



POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21ST APRIL 2009

SUBJECT: CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARD FOR CORRESPONDENCE

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for the proposed Customer Service Standards for correspondence.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 As part of the Customer First Strategy, there is a commitment to produce corporate Customer Service Standards to support the improvement of the council's "Customer Focus". An overarching Customer Charter and standards for "Managing telephone calls to and from customers" and "Customers visiting council premises" have already been agreed. This will be the third Customer Service Standard and incorporates both the "correspondence" and "electronic correspondence" standards in the previously agreed list of standards (Policy and Resources Committee, November 2004). Two further standards will be developed in 2009 relating to "visiting customers at home" and "emergency and out-of-hours services".
- 2.2 Once this standard has been agreed, work will commence to raise awareness of the standard, as well as the two existing standards and Customer Charter. The charter and three standards will be supported by the issuing of guidance to officers, monitoring of customer services standards and the provision of customer service training and advice.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Customer First Strategy is a part of the Improving Services theme and is an identified priority in the Corporate Improvement Plan. The Customer First Strategy is a key part of the council's response to the WAG "Making the Connections" strategy particularly in relation to developing citizen centred services.

4. DEVELOPING THE CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARD

- 4.1 The draft standard incorporates the views of an officers working group and the Customer First Strategy Group. The standard has also been circulated to Heads of Service and incorporates comments received.

5. THE CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARD

- 5.1 The standard has been written to be compatible with the Complaints Policy and standards relating to Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations.
- 5.2 This standard covers the management of external correspondence both paper based and

electronic, including e-mail, fax and web interactions. The standard is compatible with the Core Customer Service Principles for Public Services in Wales (a set of customer service standards for devolved public services in Wales that has been developed as part of the Making the Connections programme) and the supporting WAG Good Practice Guidance on customer service.

5.3 The draft standard, endorsed by the Customer First Strategy Group, is as follows:

- Regardless of the format (e.g. large print, Braille, audio tape) or the language used, the same standards will apply. These are minimum standards and more stringent standards may apply in certain circumstances.
- Where correspondence involves a number of service areas, the correspondent will receive a single response from a lead officer or service whenever possible.
- Where correspondence requires a substantive response and this cannot be sent within 5 working days, officers will endeavour to respond within the 5 working days from receipt. A full response, or a holding response informing the correspondent of the reason for the delay, will be sent within 20 working days of receipt of the original correspondence.
- Any response to correspondence received will be in the same format and language as the original correspondence from the customer, or will be in the format that the customer has requested.
- All outbound letters must comply with either the corporate letter format, or the format of a partnership group that the correspondence relates to, including the use of fonts, branding and letterheads. These are available from the Communications Unit.
- Outbound e-mail must be compliant with the Internet Usage Standards, available from IT Security and must use the fonts specified in the corporate letter format.
- The language used in outbound correspondence must be clear and easy to understand.
- Outbound correspondence must identify the originator of the correspondence (either an individual, or a small work team), who the customer should contact if they wish to respond to the correspondence (including a contact telephone number, e-mail address, fax number and postal address) and the date the correspondence was sent. Where appropriate, the correspondence should include information on where further advice about the subject of the correspondence can be obtained, including contact details or location

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None directly from this report

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None arising directly from this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 The views of consultees have been incorporated into the report

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That these standards be approved and adopted.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To achieve objectives contained within the agreed Customer First Strategy and the Corporate Improvement Plan.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Acts 1972 and 1990

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Consultees: Customer First Strategy Group
Heads of Service

Background Papers: None, other than those already published.