



Cabinet (Resources) Panel

24 March 2015

Report title	Customer Service Standards	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Central Services	
	Councillor Andrew Johnson Resources	
Key decision	No	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Keith Ireland, Managing Director	
Originating service	Customer Service	
Accountable employee(s)	Sue Handy Tel Email	Head of Service 01902 553053 Sue.handy@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	Strategic Executive Board Scrutiny Board Joint Strategic Executive and Corporate Delivery Board	13 November 2014 26 November 2014 27 November 2014

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is recommended to:

1. Approve implementation of the corporate customer service standards.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To propose the introduction and implementation of a set of clear, easily understandable and accessible corporate customer service standards for the City of Wolverhampton Council.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 It is vital for an organisation to define service standards for its users/customers, wider stakeholders, employees and managers. They define what a customer can expect, help build their trust and confidence, and remind managers and employees of their obligations. Delivering excellent customer service also supports our Corporate Plan objective of being a Confident, Capable Council.

3.0 Current situation

- 3.1 Whilst some departments may have existing service-specific standards as part of existing policy or statutory requirement, there are no overarching customer service principles or standards for the City of Wolverhampton Council. If we are to be a Confident, Capable Council intent on delivering high service satisfaction, public trust and confidence, we need to have clear, easily understandable and accessible corporate customer service standards.

4.0 Research

- 4.1 In developing the draft standards attached at appendix 1, secondary research has been undertaken which included reviewing the standards set out by the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) and reviewing the policies of the following local authorities: Nottinghamshire County Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Coventry City Council, Leeds City Council, Harborough, South Gloucestershire, Ealing, Redbridge, Staffordshire, Cheshire and Chester.

5.0 Way forward

- 5.1 New standards for customers and procedures for our employees have been developed – two draft documents have been produced and are attached at appendix A. Document one details the proposed external-facing customer service standards which is essentially our commitment to the public and other key stakeholders who use our services. Document two details the internal procedures and improvements that we need to make in order to deliver our new corporate customer service standards.
- 5.2 Wider engagement, consultation and feedback in respect of the draft standards has been sought from senior management and employees delivering administrative functions and the 'Equality and Diversity Forum' which is a group external to the Council. All feedback received was considered and where appropriate the draft customer service standards have been amended to reflect comments and suggestions made.
- 5.3 Implementing the new approach of the new customer service standards

will require support from a number of areas within the Council:

- The role of leadership
Any new customer service standards need ownership, visibility and commitment from senior leaders across the organisation. Leadership is critical to successful implementation and managers need to hold employees to account for delivering against the standards set.
- Internal communication
The implementation of any new standards will need to be supported by a corporate approach to internal communication with consistent key messages and visibility to create awareness which supports leaders in changing culture.
- Training and development
Existing on line training provision has been reviewed to ensure it's consistent with the new standards and face to face briefings will be carried out where appropriate. User guides to support the internal procedures will also be made readily available on-line to all employees.

6. Review and evaluation

6.1 Corporate ownership / governance

Each service standard needs to have accountable leadership and a named business owner who is responsible for delivering against the standards. Performance needs to be communicated to all staff, on a regular basis, to maintain focus. The standards themselves will need to be corporately reviewed every 12– 18 months, in response to organisational or wider environmental changes.

6.2 Management responsibility

Managers will be responsible for regular monitoring, review and dip sampling to ensure that their teams are meeting the standards set.

6.3 Member scrutiny

Performance against service standards, specifically internal telephony performance will be included in scheduled performance reports to governance and performance panel.

6.4 Mystery customer / independent assessment

There will be an opportunity to gain an external perspective and feedback on the service we provide. Consideration will be also be given to use of an independent company to undertake a mystery shopper exercise or alternatively we could seek volunteers from existing stakeholder groups such as Citizens Panel.

8.0 Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.
[CH/10032015/I]

9.0 Legal implications

9.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.
RB/14112014/V.RB/09032015/D

10.0 Equalities implications

10.1 An initial equality screening undertaken on this proposal shows there are no adverse impact on any protected group.

11.0 Environmental implications

11.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

12.0 Human resources implications

12.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

13.0 Corporate landlord implications

13.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

14.0 Schedule of background papers

14.1 Strategic Executive Board 13 November 2014
Scrutiny Board 26 November 2014
Joint Strategic Executive and Corporate Delivery Board 27 November 2014

Section 1: External-facing customer service standards



Every contact counts

Delivering excellent customer service

Welcome!

As your council, we want to give you the highest standards of customer service whether you:

- contact us by telephone
- visit us in person
- visit our website
- send us a letter or email
- communicate with us through social media
- invite us into your home
- make a complaint, comment or compliment.

We take our responsibility to provide good customer service personally. We invest in our staff and we set ourselves high standards.

Though these standards may be high, we've also tried to make them simple, user friendly and measurable. This booklet will explain what they are and also set out what you as a service user or customer can expect from us.

Our ambition is to get things right first time, every time. We're human beings, however and we realise that sometimes we might not get all the way there.

That's why your views are so important to us. Your feedback is the single most important thing in helping us improve our services.

Please feel free to get in touch with your comments and suggestions – you'll find our contact details on the last page of this document.

Our commitment to you

We will always...

- Treat you fairly, with respect and consideration.
- Be courteous, helpful, open and honest.
- Listen to you and respond positively to what you're telling us.
- Deliver high quality, value for money services organised around your needs.
- Give you information, advice and services in the way you want to receive them.
- Use clear, understandable English.
- Try wherever we can to communicate with you in the method you prefer.
- Ask for your feedback and use it to help improve our services.
- Respect your confidentiality.
- Let you know how quickly we can take action to answer your enquiry or resolve your complaint.
- Let you know if we are unable to assist you and if that is the case , provide advice on how you might obtain assistance
- Tell you who's dealing with your enquiry or direct you to the best person to help.
- **Keep our promises by doing what we say we are going to do.**

If you telephone us we will...

- Aim to answer calls within 90 seconds at our Customer Services Centre.
- Tell you the name of the service area and the person you're speaking to.
- Give you contact details of someone who can help you with any future enquiries.
- Try to deal with your enquiry then and there. If we can't for any reason, we'll tell you when you can expect a response.
- Offer to take your details and arrange for someone to call you back if we can't put you through to the right person.
- Respond to your telephone messages within two working days, wherever possible – if it's going to take longer, we'll let you know.
- Avoid using answerphones whenever we can – but if you have to leave a message, we'll respond within two working days.
- Comply with the Data Protection Act (1998), making sure that proper steps are taken to protect your personal and sensitive information.
- Support you to carry out your transaction or source information electronically to save you time and money in the future

If you visit our website we will:

- Make sure it is easy to use.
- Provide feedback forms for you to ask questions or leave comments.
- Make paper forms available electronically or as PDF documents.
- Make sure that information on the site is both accurate and easy to find.
- Display opening times and the times that council services are available clearly and simply.

If you email or write to us we will:

- Give an initial or holding response to your e-mail or letter within five working days.
- Let you know if your email or letter has to be sent to a specialist department or another person to deal with. If this happens, you should expect to hear from us within ten working days of the date we get your letter or email original date of receipt. If we need more time to give you a proper answer, we'll tell you as soon as we can.
- Keep our correspondence simple and easy to understand.
- Provide you with contact details and a reference number if you need to get in touch.
- Direct you to the council's website if we think there's information there that can help you.

If you visit us in person we will:

- Make sure that you can find our reception areas.
- Be welcoming, attentive, helpful and courteous.
- Let you know how long it will be before someone can see you.
- Aim to deal with your enquiry within 20 minutes.
- Get in touch with the appropriate service for you if we're unable to deal with your enquiry directly.
- Create a clean, safe, comfortable and easily-accessible environment for you, advance notice of any particular access requirements that you have will help us to achieve this.
- Provide you with a confidential meeting area if you need it.
- Try wherever we can to communicate with you in the method you prefer.
- Make sure that all our employees wear identification and receptionists wear name badges, so you know who you're talking to.
- Provide signing and language interpretation – as long as you let us know in advance that you need it.
- Support you to carry out your transaction or source information electronically to save you time and money in the future

If we visit you we will:

- Offer you a choice of appointment times when we can.
- Carry identification and show it to you straight away.
- Explain who we are and the purpose of the visit.
- Be on time – and let you know as soon as possible if we are going to be late or miss an appointment.
- Advise you who to telephone if you want to confirm the identity of the person visiting you.
- Let you know what will happen next as a result of our visit.
- Do our best to arrange home visits and interviews around the need to respect a day of worship if you let us know in advance

If you contact us on social media such as Facebook and Twitter we will:

- Endeavour to join the conversation where possible. However, we may not be able to reply individually to all the messages we receive
- Read all direct messages and replies to posts and ensure that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are passed to the relevant people at Wolverhampton City Council
- If we need further information from you about any issue, we'll either ask for this through direct messaging or give you a telephone number or email address to provide this.
- Work to the principles set out in the council's social media policy which you can find here [Social Media Policy](#)

Customer Feedback

We welcome and learn from all of the feedback we receive, complaints compliments and comments. If you make a complaint we will:

- Acknowledge it within four working days.
- Try to resolve your complaint as soon as possible.
- Help you by taking your complaint details over the telephone if you prefer not to write or email your complaint to us.
- Tell you if we need to deal with the issue using specific procedures, which may take longer.
- Provide a full and final written response within 21 calendar days, or a timescale which we have agreed with you.
- Learn from your suggestions, compliments and complaints, using them to improve and develop our services.
- Provide you with details of the complaints procedure, so that you know what to do if you are not happy with your response.

You can find out more about the council's Customer Feedback Process here:

[Customer Feedback](#)

Protecting your data and answering Freedom of Information requests

We will:

- Make sure that all council employees have had appropriate training.
- Sensitively and confidentially handle all information that you give to us..
- Make sure your information is not discussed with, or disclosed to, any unauthorised person.
- Ask you only for information that is relevant.
- Respond within 40 calendar days to requests for access to your personal information, in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Respond within 20 working days to requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Equality and Diversity

- The council complies with the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty in providing inclusive and accessible services. We'll make reasonable adjustments to address your individual needs. Advance notice of any particular access requirements that you have will help us to achieve this.

What we ask of you

We'll do our best at all times to meet the service standards that we've set out in this booklet. However, there are some small things you can do to help us provide the level of service we all want. Please...

- Give us feedback and tell us where we can make improvements to our services.
- Treat our employees with respect.
- Be considerate and polite to other customers.
- Let us have all the information we need to help you.
- Let us know if you have special needs.
- Ask us to explain anything that you are not sure about.

Get in touch with us

If you'd like to know more about our commitment to customer service, please contact us through one of the following methods:

- Customer Services online forms: [Customer Feedback](#)
- E-mail: city.direct@wolverhampton.gov.uk.
- General enquiries for service requests: 01902 551155.
- Minicom: 01902 555554.
- Fax: 01902 551195.
- Emergency out of hours: 01902 552999.
- Post: Wolverhampton City Council, Civic Centre, St. Peter's Square, Wolverhampton. WV1 1SH.

You can get this information in large print, Braille, audio or in another language by calling 01902 551155.

Section 2: Internal customer service procedures

Every contact counts

How we deliver excellent customer service at Wolverhampton City
Council

March 2015

Our new standards: what you need to know...

At a glance:

- Customer care and service is everyone's responsibility.
- Managers are responsible for embedding customer service into the operational delivery of their service area.
- All internal and external telephone calls will be answered in six rings.
- Working as a team, when we are away from our desks we will ensure that our calls can be answered by our colleagues and vice-versa.
- We will always keep our customers updated - from their initial call to resolution.
- We will see customers who have an appointment with us within 20 minutes of their allotted time
- We will see customers who do not have an appointment within 1 hour.
- For all emails and letters, we will respond within five working days using the agreed corporate templates.
- We will make sure our email out-of-office facility is enabled when we are away from the office for more than a day, using the corporately agreed out of office message.
- Customer service training is now mandatory for all employees
- If you are expecting a visitor you will notify main reception desk on extension 0138 to ensure that your guest is dealt with as efficiently as possible.
- It is mandatory for all employees to wear their access badge on a corporate lanyard around their neck and ensure that it is visible at all times whilst they are on duty.

Every council employee, no matter what job they do, has a responsibility to treat the people we come into contact with every day with courtesy, professionalism and fairness. It's what our service users, customers and partners expect from a Confident, Capable Council and it's the absolute minimum they deserve from us.

Managers will ensure that their teams know about, and more importantly, deliver upon these standards. There is an expectation that performance against delivery of **customer service standards will be included in service plans and form part of every employee's one-to-one and annual appraisal**, and that they will be regularly reviewed by senior managers.

Teams, departments and managers will also be held to account by the Strategic Executive Board (SEB) through monthly customer service performance reporting. This report will provide information on performance against telephone, standards as well as complaint trends. We will set high standards and we will expect these to be met. Where action to tackle poor performance is required this will be taken swiftly and service areas will be offered support to achieve these standards.

These standards aim to create a 'one council', corporate approach and are designed to set clear expectations for everyone who has regular contact with customers, both from inside and outside the council.

Handling telephone calls

- All internal and external telephone calls **will** be answered or diverted to a colleague within **six rings**.
- When you answer the phone remember to say 'good morning' or 'good afternoon' and to clearly state your name, for example:
"Good morning, you're speaking to Joe Smith, how can I help you?"
- When you are away from your desk, you will make sure that your calls can be picked up by colleagues within the team. This may require a hunt-group number, or a pick up group setting up and ICT can help you with this – email [ICT service desk](#) for support. If you are regularly away from the office, please divert your phone to a colleague who has the knowledge and skill to deal with any queries appropriately or take messages which should be responded to within agreed timescales. Alternatively you can divert your number to a temporary location, the following link will help you to do this [ICT service desk](#)

- If for whatever reason it's not possible to divert your phone, you should activate your voice mail. Voicemail messages should say who you are and when you will get back to the caller – in practice this should be no longer than **two working days** after their voicemail was left. Advice on how to set up your voicemail [can be found here](#).
- To ensure that you are accessible and available to work colleagues and our external customers, you need to make sure that the corporate telephone directory is updated if your details change. This is a personal responsibility but managers also have a role in checking and monitoring accuracy. Advice on how to do this [can be found here](#).

Handling face-to-face contact

- Reception areas will be kept smart, clean, tidy and free from clutter. This includes removing or reporting unnecessary and out-of-date posters and flyers to your manager. Again, managers will be accountable for ensuring that these standards are rigorously maintained at all times
- Standards of dress should be adhered to at all times – particularly by staff in customer-facing roles such as receptionists who should also wear an appropriate name badge. That means wearing your uniform if you have one, following the dress code if you don't (this should be available from your manager)
- All employees will wear their access badge if you do not have a corporate lanyard please speak to your manager or supervisor who will arrange to have one ordered for you.
- We will see customers who have an appointment within 20 minutes of their allotted time. If there's going to be a delay, you will let reception staff know, liaise with the officer dealing with the enquiry and – above all – **keep your customer updated**. It's important to remember that excellent customer service is about keeping our promises.
- If you are expecting a visitor you must notify main reception on extension 0138 giving the customer's name, the title of the meeting, the name of the employee meeting with the customer and their contact number

- You will ensure that your customer's preferred method of communication is used where you know it – and find out if you don't. This information should be captured in the future on the City Council's new customer relationship management (CRM) system.
- When dealing with assertive and challenging customers you will do so calmly, professionally and fairly. Customer excellence training, which includes handling aggression, is mandatory for every existing and new employee and must be part of continued professional development plans. A customer care training package can be found on the learning hub. If you don't have access to the learning hub please speak to your manager who will make alternative arrangements for you to access this training.
- When you visit customers in their own homes, you will carry up-to-date identification to show them and give your name and reason for visiting before you cross the threshold. You will also provide a number for them to call so that they can verify who you are.
- When you are visiting a customer in their own home you should follow your departmental lone working policy **at all times**. Please speak to your line manager if you are not aware of the policy in your area of work or if you require any clarification of the processes that are in place.
- If you have to cancel a home visit or you're running late, then you **must** let your customer know at the first opportunity.
- At the end of any home visit, you **will** always make sure that your customer knows what will happen next.

Handling social media contact i.e. Face book and Twitter

Social media is a very powerful tool, but you have to be careful about how you use it, both in your professional and personal lives.

The council has a social media policy which you need to be familiar with. You can find out more about it here:

[Social Media Usage Policy](#)

Handling contact by letter

For many people, a letter may be the only contact they have with the council. You should always remember to:

- Only use the agreed, corporate letter templates (and no others) which can be found [here](#).
- Include, as a matter of corporate standard, your customer's first name (and if this is not available their sign-off – for example, Mr Mrs, Ms) in your response
- Explain any technical terms you use clearly and simply if their meaning isn't immediately obvious.
- You will acknowledge - and ideally respond to - all letters within **five working days** of receiving them.
- Written correspondence is one of the most expensive methods of communicating with our customers. Every effort should be made – where appropriate - to encourage customers to use channels such as email and digital self-service which are more efficient and environmentally-friendly.

Handling email contact

- You should keep internal emails to a minimum – and use the Cc option only when it's absolutely necessary
- The first and third Wednesday of every month have been designated 'internal email-free days' to encourage better internal communication and productivity. So, unless you're communicating time-sensitive information relating to statutory requirements, for example complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, you shouldn't send **any** internal emails. If you are unsure about sending something, please take advice from your line manager
- Every **internal** email you send will include the appropriate protective marking– for example PROTECT – LOCSEN , NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED. You can find out more here: [Protective Marking Guidance](#)
- The subject bar on each email should state clearly what the email's about

- You will acknowledge - and ideally respond to - all emails within **five working days** of receiving them
- You should send an initial holding response to all external emails immediately. The holding response should set out for our customers when they can expect to receive a full response. IT helpdesk can support implementation of this function for service specific mailboxes within service areas.
- When you are away from the office for more than half a day you will need to ensure that your Microsoft Outlook out-of-office notification is activated. The corporate email response should be used for your out of office message, It will read: "I am currently away from the office returning on DAY/MONTH/YEAR. If your enquiry is of an urgent nature, please contact XX on 01902 55XXXX. Thank you. Kind Regards XXXXX" All out -of -office notifications will be written in Arial size 14 text.

Handling customer feedback

You should always refer customer complaints, comments and compliments to the Corporate Complaints team. If you have any doubts about whether this should be done, ask your manager for advice or consult the council's complaints policy which can be found [here](#).

Ends