

Waverley Borough Council

Report to: Executive

Date: 7 May 2024

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director: Place

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Report Status: Open

Key decision: No

Customer Services Charter

1. Executive Summary

Our customer charter sets out the service our customers, both internal and external can expect to receive when interacting with us. This charter applies to all customer interactions across the organisation, not just those undertaken through our customer service centres, and covers online, email, phone and in person.

The current charter has been in place for a significant amount of time, is not well known and is no longer fit for purpose for the world that we now operate in as it does not strongly reflect the digital contact that is now in place. To ensure that this is fit for purpose it has been reviewed. This report sets out the updated proposed customer charter.

Please note: the charter has been reviewed alongside Guildford Borough Council's customer charter with a view to harmonise approaches at both councils as part of collaboration. A paper will also be going forward to Guildford's Executive for consideration.

2. Recommendation to Executive

2.1. That the Executive adopts the new charter for implementation

3. Reason(s) for Recommendation:

3.1. It is important that we have a customer charter in place that supports our customers and ensures that we are able to clearly manage expectations for our residents when they contact us.

3.2. The current one is no longer fit for purpose and needs to be updated.

4. Exemption from publication

4.1 No

5. Purpose of Report

5.1. To provide the executive with the opportunity to comment on the proposed new harmonised customer charter.

6. Strategic Priorities

6.1. Customer services is at the heart of what we do at Waverley Borough Council, with the customer services centre acting as the front door to the council for our residents.

6.2. Customer services contributes to the councils' strategic priorities of local, open, participative government.

7. Background

- 7.1 The charter has been in place for quite some time, and is not well known within the council or publicly. Significant changes in how customers interact with us particularly in the digital space means that there was a need to review this.
- 7.2 As part of this review other Surrey councils were contacted to benchmark their standards. Of those that responded most had longer response times than in our charter and many were looking to further change their customer charters to be more in line with customer service levels in the private sector that reflect wider customer expectations outside of the public sector.

8. Creating a mutual relationship with our customers

- 8.1 One of the key changes in this charter is that as well as setting out how our customers can expect to interact with us, we have also set out our expectations regarding customer contact with us.
- 8.2 The revised charter provides an opportunity to form a relationship with our customers that is based on mutual respect in all interactions between customers and the council.
- 8.3 Whilst many of our customers treat our staff with respect, post covid there has been an increase in negative behaviour towards officers from customers verbally, in writing and in person. This is not unique to Waverley as a council but something that is also being reflected from other district and boroughs as well as the private retail sectors. It is important to us that we are publicly demonstrating that we will not tolerate negative behaviour and abuse towards our staff and the charter is part of the way that we can do this, supported by our vexatious customer policies.

9. Harmonisation

- 9.1 How we interact with our customers is extremely important and it is essential that we have high customer service standards in place.

9.2 As we work more closely together with Guildford Borough Council it is important that staff are following the same approach to customers at both locations to better help closer collaborative working.

9.3 As both councils charters were in need of a refresh and in order to help facilitate collaborative working moving forward this charter has been reviewed at both locations with the review to be implemented in a harmonised way across both.

9.4 The charters do also follow best practice customer approach so would also work as a stand-alone charter for both councils.

10. Consultations

10.1 The Executive Portfolio holder Customer Services and IT has been consulted on this report and approved its submission to the Committee

10.2 CMB and the joint management team have also been consulted and provided feedback on the charter.

10.3 The Lead councillor at Guildford Borough Council has also been consulted

11. Key Risks

11.1 Customer service covers all contact that a customer has with the council, not just those that are via the customer service centre. There is a risk that the level of service is not replicated across all council departments. By having the updated, fit for purpose charter that is implemented across all services would help to mitigate this risk.

12. Financial Implications

12.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

13. Legal Implications

13.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

14. Human Resource Implications

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

14.2 There is training and wellbeing support available to staff to support them with dealing with and managing the impact of interactions with difficult or aggressive customers.

15. Equality and Diversity Implications

15.1 The charter does not limit any routes of contact for customers whether digital or in person. Any future changes to the service will have regard to the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) and may be subject to an equalities impact assessment

16. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

16.1 There are no climate change or sustainability implications arising from this report

17. Summary of Options

17.1 Approve recommended customer charter for adoption

17.2 Reject the revised customer charter

17.3 Approve the recommended customer charter with requested amendments

18. Conclusion

We know that there is always more we can do to make improvements to the service we offer our customers. We will continue to strive for

improvements and work with customers and councillors to ensure that what we are doing meets the needs of our residents. An updated charter, that is harmonised with Guildford will allow us to further embed a strong customer services culture across the council and the partnership.

We would encourage councillors to share any ideas or feedback you receive from residents on improvements we can make with us via email and would welcome your input.

19. Background Papers

19.1 None

Appendix 1 - Proposed Customer Charter

Our Customer Charter

We are committed to providing a consistently high standard of service. We promise to put our customers at the heart of everything we do. Our charter sets out our commitment to you:

- to communicate and engage with you proactively, being open, honest and transparent, recognising confidentiality.
- understand and respond to your personal circumstances, being polite, supportive and professional, treating everyone consistently and fairly

Customer Service Standards

We are committed to ensuring that you experience the best possible customer service. When you contact us, we want to make sure that:

- We are friendly and approachable
- We listen carefully and not be judgemental
- We treat you fairly
- We use plain language
- We respect your confidentiality and safeguard your personal information
- We give timely, clear, and accurate information about our services to help you make informed choices
- We make reasonable adjustments to give you equal access to information, services, and our buildings

Responding to your enquiry

if you call us:

- we will aim to answer your call in a timely way
- we will attempt to deal with your query without passing you on to someone else
- if we must transfer you, we will tell you who you are being transferred to and why

If you email or write:

- we aim to respond within ten working days. If this is not possible, we will write to tell you why and to let you know how long we expect it will take to respond fully

If we are out of the office and you email:

- We will set up an 'out of office' automatic reply, giving the following details:
 - A date when we will be back in the office
 - An alternative contact that may be able to help you while we are away

If you visit us:

If you need to see someone in person, this would be done by booking an appointment with the relevant service. However if you visit the council office without an appointment we will:

- see you as soon as we can and always try to acknowledge that you are waiting
- we will attempt to deal with your query without passing you on to someone else
- if this is not possible, we will explain why you are being passed on and to which team
- if we cannot resolve your query on the day we will endeavour to book you an appointment for a suitable time.

If we visit you in your home:

- we will provide you details of the person or company visiting you in advance, unless it is inappropriate to do so
- we will agree an appointment time with you and keep you informed if a delay occurs
- you can check the identity of the person visiting you with them directly or by contacting us

If our service falls short:

We are committed to ensuring that you experience the best possible customer service but there may be occasions where we get things wrong. We want to try to put them right and learn from our mistakes to help improve services for the future. Our complaints process is available to all and more details can be found on our website: [Waverley Borough Council - complaints](#)

What we expect of our customers

- Treat us politely and with respect; aggressive behaviour or inappropriate language will not be tolerated
- To help us reduce costs and offer value for money for our customers we encourage the use of our online services wherever possible.
- Have an understanding that the council's resources are limited and that we must prioritise the work we carry out.
- Provide us with all the information we need to help you
- Ask us to explain anything you are not sure of
- Keep any appointments that you have with us, and notify us if you are unable to attend
- Once you have established contact with us through one of our advertised routes, direct all correspondence through an agreed single route

Service	Sign off date
Finance / S.151 Officer	10/04/24
Legal / Governance	10/04/24
HR	10/04/24
Equalities	As above
Lead Councillor	15/04/24
CMB	10/04/24
Executive Liaison/briefing	23/04/24
Committee Services	23/4/24

Please ensure the following service areas have signed off your report.
Please complete this box and do not delete.