

# **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

## **Customer Focus – Putting People First**

### ***One Council, One Service***

## **Customer Care Policy Statement & Standards**

**Whenever customers have contact with Flintshire County Council they will receive consistently excellent standards of customer service. These standards will ensure that all sections of our diverse community are able to access our services. The Council is committed to ensuring that customer service excellence is an integral part of the planning, resourcing, and delivery of all Council services.**

### **1.0 Section One: Policy Statement**

#### **1.1 Our guiding principles**

As an organisation we will:

- ✓ Identify ourselves, be helpful and courteous
- ✓ Be professional and positive
- ✓ Be well informed, so that we are able to help you
- ✓ Be effective in listening and responding to you
- ✓ Be fair and support your individual needs

#### **1.2 Who are our customers?**

Our customers are all the people we come into contact with in connection with our work. This includes people who live in, work in or visit the area, and people acting on behalf of people who live in the area.

The customers of some services will be employees, local businesses and partner organisations.

Although produced primarily with external customers in mind, these customer care standards will also apply to internal customers who are colleagues in the Council.

Finally, many customers of the Council receive their service from other providers on behalf of the Council. Where services are procured and funded by us, those commissioning the service must ensure that the

provider can deliver a customer care service which is broadly in line with this Customer Care Policy.

### **1.3 What do our customers want?**

Our customers want accessible, efficient and responsive services and we must strive to meet these demands.

Consultation has been carried out in relation to how our customers prefer to access Council services. This has highlighted a clear preference for using the telephone when dealing with the Council on many issues. Fewer people would choose to deal with the Council by letter, although there is an increase in the use of e-mail and electronic access to services. Access to services via the council's website is increasing on an annual basis with more customers wishing to communicate with the council electronically, as well as accessing information and applying for services on line.

A high percentage of citizens would prefer to carry out all their business with the Council at a single point of contact, and many wished to have contact available outside of the normal office hours and via the internet.

However, where there are sensitive and personal issues to be discussed, there is a considerable demand for face-to-face contact with specialist staff, either in Council offices or in the customer's own home.

We must respond to the needs of our customers in terms of access and recognise that one method will not suit everyone. We will therefore continue to offer choices to our customers whilst maintaining consistent service standards.

### **1.4 What is customer care and why is it important?**

Customer care means:

- ✓ Providing a good quality service in a friendly, efficient and helpful way. We should continually strive to improve services by ensuring good communication and a positive attitude towards customers;
- ✓ Treating other people how they would like to be treated;
- ✓ Treating each person as an individual. In order to do this we must understand and recognise that we are all different and that we all have diverse needs. These differences and needs can be based on our culture, language, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, literacy, sexual orientation or religion. Good customer care is about having a positive attitude towards and respect for diversity and, in turn, having the flexibility to adapt our behaviour and actions in a way that is appropriate for the individual;

- ✓ Treating people with dignity, respect and courtesy. Generally customers will request a service from the Council. In some instances we may need to be involved with people when they do not particularly want our involvement. In all cases, customers have a right to be treated with dignity, respect and courtesy;
- ✓ Offering choices where possible;
- ✓ Giving information about what is available, and providing an explanation if a service is not available.

### **1.5 Why do we need customer care standards?**

This statement outlines the Council's policy on customer care and related issues. The standards set out in this document are the minimum the Council would expect as a starting point. Individual Directorates or service areas will want to produce additional service specific standards or targets that are more relevant to the services they provide or the customers they serve.

Customer care standards set out the expectations on us as employees in our work, and ensure that we become and remain a customer-focussed organisation. In particular, these standards define a corporate customer care framework for the achievement of excellent customer service which will:

- ✓ Ensure that all customers, whether they are residents or visitors equally receive the same consistent, high standards of customer service.
- ✓ Ensure that customer care and customer service is an integral part of the planning, resourcing, and delivery of all Council services.
- ✓ Prevent valuable Council resources from being wasted upon the expensive costs of delivering poor customer service.
- ✓ Enable the Council to achieve its corporate and service goals, as set out in the Council's Improvement Plan.

### **1.6 How will we measure our success?**

Our Customer Care Policy will be backed up by Customer Care Standards. Over time, our customers will be involved in setting and monitoring these standards.

We will monitor our performance through self-assessment, through comparison with other organisations, and sometimes through receiving feedback through external inspections.

As a Council, we will develop ways of getting customer feedback and finding out whether or not our customers are satisfied with the standard of service they have received. Comments, compliments and complaints from our customers are an important part of the continued improvement

of key processes that will be needed in order for us to be a customer-focused organisation.

## **2.0 Section Two: Setting Standards for Staff to Follow**

### **2.1 In developing these standards we have sought to:**

- ✓ Set standards which are user friendly, customer focused and measurable.
- ✓ Clearly state how staff should behave in dealing with customers.
- ✓ Set performance targets which can be reviewed regularly.
- ✓ Give consideration to legislation, good practice and national standards.
- ✓ Ensure staff are equipped to deliver services taking into account equality and diversity so that :
  - A service can be delivered in Welsh or English according to the customer's preference.
  - Translation / interpretation can be arranged when languages other than English or Welsh are used.
  - Customers with sensory impairments can be assisted through their chosen medium, such as Braille or British Sign Language.
  - Customers with a learning disability will be offered clear and simple advice and instructions, sensitively provided.

### **2.2 General principles when dealing with an enquiry:**

When dealing with an enquiry from a customer, whether face to face or by telephone:

- Listen carefully to the enquiry.
- Identify and address any special needs with sensitivity, tact and diplomacy.
- Record customer contact details accurately.
- Ensure that the nature of the customer's enquiry is understood clearly.
- Aim to resolve enquiries at first contact where possible.
- Keep the lines of communication open with our customers and keep them informed.

### **2.3 Telephone callers**

- Aim to answer the telephone within 15 seconds or at the most within 30 seconds.
- Greet the customer in a polite and courteous manner, giving your name.
- Give a bi-lingual greeting to external callers.
- Offer to transfer the call to a Welsh speaking colleague when required.
- Where a customer has a hearing impairment offer access to an alternative system.

- Give your full attention to the customer.
- Take ownership of the call, resolving the customer's enquiry wherever possible.
- When taking a call for a colleague, use an effective message taking system and make sure the customer is called back.
- End the call with a thank you and confirm with the customer the outcome.

## **2.4 Use of Voicemail**

- Only use voicemail to ensure that telephone calls do not go unanswered.
- Use voicemail only for short periods or specific purposes.
- Ensure recorded messages are audible, accurate, and appropriate and where possible, provide alternative contact details.
- Give the caller an option to leave a message.
- Respond to all messages within 24 hours or the next working day if the message is left over a weekend or Bank Holiday.
- Regularly update your voicemail message.

## **2.5 Face to Face contact** – this covers personal callers with or without appointments, contact with customers at events, meetings out and about and site visits.

- Aim to greet customers as soon as practicable, and preferably within 5 minutes of their arrival at a council building / event.
- Greet the customer in a polite and courteous manner.
- Give your full attention to the customer.
- In designated reception areas, provide a bilingual receptionist or clearly indicate access to a Welsh speaking colleague.
- Keep the customer informed of the length of time they are likely to wait to see the person they need.
- Offer an appointment where this may be more appropriate, responsive or efficient.
- When a customer has special needs, find out what they need and aim to provide it.
- When a customer needs to communicate in a language other than English or Welsh, make arrangements to provide an interpretation service.
- When discussing personal information, always arrange to do so in a confidential environment.

## **2.6 Personal calls to customers** – this covers visits to customers' homes / properties.

- Wherever possible or appropriate makes visits by arrangements with the customer, clearly stating the purpose of the visit.
- Keep customers informed of any changes to the visit arrangements.

- Establish the customer's language, communication and other special needs prior to the visit and make arrangements to meet these.
- Carry your identify card at all times and show it to each customer before entering the property.
- Encourage customers to check your identity with the Council, for example by telephoning.
- Follow policies and guidelines on Lone Working for your safety.
- Use tact and courtesy as a visitor in another person's home, treating their property with respect.
- Close the visit by explaining the next steps, and leave written information where possible.
- Follow up your commitment to the customer with action.

## **2.7 Written communication**

- Aim to respond to all written communication within 10 working days of receipt.
- Respond to the correspondence in the language of the original communication.
- There may be occasions when a full response cannot be given within the timescale. This is unavoidable but there is still a requirement to keep the customer informed by making contact or sending a holding response. This can give an expected date for a full response or give the reason why a full response cannot be given.
- Ensure the presentation of all written correspondence is easy to understand, professional and accurate.
- Include a contact name and telephone number, together with any other information needed (e.g. reference number) to assist the customer.
- Meet the needs of people with visual impairment, through the use of Braille, large print or other specialist services.

## **2.8 Compliments, comments and complaints**

- Be open to receiving feedback from customers.
- Pass comments and suggestions on to your manager, if they may improve the service.
- Ensure compliments are recorded and shared with colleagues.
- Be aware of the Council's procedure for dealing with compliments, comments and complaints.
- Aim to resolve all concerns (except serious complaints) raised by customers immediately and informally wherever possible.
- If informal resolution is not successful, tell the customer they can make a formal complaint, and help them to do so.
- In the case of a serious complaint, tell your manager.

### **3. Section Three: Our Published Standards**



#### **Customer Care**

##### **Our Commitment to you**

##### **We will:**

Identify ourselves, be helpful and courteous  
Be professional and positive  
Be well informed, so that we are able to help you  
Be effective in listening and responding to you  
Be fair and support your individual needs

##### **And...**

Aim to answer your telephone call within 15 seconds  
Arrange for someone to call you back promptly if we cannot answer your query immediately  
Aim to respond to your enquiry within 10 working days of receipt

##### **We also...**

Expect you to continue to treat our workforce with respect and consideration.

### **4. Section Four: Contacts**

- Customer Services Manager, Flintshire County Council, County Hall, Mold, CH7 6NG  
Tel: 01352 702421, e-mail: [customerservices@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@flintshire.gov.uk)
- Customer Services Team, Flintshire County Council, County Hall, Mold, CH7 6NG.  
Tel: 01352 703020, e-mail: [customerservices@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@flintshire.gov.uk)