## Simplification centre

## Simple action 5

# Better speeding notices for faster comprehension

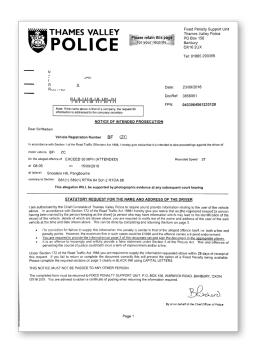
The Simplification Centre is a not-for-profit organisation that helps to make information clearer. Our Simple Actions bring together volunteer designers and writers to tackle communication problems no one appears to own.

The idea is to demonstrate how much better things can be, and to provide models of good practice.

You can find out more about this activity, and others, on our website:

www.simplificationcentre.org.uk

This Simple Action was developed by Rob Waller and Nick Parker.





Our Simple Action 1 took a bus lane penalty charge notice and showed how its chaotic, impenetrable design could be made much clearer. A friend sent us a similar notice when he was caught speeding recently, and we thought it would be interesting to see if the bus lane notice would work as a template for this too.

We think it works just as well. The new design tells the story straight away. What's happened, what's this letter for, what to do now.

### The original

If you've ever been caught speeding, you may have received something like this in the post. Many documents fall into a category or 'genre' that we recognise. This means we know the rules for reading it – to skim a leaflet, fill in a form carefully, check and pay a bill, store a certificate carefully, and so on. But these documents just look worryingly incompetent – you know you've fallen foul of the law, but now you are lost in a sea of confusion, terrifed by threats that you'll make it worse by responding in the wrong way.

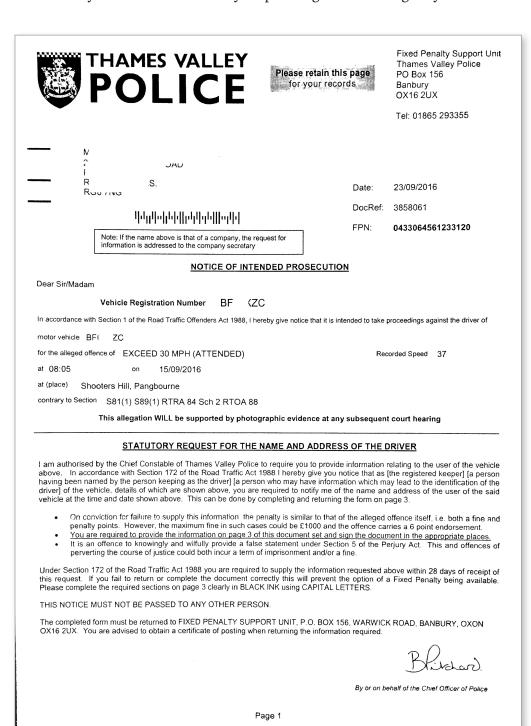
- There is a genre confusion.
   It starts and finishes like a letter (Dear Sir/Madam).

   But nothing in between is letter-like.
- There are two titles: 'Notice of Intended Prosecution' and 'Statutory Request for Name and Address of the Driver', because the letter fulfils two purposes set by legislation.
- Legal language dominates, with references to legislation, and formalities like 'I hereby give notice'. This feels like a defence against claims that it doesn't comply. But it makes it more likely people will fail to understand it.

#### • The 'story' is hidden.

What has happened? What happens next? In fact a possibly misleading story predominates: references to 'intended prosecution', and 'subsequent court hearing' hide the good news that if you own up to the offence you will get a fixed penalty with no court appearance, and that you can probably avoid even that by going on a safer driving course.

 Poor design. It includes a number of features known to detract from easy reading: long line lengths, chaotic layout.



## The redesign

The new design uses the same template we used for our Bus Lane Penalty Charge redesign. Clear headings sit in their own space on the left, so you can read down them for the main story. Thick rules divide off the sections, so you read in short chunks. And the language is simplified to reflect what it means to people, not how the regulations are worded.

- A clear title says what it is, ('Speeding notice). The speed limit icon is instantly recognisable.
- The left hand column tells a story in headline form.
   'Your car was caught...'
   'You need to tell us...' The

purpose is made clear: they need to establish who was driving.

- The three response options on the form are made clear, with explanatory notes about why the information is needed. They also give some idea of what the penalty might be.
- Actual dates are given, not 'within 28 days of receipt of this request'. This makes it clear what actual date they have in mind.
- The photographic evidence is included, making a more convincing
- The legal references are grouped together to make it clear how this notice fulfils statutory purposes..



### **Speeding notice**

This is an important notice. Do not ignore it or pass it on to anyone else, even if you were not the driver. We must get your reply by 28 October 2016

Notice date: 23 September 2016

Document reference: 12345678

Fixed Penalty Num. 1234123412341234

Mr Andrew Sample 12 Acacia Avenue Manton MN3 6XY

## Your car was recorded doing 37 in a 30 zone

 Date of photo
 15 September 2016

 Time
 08.05

 Vehicle
 AB51HTY

Place Station Road, Manton
Speed limit 30 mph

Recorded speed 37 mph
Evidence Speed camera



## You need to tell us who was driving

This is so we can issue the fixed penalty to the right person.
Send us the Driver or Keeper
Form by 28 October 2016.

#### If you were the driver, tick box A on the form

If you were the driver, you will be offered the chance to accept the offence without being prosecuted in court, and either

- receive a fine and points on your license (usually £100 and 3 points).
- or you may be able to avoid a fine and points if you go on a driver education course (please see the notes on the next page to see if you are eligible)

If you want to contest the alleged offence you must still send in the form, and you will have a chance to refer your case to a Magistrates' Court later.

#### If you were <u>not</u> the driver, tick box B or C on the form

If you were not the driver, you must give us details of the person who was driving the car at the time of the offence.

If you did not own the car at the time, you must tell us the name of the person or company who you bought it from or sold it to.

You must still fill in the form yourself. Do not pass it on to anyone else.

#### Contacting us

Keep this page for your records, and send the form to: Fixed Penalty Support Unit,

City of Manton Police, PO Box 123, Manton MN1 2UX

**Helpline** 01234 567890

#### Legal notes

This is a Notice of Intended Prosecution issued in accordance with Section 1 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988. It is also a Statutory Request for the name and address of the driver under Section 172 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.

The alleged speeding offence is contrary to Section S81(1) RTRA 84 Sch 2 RTOA 88. If you knowingly provide false information, you will be committing an offence under Section 5 of the Periury Act.

Data Protection Act 1998: information you supply may be held on a computer.

## The form: original

No white space is unfilled, few elements align. It would be interesting to know the error rate for this form – possibly lower than we might expect, given that failure could apparently mean prison. People probably work quite hard to get it right.

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## The form: redesign

The new form is uncluttered and uses white space to direct the eye across the three choices to the signature area. We've used plain English where possible, and have tried to calm the design to encourage careful reading.

- A **clear title** tells us the purpose of the form.
- The return date, already mentioned twice on the front page, is repeated again. It's important to guide people about how to comply, rather than just threaten them with the consequence of failure.
- The response options are labelled A, B and C.
  We started with 1, 2 and 3, which lookd better (slightly less technical) but could be misunderstood as a sequence of steps. They only need to be labelled because we refer to them on the first page.
- The respondent's name is preprinted this reinforces the instruction not to pass it to anyone else to fill in.

  The assumption is that this is a data-driven dynamic document, so in the event of a company as the addressee, a different version of this section would appear.

Driver or Keeper Form	We have written to you, Andrew Sample, because you are the registered keeper of the vehicle that was caught speeding.								
Tick one box only below. Use black ink.	Even if you were not the driver, you must fill in, sign, and send back this form by 28/10/16. The penalty for not doing so is a fine which could be as much £1000, and up to 6 penalty points. If you knowingly provide false information, you will be committing an offence under the Perjury Act.								
A I was the driver at the time of the alleged offence	Date of birth								
aneged offence	Driving licence number								
	Licence issued by	DVLA N Ireland or EU Other							
	Full or provisional?	Full licence Provisional licence							
	Do you wish to be considered for a driver education course?	Yes No Your name will be checked against a national database to see if you are eligible.							
B I was not the driver of the car	Tell us the name and add	ress of the person who was driving							
but I know who it was	Title (Mr, Ms etc)								
	Forenames								
	Surname								
	Address								
	Postcode								
I was not the owner of the car at the time of the alleged offence	What date did you sell or buy the car? Who did you sell it to / buy it from?								
		uy it from:							
	Company name								
	Title (Mr, Ms etc) Forenames								
	Surname Address								
	Postcode								
Sign here									
I confirm that this information is correct to the best of my knowledge.	Full name	Andrew Henry Sample							
or my knowledge. I understand that if I knowingly give false informa-	Job title, if signing for								
tion I could be prosecuted under the Perjury Act.	a company								
Send the original form to	Date of birth, if under 18								
Fixed Penalty Support Unit, City of Manton Police, PO Box 123,	Signature	×							
Manton MN1 2UX.									

## Feasibility

In our report on the bus lane notice, we include a discussion of legal issues, and we believe similar points apply here.

Legislation uses precise and technical language to specify the requirements to communicate, but that does not mean the communications themselves have to be worded in the same way. Instead, authorities have a duty of care to communicate in a way that can be understand by the majority of the population.

Commercial companies are obliged by the Consumer Rights Act to provide information that is legible and comprehensible – public bodies should be held to the same standards. Literacy statistics show that a large proportion of the UK population struggle with complex information. Many public agencies demonstrate their duty of care in the way they communicate – for example, by providing translations of key communications into other languages, and by conforming to RNIB guidelines on the legibility of type. There seems no reason why documents about the enforcement of driving regulations should be any different.

At the same time we acknowledge any new documents would have to be rigorously assessed to check they did not give grounds for spurious appeals.

<sup>1</sup> According the 2011 Skills for Life Survey, 43% of the UK population have literacy skills below Level 1, the level required to cope with the Penalty Charge Notice. See 'Skill for Life Survey 2011: Headline findings', BIS Research Paper 57, Department of Business, Innovation & Skills.



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The latest version may be downloaded from: www.simplificationcentre. org.uk/simple-actions

## **About Simple Actions**

Most of us don't complain when we come across information that's poorly written or designed – for example, a mobile phone contract, an application form, or a user guide. We cope and make do, we blame ourselves for not being clever enough, we make mistakes, or if we have a choice we might just chuck it away. For one thing, it's probably not worth complaining, and we wouldn't know who to complain to anyway.

It's not obvious to everyone how to improve poor documents. A lot of everyday information could be better, but we've got used to it and assume that, like the rain, there's nothing we can do. But that's often not true, and with a little effort we can set much higher standards.

So the Simplification Centre has got together a group of volunteer information designers and writers to challenge the quality of everyday information.

They work together to take on 'orphan design projects' – those communications that no one seems to own or look after, but that really matter. Their work is published on the Simplification Centre website, where anyone can comment, or borrow the ideas under a Creative Commons license (www.simplificationcentre.org.uk/simple-actions).



One of our Simple Actions days, with a group of volunteer information designers.