

**REPORT TO THE SCRUTINY PANEL for RESOURCE AND PERFORMANCE
MEETING OF 14th MARCH 2013**

Status: For comment and recommendation
Title: Draft Customer Service Standards
Originator: Communications and Customer Services Manager
Where from: Scrutiny Commission, 28th February 2013
Where to next: Council

Objective: Review, revise and communicate service user care standards across all channels in line with the Customer Services Strategy

1. Outcome sought from Panel

1.1 To consider the refreshed Customer Service Standards as set out in Appendix A attached to this report.

2 Background

2.1 Full Council approved the Customer Services Strategy at its meeting on 30th January 2013.

2.2 The Customer Services Strategy noted the Customer Service Standards should define, in general terms, the service customers can expect from the Council across all channels of communication. It went on to explain that these Service Standards were currently being reviewed by the Council's Senior Management Team. Once approved by Council, these Standards would be communicated to our customers and displayed on our website.

2.3 Customer Service Standards for Harborough service users have, in recent years, been published as a Harborough leaflet – "Customer First – Our Promise". In this leaflet it noted the Council's Care Standards as:

- Answer telephones within 5 rings (13 seconds)
- Respond to Voicemail within 1 working day
- Respond to Letters within 10 working days
- Respond to emails within 5 working days
- Visitors seen within 5 minutes

3 Points for discussion

- 3.1 Service standards are important for customers, potential customers, staff, managers and Members as they help to define what a customer can expect when contacting the Council. They also act as reminder of the obligations staff face when dealing with customers.
- 3.2 These Customer Service Standards identify what customers can expect when first contacting the Council. They do not relate to specific service areas where there maybe response times/standards set in-line with statutory guidelines, such as planning.
- 3.3 Customer expectations are changing and increasing in terms of what services are offered, how they are offered and when they can be accessed, such as social media and on-line services. These changes have been incorporated in the refreshed Customer Service Standards.
- 3.4 SMT undertook a Customer Services Standards comparison exercise with partner authorities of Hinckley & Bosworth, North West Leicestershire, Charnwood and Blaby. Examples of partner authority's standards can be found at Appendix B. SMT also considered if HDC could 'match' its Standards with these other authorities, although this was not possible due to way each authority presented their Standards.
- 3.5 SMT considered the current Customer Services Standards and presented a refreshed draft to CMT. The below table shows the feedback SMT and CMT considered when drafting these Standards:

Current Service Standard	Feedback/comments
Answer telephones with 5 rings (13 seconds)	<p>Whilst the Council is working from Millers House, there is no voicemail service available on the telephones. Therefore, all telephones have a 'pick-up' facility which will ensure all calls are answered. Although ensuring calls are answered within 5 rings with this 'pick-up' facility may be hard to achieve.</p> <p>North West is the only other authority with a 5 ring policy, others have between 10 rings and 60 seconds.</p> <p>Action: It was agreed that 10 rings (approx. 30 seconds) would be manageable and the Customer Service Standard should be amended accordingly</p>
Respond to Voicemail within 1 working day	<p>Voicemail is not currently accessible on all telephones whilst located within Millers House.</p> <p>Action: It was agreed that this standard is not appropriate at the present time and should be removed</p>
Respond to Letters within 10 working days	<p>Although a majority of letters could be responded to within this timeframe. Some letters may require more investigation or a more detailed response. Where this is the case a holding letter</p>

	<p>explaining this should be sent to the customer.</p> <p>Under equalities, why should customers without access to emails or a preference to write a letter, be treated differently? This was discussed and agreed there should be no difference.</p> <p>To bring this in-line with email, ie 5 working days, it should be made clear the Service Standard would apply once the letter has been received, not when it was posted.</p> <p>Action: It was agreed that letters should be responded to within 5 working days of receipt. If a holding letter was required this would be sent – this would be ‘counted’ as a response.</p>
Respond to emails within 5 working days	<p>SMT agreed with this, however staff must remember to ensure they use their out of office option effectively, ie always ensure it is switched on and the message contains an alternative contact details when they are on holiday or away from the office.</p> <p>Where an email requires further investigation, a holding email would be sent to the customer.</p> <p>Action: Keep this Standard.</p>
Visitors seen within 5 minutes	<p>Clarity is needed re ‘visitor’. It was agreed that a ‘visitor’ is someone with a pre-arranged appointment or attending a meeting.</p> <p>Action: Agreed to amend the standard to ensure clarity around of a visitor with an appointment within 5 minutes.</p>
Other points:	
Include behavioural standards eg courtesy, helpfulness and openness / honesty	Agreed to include this.
Comparison of authority’s Standards	<p>Some of these had some good points such as complaints, FOI, arranging appointments and it was agreed to include these.</p> <p>Other authorities had not included Social Media within their Standards. It was agreed to include Social Media, website question and Govmetric feedback within the HDC standards as they are used regularly by customers.</p> <p>Some authorities Customer Services Standards seemed too detailed and very lengthy. These lengthy documents would be difficult to display on posters and publicise. Agreed to keep the Standards simple and clear but relevant.</p> <p>Some authorities included a vision within their Standards. It</p>

	was agreed HDC should include a vision statement.
Monitoring	The main use of these Customer Service Standards is as a guidance tool to confirm to management that customers are receiving what they have been promised. These Customer Service Standards, and performance against these standards, should be reviewed regularly with staff through meetings with their managers.

4 Equality Impact Assessment Implications/Outcomes (attach completed EIA)

4.1 This was completed as part of the Customer Services Strategy approved by full Council in January 2013.

5 Impact on Communities

5.1 These Customer Service Standards will give an understanding of what users can expect to receive for each council service for each major area of service provision when first contacting the Council.

5.2 The review and development of these Customer Services Standards will ensure continuous improvements to services.

6 Legal Issues

6.1 Not applicable.

7 Resource Issues

7.1 There are no resource issues as these strategies will be delivered within existing budgets.

8 Community Safety Implications

8.1 *Not applicable*

9 Carbon Management Implications

9.1 *Not applicable.*

10 Risk Management Implications

10.1 *Not applicable*

11 Consultation

11.1 These Customer Services Standards have been reviewed and refreshed by the Senior Management Team at their meeting in January 2013.

- 11.2 A bench marking and comparison exercise was carried out with partner authorities and can be found at Appendix B
- 11.3 Corporate Management Team considered these refreshed Customer Service Standards at their meeting in February 2013.
- 11.4 Through an internal consultation process, these Customer Services Standards are being shared with all staff during March 2013.
- 11.5 Consultation will be carried out through the Council's website to seek views of residents during March & April 2013.
- 11.6 Once these Customer Service Standards have been approved they will be produced and displayed on posters within the Council's buildings, Notice Boards, shared at staff team meetings, on the Council's website and intranet and published in the Council's Newsletter Harborough News newsletter and other appropriate methods.

12 Background Papers

- 12.1 Customer Services Strategy report to Council 30th January 2013.
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Previous report(s): *TEXT*

Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure: *No*

Appendices:

A. Customer Services Standards (Appendix A)

B. Partner Authorities Customer Service Standards (Appendix B)