lend a hand and say hello. We don't see ourselves as a housing association but as part of the community. Understanding, helpful, and always ready to chat with a smile on our face. We go further to make sure they feel at home.

Here's how...

Lead with the first person

Speaking in the first person (using 'I', 'we' and 'our') is more personal, friendly and direct. It feels more like a dialogue rather than someone talking at you. Using contractions ('I'm', 'we're', 'we'll') feels more conversational too.

Be natural

How we are when we speak to customers in person – warm, helpful, polite are all qualities we need in our writing too. We do it by using familiar, everyday words and avoiding stuffy corporate speak. It's being natural and conversational, without ever being too pally, glib or familiar.

Celebrate together

We're building communities. And communities care about each other. So we should celebrate every customer success as if it were our own. Where appropriate, share stories of people finding homes and what that means to them. Try and capture the joy and pride that it brings.



The three keys to our voice

We appreciate that's quite a lot to take in. But, when you think about it, a lot of what we're suggesting is just common sense. At its simplest, we're asking you to do three key things.

Be thoughtful

What does the customer need to know? What do you want them to do?

Be human

Do you sound natural, caring and like a real person, not a cold, faceless organisation?

Be smart

Have I shared my knowledge and expertise in a digestible and engaging way?

Who are we speaking to?

Our personality is our personality. We shouldn't change it depending on who we're speaking to that would be inconsistent. But what will change is our point of view. So, to make sure our messages have the desired impact, it's important we understand what we mean to different audience groups.

To our customers

We offer homes to be proud of with a choice of facilities and customer services that are tailored to individuals as their lives change.

To our people

We are the place where talented and ambitious people enjoy rewarding and fulfilling careers in an inspirational environment.

To our local communities

We are large enough to influence, small enough to care. We partner with others to create great places where people choose to live.

To our partners

We seek to continuously develop professional business partnerships, creating long term mutual success which will help us provide quality homes and associated services.





Suppliers

An exception to the rule: suppliers

The only time it's acceptable to flex our voice is when speaking to suppliers: the third parties we have business dealings with.

In these instances – where negotiations, contracts and invoices are involved – it's more appropriate to revert to a more formal, professional tone. It shows that, as a charity, we should still be taken seriously as a business entity.

That's not to say we should lose our politeness or humanity. We just need to temper it with a bit more business savvy.

Our voice in action

Capturing a brand personality in your writing isn't easy, especially if it's new to you. To help, we've put together a range of 'before and after' examples so you can see exactly how the Magna tone and style has changed.

You'll notice that you don't have to squeeze our brand personality into every line. It's more about sounding natural and getting your point across in a human way.



Example 1: From a stuffy letter...

Before: A letter to Starter Tenants:

Dear |Name|

Starter Tenant – 9 Month Home Visit

As you have now been a tenant for approximately 9 months, I would like to visit you to review your starter tenancy.

I would therefore like to visit you at your home at the following time |date and time|

This visit will give you an opportunity to meet me and ask any questions you may have about your home, your tenancy agreement, paying your rent, or anything else.

You may find it helpful to read your tenancy agreement and handbook before my visit.

If the appointment is not convenient please let me know so that we can arrange another time.

Yours sincerely

|Name|

..to warm conversation

After: The same letter, rewritten in our new voice:

Dear |Name|

I'd like to come and visit your new home

You've now been living in a Magna home for around nine months. We hope you've been enjoying your new home. Now you're all settled in, I'd like to come and visit you so we can see how you're getting on and review your starter tenancy together. If it's convenient, I'll come on the [date and time].

When we meet up, I can also answer any questions you might have about your home, paying your rent, in fact, anything I can help with. To make the most of our time together, it might be worth having a read of your tenancy agreement and handbook before I arrive.

Do let me know if the appointment isn't convenient and we can rearrange. The best way to get in touch is [contact details].

Otherwise I'll see you then. I'm looking forward to it.

All the best,

|Name|

What we've done:

- Made the heading friendlier, action-orientated and in the first-person. It now feels less like a corporate template.
- Referenced life in their new home – we're demonstrating we care about what home means to our customers.
- Warmed up some of the language to feel less stiff and authoritarian (eg I would therefore like to visit you has become Now you're all settled in, I'd like to pay you a visit).
- Used contractions to sound more conversational and approachable (eg hope you've been enjoying your new home).
- Helpfully added contact details to the body of the letter, making it easier for the customer to get in touch.

Example 2: From a technical announcement...

Before: A letter about loft insulation:

Planned Maintenance Programme: Loft Insulation

As part of Magna Housing's continuous improvement works, please be advised that your home has been included within the Loft Insulation Top-Up programme. This will improve the energy efficiency of your home and should reduce your energy bills.

The contractor that will do this work is (Contractor).

To comply with current data protection laws, we will need to pass on your current contact details to our contractor (Name, telephone number, email addresses etc.). If you do not wish for us to do so, then please contact me as soon as possible.

(Contractor) will be in contact with you directly to arrange an appointment at a convenient date and time to you. Before the works can commence you will need to remove any items you may have stored in your loft space.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you have any queries please contact me on the telephone number below.

Yours sincerely

|Name|

...to a cosy upgrade...

After: The same letter, rewritten in our new voice:

[Dear Name]

We'd like to improve your home with loft insulation.

I hope you're well.

I'm getting in touch to let you know that we would like to put more insulations into your loft. We hope this is alright with you. These improvements will make your home more energy efficient and should reduce your energy bills – always welcome news.

Who

Our partner [contractor name] will be carrying out the work.

Where

They'll be working in your loft and will need full access, so please remove any items you have stored up there.

When

[contractor name] will get in touch directly to arrange a convenient date and time to carry out the work.

To get everything sorted, I'll need to pass on your contact details to [contractor name]. If you'd rather I didn't, please let me know as soon as you can. I hope you're pleased about the improvements. If you have any questions at all, feel free to call me on [number].

Many thanks,

[Name]

What we've done:

- Made the heading more direct, friendly and benefit-led.
- Opened with an enquiry about the customer using I instead of we – this adds a personal touch and shows we care.
- Added headings to make it easier for the customer to find what they need at a glance.
- Removed the technical term about our loft programme which the customer doesn't need to know about.
- Added a warm aside (always welcome news) to relate with the customer and make us more approachable.
- Relaxed the language with contractions to make it more human and conversational (eg They'll be working in your loft).
- Removed To comply with current data protection laws and replaced it with something more straightforward and less technical: To get everything sorted.

Example 3: From a functional timeline...

Before: Our 'About Us' web page:

About us

Magna Housing Association Limited was established in 1993 when West Dorset District Council transferred its housing stock to us. We amalgamated Magna Housing Association Limited, Magna West Somerset Housing Association Limited and Magna Housing Group Limited in April 2017 to create Magna Housing.

We are a community based housing association providing over 8,500 homes to let and around 350 shared ownership homes. We primarily work in Dorset and Somerset where we provide housing related services to people living in our community. Our head office is in Dorchester, and we have local offices in Williton, Bridport and Sherborne. Working in partnership with residents is key to our success. If you're a resident there's lots of ways you can get involved and help us to improve how we do things.

As an exempt charity, we are a not for profit organisation and are regulated by the Regulatory of Social Housing (RSH). Magna Housing Limited is registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 and its Registered Society number is 7520. The registered office is Oak House, Poundbury Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1SW.

In July 2015, we adopted the National Housing Federation's 'Code of governance: promoting board excellence for housing associations' (2015 edition). We have identified improvements we can make to our Board Member recruitment and appraisal processes in order to ensure we are fully compliant with part D of the code (Board skills, renewal and review).

We are compliant with all other aspects of the code and we will assess our compliance with this code annually.

...to a human story

After: The web page is our new tone:

Creating great homes together

We're Magna Housing, a community-based housing association. We mainly work in Dorset and Somerset (our head office is in Dorchester) providing housing services to local people.

Officially, our story begins in 1993 when the West Dorset District Council transferred all its housing stock to us. But Magna Housing, as we're known today, was born in 2017 when we brought all our separate organisations together.

Really though, our story isn't about us as much as the people we create homes for. We understand that a home and house are two different things. Our job is to understand each customer's needs and give them somewhere they can enjoy living and feel they belong. To do this, we collaborate. With our colleagues, with our customers and with our partners. We work with compassion and dedication. Giving everything to empower our customers and build true communities.

We're creating great homes together.

The legal bit

As an exempt charity, we are a not for profit organisation and are regulated by the Regulatory of Social Housing (RSH). Magna Housing Limited is registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 and its Registered Society number is 7520. The registered office is Oak House, Poundbury Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1SW.

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What we've done:

- Changed the heading to capture what's at the heart of our service and not just repeat the page name.
- Delivered all the functional information efficiently and with everyday language (Officially, our story begins in 1993 when the West Dorset District Council transferred all its housing stock to us).
- Told an emotive story about what we stand for, not just provided a timeline of name changes.
- Switched the emphasis to be on customers, not us (our story isn't about us as much as the people we create homes for). We're approachable and open.
- Housed all the technical information in its own section with a clear heading. It's only there if you need it.
- Removed all the unnecessary legalese (eg Magna Housing Association Limited) and overly specific dates (eg April 2017).
- Added contractions and used action-orientated language to make it more human and positive (eg Our job is to understand each customer's needs and give them somewhere they can enjoy living).

Example 4: From a wordy story...

Before: A story on supporting local food banks:

Feeding our communities: How Magna are supporting local food banks

We are seeing how Coronavirus is putting extra strain on household finances. Food banks already support lots of families across the UK and the Coronavirus is causing more and more people to rely on food banks to feed themselves and their families. This includes many front line, key workers who are supporting our NHS and most vulnerable people right now. Magna Housing are committed to making a difference in our local area and supporting local communities is very much part of our ethos and culture.

In addition to our regular donations, we've committed a further £3,500 in the last week to help food banks in Dorset and Somerset continue to support local communities and provide essential basics to those who are relying on food banks. We want to make sure that at this time our local food banks can continue their great work and support even more people to get the food they need.

Tony Murray, housing director at Magna, said "At the moment many more families are concerned about making ends meet and have seen their incomes decline during the Coronavirus pandemic. Our local food banks do a fantastic job helping people in our local communities and we wanted to support them with additional funds to provide those vital essentials."

We are supporting West Somerset Food Cupboard, The Quantock Food Bank, Dorchester Food Bank, Lyme Forward CIC, Sherborne Food Bank and a community food box initiative in Weymouth. We've also developed a list of community hubs and help groups in Dorset and Somerset. We update this regularly and publish it on our social media channels to help people know what support is available in their local community.

<https://www.magna.org.uk/my-community/coronavirus-community-networks/>

The Trussell Trust support a nationwide network of over 1,200 food banks. If you need a food parcel because you're unable to afford food, you can find your local food bank online at www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank. If you don't need to rely on a food bank but are struggling to get to the shops because you are self-isolating, contact your local council or Citizens Advice for support.

...to a call to action

After: The same article in our new tone:

Food banks: it's time to support those supporting others

The coronavirus has put us all under strain. But families whose household finances were already tight are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. As a result, they're having to rely more on food banks to feed themselves and their families.

As we're out working in the community every day, we see all the great work local food banks do at the best of times. But right now, they need help to get food to the people who need it most.

What we're doing to help

In the past week, we've committed a further £3,500 to our usual donations to help food banks in Dorset and Somerset. This will support the amazing work of West Somerset Food Cupboard, The Quantock Food Bank, Dorchester Food Bank, Lyme Forward CIC, Sherborne Food Bank and a community food box initiative in Weymouth. To help local people track down support in their area, we've also developed a list of hubs and help groups in Dorset and Somerset. We publish it on our social media channels and you'll also find it here:

<https://www.magna.org.uk/my-community/coronavirus-community-networks/>

The Trussell Trust

We also want to highlight the wonderful work of The Trussell Trust – a nationwide network of over 1,200 food banks. Find your local Trussell Trust bank online at www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank

For people who don't need to rely on a food bank but are struggling to get to the shops, contact your local council or Citizens Advice for support. For more information on any of these subjects, or if there's anything we can do to help, please get in touch: [\[contact details\]](#)

What we've done:

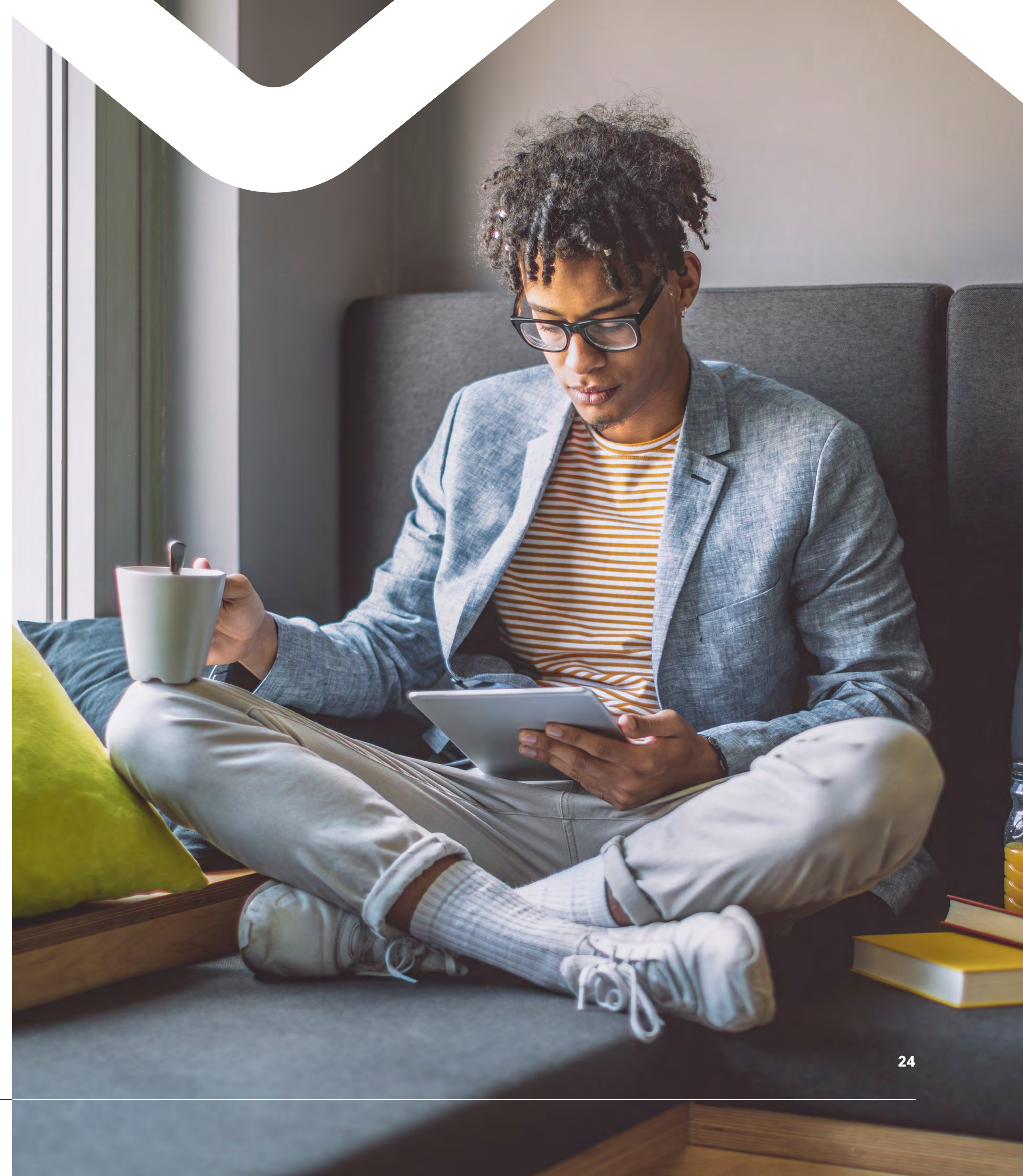
- Made the headline less about us and more about the people we're helping. It's also more action-orientated: a call to action.
- Opened the story by connecting with the reader on the problem. We don't mention Magna yet – we don't want to appear to be blowing our own trumpet.
- Used more everyday language to communicate the topic (eg But where household finances are tight).
- Celebrated the work of food banks in a more overt and enthusiastic way (eg This will support the amazing work of...).
- Removed the quote. It was placing too much emphasis on Magna, not the food banks we're supporting, without adding specifics.
- Used sub-headings and punchier paragraphs to break up the copy and make it an easier read.
- Promoted the useful information to earlier in the article, changing the purpose of the article from 'here's what we've done' to 'here's how to find help'.

What's the story?

While we're talking about Magna news stories, it's probably a good time to outline a few general rules that will help to make for more impactful and memorable pieces:

- Write a direct and impassioned headline. Don't try and be too clever. Instead, capture your reader's attention with how much we care.
- Keep your writing as succinct as possible – most people these days are short on time. If you can, avoid going over 300 words.
- Focus on the customer (unless there's a different specific audience) not us: how is the story supporting the idea of creating great homes for people?
- Apply our other tone of voice principles – don't use jargon, take a human approach and be helpful.
- Use statistics (include your source if they're not our own) to reinforce your story, but don't bombard people with figures. Make sure they're relevant and impactful.
- Include a meaningful quote from a Magna colleague – don't just repeat what's already been said. Add something insightful that supports our stance.
- Use a professional, on-brand picture to support the story.

Contact the communication and marketing team with your story so we can distribute it externally.



A photograph of a family in a kitchen. A young boy with red hair, wearing a blue and white striped shirt, is standing at a kitchen sink, pouring water from a white bowl. A woman with dark hair, wearing a plaid shirt, is smiling and watching him. Another child is partially visible on the left side of the frame. The kitchen has a window in the background, and the scene is brightly lit. A large white diagonal shape is overlaid on the image, partially obscuring the family.

Housekeeping

It's time to look at the house style choices we've made. By following them in everything you write, we'll build consistency. And consistency builds trust.



Email signatures

Email signatures

We all need to make sure we’re signing off our emails consistently in format and tone – it impacts the brand image more than you might imagine.



Tanya Head | Marketing Manager

Direct Line: 01305 214047 Mobile: 07977 175259

magna.org.uk [#teammagna](https://twitter.com/teammagna)

This not that: our business

Talking about our business

Keep our name the same in all communications to avoid any confusion.

We also always write in the first person: it's friendlier and more approachable. So use 'we', 'our' and, where appropriate, 'I'.

This...

Magna Housing or Magna

Not this...

Magna Housing Association
or Magna Housing Limited

This...

We help
I'm writing
Our expertise

Not this...

Magna helps...
We are writing
Magna's expertise

This not that: our business

Talking to our customers

We use the second person: 'you'. It's more direct and helps to make a connection.

This...

We'll help you to

Not this...

We help our customers to

Talking about each other

To keep us more human, here's what we like to say when we talk about each other.

This...

Colleagues

Not this...

Staff, employees

This not that: our business

Talking about people we support

We use 'customers'. It's more informal and puts the emphasis on service.

This...

Customers

Not this...

Tenants, residents, consumers

Talking about our service

We only use 'homes'. It's warmer and more communal.

This...

Homes

Not this...

Houses, properties, voids

This not that:
our style

Abbreviations

We don't use full stops. It's a bit neater. So:

This...

Mr

Mrs

Dr

Ltd

eg

etc

ie

Not this...

Mr.

Mrs.

Dr.

Ltd.

e.g.

etc.

i.e

This not that: our style

Acronyms

Like most industries, we deal with a lot of acronyms. As a rule, if it's not well known, write it in full the first time you use it, then use the shorter version from then on:

First...

- Anti-social Behaviour (ASB)
- Housing Association (HA)
- Universal Credit (UC)
- Housing Benefit (HB)
- Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)
- Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
- Notice of Intention to Seek Possession (NOSP)
- Value for money (VfM)

Then...

- ASB
- HA
- UC
- HB
- HCA
- KPI
- NOSP
- VfM

This not that: our style

Ampersands

We only use these if they're part of a name (eg M&S) or to save characters on social media:

This...

With care, support and expertise

Not this...

With care, support & expertise

Bullet points

When using bullet points:

- Each point starts with a capital letter.
- And we use full stops after each point.
- It's more emphatic.

This not that: our style

Capitals

Use capital letters for all names, places and organisations.

For job titles, if it's for a specific person (eg Gavin Smith, Sales Director) then use initial capitals. If we're talking generically about teams and departments (eg 'our customer service team is working on it') then use lower case.

Headings

All headings and subheadings should be in sentence case – the first letter is capitalised, the rest are lower case. They don't need full stops, we don't want to sound too abrupt.

Exclamation marks

Try and avoid using these. They can seem attention-seeking!

This not that: our style

Dashes

We use dashes to break up sentences, separate phrases and create longer pauses – like this. We use hyphens (they're shorter than dashes) to join words together. We do this to help ensure understanding and avoid ambiguity.

This...

These are load-bearing walls.

This is a dog-friendly home.

Not this...

These are load bearing walls.

This is a dog friendly home.

Numbers

Write numbers from one to ten as words. From 11 upwards, write as figures.

This...

Zero, one, two, three, four, five,
six, seven, eight, nine, ten

Five things to remember when
you move home.

Not this...

0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Don't use figures at the start of a sentence.

5 things to remember when you move home.

This not that:

our style

Miscellaneous

This...

- Online
- Email
- Website
- Internet
- magna.org.uk

Not this...

- On-line
- E-mail
- Web site or Web-site
- Inter-net
- www.magna.org.uk

