

Customer Service

Code of Practice and Standards



June 2018



Customer Service Code of Practice and Standards

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Introduction

Endorsement from the Chief Executive

Our customer centric approach forms part of all our business; particularly in how we communicate with our citizens, our partners and each other. How we communicate needs to reflect our commitment to providing excellent, value for money, accessible council services. Therefore I welcome and support any feedback from customers so that we can shape our services to those they require. We promise you we will continue to demonstrate how excellent customer services are our highest priority.

Dan Swaine

Chief Executive Officer



What is Customer Service?

Customer Service is ensuring that we give you, our customer, the level of quality of personal service to allow you to be served as we would wish to be served ourselves.

You have a right to expect the best possible standards of services from us and you should be treated with respect, listened and responded to in a polite, helpful and timely manner.

Our aim is to bring your reason for contacting us to a satisfactory conclusion when you first contact us as often as possible.

Why does the Council need a Code of Practice and Standards?

There is a lot of good customer service practice within both Bolsover District Council (BDC) and North East Derbyshire District Council (NEDDC). We have formalised this good practice ensuring that the principles are embraced and adopted by all employees. This enables us to respond to and communicate with you in a consistent manner, no matter who you contact.

The Government is committed to improving and modernising public services and is keen for us to provide high standards of customer service to our citizens. Both Councils have identified providing excellent customer focused services as one of its key aims in our Corporate Plans and as essential to improving performance more generally.

This Code of Practice sets out the way in which we deal with you by telephone, letter, face to face, e-mail, and any other form of communication.

Who are our Customers?

Our customers are all the people and organisations for whom we provide a service. This includes residents, visitors, businesses and partnership organisations.

It is important to note that **internal colleagues** serving these groups are also customers.

Standards, Targets and Performance Measures

What are Standards, Targets and Performance Measures?

This document sets out the customer service standards for the Council.

Standards are the promises that we make to you, the service user, about the level and quality of service you can expect.

Example: 'We promise to answer all e-mails within 8 working days'.

Targets are commitments that are made in advance to achieve a stated level of service.

Example: 'We aim to meet the standard to answer all e-mails within 8 working days'.

Performance Measures are systems to collect data that demonstrate how well a standard is being achieved or whether a target is being met.

Example: 'This year we answered 98% of all e-mails within 8 working days'.

A number of standards have been established as key ones and are monitored and reported upon quarterly to the relevant officer and Elected Member Groups. Our customer service standards are:

BDC and NEDDC Joint Customer Service Standards	
Telephones	Incoming calls to be answered within 20 seconds
E-mails	To be acknowledged within one working day
E-mails	To be answered within 8 working days or, if the subject is complex or crosscutting several departments, a maximum* of 20 working days
Formal Investigation (stage two complaint)	To be answered within 15 working days
Internal Review (stage three complaint)	To be answered within 20 working days
Written communication	To be answered within 10 working days or if the subject is complex or crosscutting several departments, a maximum* of 20 working days
Face to Face (Contact Centre) excluding appointments	Not to be kept longer than 20 minutes
Face to Face (Contact Centre and departments)	Not to be kept waiting longer than 10 minutes for appointments, Meet & Greet, reception and visitors

The 'softer' aspects of the customer service standards such as courtesy and helpfulness are monitored and measured through quality monitoring and customer satisfaction surveys.

*The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman acknowledges that 20 working days is acceptable in complex cases.

Customer Service Code of Practice

Our Promise to our Customers

Elected Members and Officers are committed to providing a first class service to the residents and businesses of Bolsover District Council and North East Derbyshire District Council. Our promise is to provide you with the best possible experience however you choose to get in touch with us when you require our services. We recognise our duty to deal with all customers fairly and value diversity. You are at the heart of everything we do.

When customers make contact with us we will:

• Be welcoming and courteous
• Be polite, fair and respectful
• Be helpful and responsive
• Provide good quality information suited to your needs
• Communicate clearly
• Advise what we can provide, who to contact and how
• Advise you how to use the compliments, comments and complaints system to improve our services
• Keep you informed of the actions we have taken and not make false promises
• Empathise and listen to understand your needs
• Have knowledgeable staff to deal with your enquiry
• Treat all information received in the strictest of confidence

To help us achieve this we ask that our customers:

• Are courteous and respectful towards us
• Provide accurate information when required
• Make suggestions on improving our services by using the compliments, comments and complaints system
• Ask us to explain anything you are not sure of
• Advise us of any specific requirements you may have, e.g. large print, Braille etc.

In addition:

- All employees need to work within the Corporate Policy for Access to Information (Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations)
- The Data Protection Act 1998 requires that any information we keep about our customers must be accurate, up-to-date, and relevant. Information must only be used for which it was obtained and not disclosed to anyone except those noted in the registration. The General Data Protection Regulations 2018 will strengthen those rights
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives a general right of access to recorded information held by the Council, subject to certain conditions and exemptions contained in the Act. Any person making a request for information is entitled to be informed in writing whether the Council holds the information and if it does to have that information communicated to them

- The Council is committed to equalities as an employer and in all the services provided to all sections of the community. The Council believes that no person should be treated unfairly and is committed to eliminate all forms of discrimination in compliance with its policies in line with the Single Equality Scheme. The Council also has due regard to proactively promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different groups in society when performing its functions.

Customer Service Standards - Contact Centres

The Contact Centre service provides a frontline service, managing telephone calls, e-mails, web chat and face to face enquiries for a number of Council Departments. The service ensures that enquiries are responded to in a timely manner, are recorded on the appropriate systems and provide an audit trail of contact, if required.

A. Customer Service Standards for Management of Reception Areas

First impressions are always important, and reception areas are the first place that a customer sees. We aim to give a business-like appearance as well as a warm welcome.

Housekeeping and Information

Our standards are that we will:

- Keep all reception areas clean, tidy and safe e.g. keep walkways clear in line with Health and Safety Policy
- Keep publicity displays and leaflets tidy and up-to-date
- Take into account those who require mobility scooter, wheelchair or pushchair access
- Make sure information is available in other formats, if required
- Try not to leave the reception area unattended. However, if we do need to for any reason, display an appropriate notice
- Use large lettering on signs, with good colour contrast e.g. black print on pastel shades, such as lemon
- Replace worn or damaged documents with new copies
- Try not to display posters on glassed surfaces
- Keep any glass screens clear to enable people to lip-read
- Ensure that key documents, such as the compliments, comments and complaints booklet and customer service standards leaflet are displayed in prominent positions in reception areas
- Offer to help if you are having difficulty in filling in a form
- Always give you any useful information that will help resolve your problem or assist you in filling in a form
- Offer you the use of a private interview room if considered appropriate to the enquiry or situation
- Provide a loop system for anyone who is hard of hearing and, where appropriate, train staff in British Sign Language.

Customer Service Standards - Corporate

B. Telephone Customer Service Standards

Where appropriate, the Contact Centre telephone number will be used on all general external communications to the public i.e. leaflets, newspaper articles, web pages, unless the department does not use the Contact Centre to provide their frontline service. In this case the telephone number quoted should be accurate and adequate cover is there to manage calls.

These are the minimum standards the Council aims to achieve when we answer the telephone. We should:

- Log in to the telephony system to ensure our colleagues know we are available to take calls
- Aim to answer calls within 20 seconds
- Use a greeting such as 'Good morning/ afternoon' to give you the opportunity to get accustomed to voice and pace, keeping the introduction short and concise
- Identify the department/ section
- Identify ourselves early in the conversation
- If you are asking for personal information about yourself, such as financial information, we will ask you to confirm some details about yourself – full name, address, reference numbers etc. If there is any doubt, we will advise we will call you back with the information
- Use clear, positive language and not use jargon
- Listen carefully to what you are saying and summarise the conversation for clarification at relevant points
- Use your name, if appropriate; as it expresses a friendly attitude
- At the end of the conversation we will ask you if there is anything else we can help you with
- If you need to provide further information, we will ask what method of contact suits you, for example, by e-mail, through the website
- If transferring a call, we will introduce you to the relevant department, passing on the information already given
- When transferring you we will, if appropriate and where voicemail is available, check the inbox message for when the Officer is back in the office, explain the situation and give you contact details on how to leave a voice message
- Offer to ring you back to avoid you being left on hold for a long period
- When we leave you a message, we will tell you our name, department and what number to contact us on.

Please see the Call Handling (including telephone answer machine service) Procedure at Appendix A.

Messages

When someone makes a call, there is nothing more frustrating than a telephone that is not answered or one that is answered but the person on the other end cannot help and tells you to ring back.

If we are going to be away from our work area for some time, we will:

- Ensure our status is recorded accurately on the telephony system to ensure our colleagues know we are not available to take calls
- Let colleagues know where we will be, how we can be contacted, and when we are likely to be back
- Make arrangements where possible for calls to be redirected to someone who can take a message
- On our return to work, ensure calls are returned within 1 working day, where practically possible
- Activate the answer service when away from the office for any extended period, for instance, leave or business absence
- If we take a message for someone else, we will:
 - Make sure it is clear and concise. Take a note of the your name, organisation/department, telephone number, date, time, and when you are available to receive the return call
 - Be prepared to slow you down and ask for difficult spellings or points to be repeated
 - Repeat the message back
 - Don't make promises for other people unless we are certain they can keep them (e.g. say that they will return the call within an unreasonable timescale as they may need to look into a matter before making a call).

Answer Services

Telephone answering machines should only be used when no one else is available to take messages and staff are away from their work area. Where answer services are approved and provided the following standards apply:

- Answer machines should only be switched on when staff leave their work area and at the end of each working day
- Answer machines must be switched off when Officers are back in their work area
- Answer machines will not be used to filter difficult calls
- Answer machines must contain a greeting and a clear message about whose answer phone has been reached
- The message should contain an alternative number in case of emergency
- Answer machines must be checked daily. See Appendix A.

C. Customer Service Standards for Written Communication

Written communication can take a variety of forms and we need to ensure that we answer appropriately and professionally whether it is an e-mail or letter.

Performance standards have been established for how quickly we should respond to different forms of written communication. Where mail can be responded to sooner, all efforts should be made to do so.

Examples of written communication would be requests for service, benefit entitlement queries, requests for assisted bin collections etc.

Compliments, Comments and Complaints and requests for information made under the Data Protection Act 1998, Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 are dealt with corporately and fall under separate procedures with their own timescales. Please refer to the relevant policies.

If a reply requires information from more than one department and falls outside of the scope of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy or outside of Freedom of Information/ Data Protection Request Procedures, the lead department (the department who has received the enquiry or is responsible for the main content) should assess how best to manage the reply and adopt one of the following approaches:

- For the lead department to obtain the required information from other departments and to include in their reply. (This approach should be suitable for enquiries requiring input from two departments)
- For the lead department to note in their reply that the enquiry has also been passed to X departments for their attention and provide a name and telephone number for contact. (This is the minimum standard and should only be used when the first option is not considered appropriate by the lead department).

Wherever possible we will provide you with one reply which covers all the points raised.

E-mail

E-mail is often seen as informal, which is fine for when we are using our own devices at home. However, in the course of providing our services and undertaking our duties all e-mail correspondence will be treated with the same attention to customer service as with other forms of communication. The standard includes the use of iPads, tablets and mobile telephones which have the facility to send and receive e-mails.

We should:

- Acknowledge all enquiries by the public within one working day, if unable to respond fully within one working day. Automated e-mail responses are acceptable and will suffice for when away from the desk for more than a day. It is important that a professional message is left with contact details for those enquirers who cannot wait until the return to pick up messages. The message should advise the period for which the Officer is unavailable, when they will be back at their desk, who to contact in their absence and the name and job title. The 'Out of Office Assistant' needs to be used for this purpose on Outlook

- Answer e-mail enquiries in full within eight working days. For responses requiring more information, you should be informed about when to expect a full response
- Ensure that all responses by e-mail are professionally written and:
 - Include a greeting e.g. Dear/Good morning/ Good afternoon
 - Include your name, if provided
 - Include some form of ending e.g. please contact me if you require further assistance
 - Be typed in basic text using black Arial 12 point and typed in the same case format as used in letters
 - Bear you, the reader, in mind. Use several paragraphs for longer responses as it is easier to read
 - Include an ending as appropriate, e.g. Yours sincerely/ Yours faithfully/ Regards
 - Include a signature in accordance with the corporate layout as follows:

Internal E-mail

Name
 Job Title
 Ext: extension number
 Mob: mobile number, if applicable
 e-mail: [name@council.gov.uk](mailto: name@council.gov.uk)

External E-mail

Name
 Job Title
 Department
 Name of Council
 Address of office base
 Tel: 01XXX XXXXXX
 Mobile: If applicable
 e-mail: [e-mail or service@council.gov.uk](mailto: e-mail or service@council.gov.uk)

- The corporate or departmental e-mail address is to be used on all general external communications to the public i.e. leaflets, newspaper articles, web pages. The use of the corporate e-mail address enables all e-mail enquiries to be managed centrally by the Contact Centre service, and enables them to be monitored and reported on by the Officer responsible for Customer Standards.

See Appendix E for an example of how to lay out an e-mail.

E-mail is no different from any other form of communication and makes the same binding commitments. The Councils have a policy on the use of the Internet and e-mail, which can be found on the Councils' Intranets.

Where there is an ongoing case, there is no requirement to acknowledge each and every e-mail correspondence within one working day. However, in a small number of cases, some customers may seek to prolong dialogue with Officers via e-mail, raising different issues or asking for information after their enquiry has been fully dealt with. In these cases advice should be sought on how to proceed with the enquiry, as it may be better dealt with through another process, such as a comment or complaint or Information Request. These procedures have a different timescale to 'enquiry e-mails' and as such, should be forwarded to the relevant Officers responsible for these procedures.

Absence

If the addressee is not available to respond to their e-mail due to absence, provision must be made to deal with that person's e-mail for the time they are absent, or an alternative contact given for the period of their absence. If a reply is not going to be sent within 8 working days:

- An acknowledgement should be sent within 3 working days
- You should be notified of when to expect a response.

Please see sample out-of-office e-mail message at Appendix E.

Redirecting e-mail

If it is not known who to direct an e-mail to:

- Officers should check the global distribution address list on Outlook

If it needs to be referred to another department, you should be advised: Further to your recent enquiry. . . and who the enquiry has been passed to, giving:

- the name of the department
- the name of the person within that department
- a telephone number, either the Council's main telephone number if the Contact Centre provides an administrative service to that department or the direct line for that person/ department, if not
- and confirming that if you require any further assistance, please don't hesitate to ask.

End the e-mail with appropriate ending either:

- Regards
- Yours sincerely
- Yours faithfully

Confidential e-mail

If there is any doubt about whether a reply would remain confidential to the recipient, for instance if the name of the e-mail recipient is not the name of the customer, it may be more appropriate to send a letter.

Confidential e-mails should be 'flagged' appropriately. Please note though, e-mails flagged in this way does not make them exempt from release under Data Protection or Freedom of Information legislation.

E-mail Security

Each new PC user is made aware of the computer guidance which is available on the Councils' Intranets at their induction. This contains information about ICT security together with guidelines on the use of e-mail and the Internet. Users are required to abide by these guidelines.

Employees should be cautious when accepting e-mail from unknown sources and alert the ICT Department if unsure. Any suspicious e-mails should just be deleted, there is no need to report to ICT. Virus detection is undertaken for all incoming and outgoing e-mail, including attachments, but nothing is 100% secure.

Social Media

Social media sites are another customer service channel used by the Council. Social media is instant and therefore any comments (legitimate or not) made via this medium can create a significant amount of interest and be widespread in minutes. They should therefore be addressed as soon as is practicable to minimise any harm or misinformation these might cause.

Consequently, the Council's Communications Officer monitors and manages requests for service via these channels. Compliments, comments and informal (frontline resolution) complaints received via these channels are passed to the relevant officer dealing with these. If a formal investigation (stage two) or internal review (stage three) complaint is received via this access channel, due to the level of detail required in order to investigate (please see Compliments, Comments and Complaints policy), customers will be directed to the electronic complaints form.

When responding to the Communications Officer about a social media enquiry, Officers should provide the same level of detail as they would ordinarily do when responding to a telephone call, e-mail or letter. It is recognised that we may require some further information in order to process the enquiry and the Communications Officer will need to clarify this with the enquirer.

Web chat

Web chat is an online communication tool which has been introduced to both Councils. It helps customers navigate the Councils' websites and focuses on two-way communication rather than simply delivering a message. Although it may be perceived as an informal communication, web chat makes the same binding promises as e-mail and letters. It is important to respond in a way that is not overly formal, but still maintains confidentiality and accuracy.

Officers should refer to the Joint Web Chat Guidance produced in August 2017. This provides advice on how to structure a 'chat', the appropriate use of language and when to terminate inappropriate 'chats'.

Letters

Incoming letters should be date stamped when received and passed on to the addressee or appropriate person within 1 working day where practically possible.

Incoming letters flagged as 'Private and Confidential' should be opened by the addressee only. However, Executive Directors and Assistant Directors can nominate a named delegated person to open such letters in their absence.

Outgoing letters should:

- Be typed on standard letter headed paper

- Contain a telephone contact number and an e-mail address. Consideration needs to be given to the contact details provided, follow up enquiries from the public may be served better if directed to a generic team number or e-mail address
- Be typed using Arial 12 point (unless a disk, digital/CD, large print or Braille copy is asked for)
- Quote any references.

See Appendix D for an example of how to lay out a letter.

Confidential Letters

If an item of correspondence is confidential, then this must be written on the letter and on the envelope, if a window envelope is not being used.

Information Security Policy

The Council has adopted the Government Security Classification Scheme for protective marking. There are two classifications we use - 'OFFICIAL' and 'OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE'. All documents that include personal sensitive data as per the Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulations must be marked as 'OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE'.

'Official-SENSITIVE' may also cover some information which we would consider exempt from Freedom of Information requests, when in doubt please discuss with the Information Policy Officers. The protective marking should be held in the header or footer of the document and the new Word 2017 template will include these. Protective marking is also being developed for use in our e-mail systems. Please refer to the Information Security Policy which is on both Councils' Intranets.

Style Guide

Both BDC and NEDDC set out how to use their logo and icons in its corporate style guide, which is available on the Council's Intranets.

When responding to letters Officers should:

- Reply within **10 working days**
- Produce the reply and supporting documents in an appropriate format where necessary, for example, large print (see Appendix B)
- Reply to an enquiry using the community language within which it was received (see Appendix B)
- Reply in plain, jargon free language
- Be accurate, especially when using or referring to names
- Give consideration to the telephone number quoted at the top of the letter, follow up enquiries from the general public may be better served if routed to a generic team
- Use a salutation which is appropriate to the degree of formality required and to the ethnic origin of the respondent
- Include a subject/heading

- Include a 'signature' with the name and job title of the person responding
- Include a closing statement, which tells you what to do if you require further assistance
- Check the grammar and the spelling before sending.

If a reply requires detailed information or translation, Officers should:

- Acknowledge the enquiry within 3 working days and keep you informed about when to expect a full response
- Send a detailed response, preferably within a maximum **20 working days**.

Please note: It is important at all times to keep you, the customer, informed about their enquiry.

Absence

If the addressee is not available to respond to their mail due to absence, provision should be made to deal with that person's mail for the time they are absent. If a reply is not going to be sent within 10 working days:

- An acknowledgement should be sent within 3 working days
- You should be notified of when to expect a response.

Redirecting Mail

Sometimes it is necessary to redirect mail if a customer is unsure where to send mail. It is poor customer service to move documents around the Council without dealing with them effectively, if unsure please seek information from Customer Services.

If mail needs to be redirected, Officers should:

- Make every effort to find the right addressee
- Aim to do so within 1 working day where practically possible
- Check that the person is the correct recipient and they have their correct contact information
- Include an explanation on the redirected correspondence saying from where and to who it has been sent
- In the cases of redirected mail for outside of the Council, send an explanation to you stating what action has been taken, together with the name and contact details of the person who is dealing with the enquiry.

Short Messaging Service (SMS) Text Messaging

Where this is used we will:

- Acknowledge your text within 1 working day
- Pass your query to an Officer/ the appropriate department to deal with

- Deal with service requests and queries within the appropriate service standard.

The Council's Website

The website is an information portal that is available 24 hours a day. In this 'on-demand' society, users need to know that the information contained on the site is accurate and up to date. The website should be designed to meet accessibility standards, be written in clear, plain English and be readily available, with options to request more information or a specific service (i.e. report dog fouling or a missed bin collection).

The website is an ever-changing communication tool and it's important that it keeps pace with new technology and provides customers with the information they need, regardless of what device or technology they are using.

Regular monitoring of the website is undertaken by the Communications Officer to make sure the information is correct, up to date and provided in a timely manner.

D. Face to Face Customer Service Standards

Greeting Customers and Dealing with Enquiries

When visiting the Council, we recognise that our customers should be treated with respect and in accordance with their needs, which will vary from customer to customer. This type of personal service is important if we are to ensure that all our customers receive equal access to services whatever their needs. Reception areas should be designed or laid out in such a way that it is clear to the customer where to go and what assistance can be sought.

See Appendix B for information on access facilities.

When dealing with customers at the first point of contact, we will:

- Be appropriately dressed (e.g. standard issue uniform for Contact Centre and Leisure Centre staff) and always wear a name badge or identity card as appropriate
- Aim to greet or at least acknowledge customers (eye contact, smile etc.) as soon as they enter the building or approach a reception or enquiry desk/ employee
- Speak clearly and face the customer
- Make customers feel welcome and find out how they can be helped
- Address the customer appropriately, for example, 'Mrs Jones'. Words such as 'duck', 'love', 'dear' and 'mate' are not appropriate and should not be used to address the customer
- If the customer needs an interpreter, make the necessary arrangements (see Appendix B)
- **Not keep customers waiting more than 20 minutes to be served** at an enquiry desk
- **Not keep customers waiting more than 20 minutes** once they have made an initial contact at an enquiry desk and need to be seen by an officer. If this is not possible, they should be given the option of waiting until they can be seen or making a specific appointment
- Deal with all enquiries politely and helpfully

- Listen and consider the situation from the customer's perspective – empathise, **actively** listen and don't interrupt
- Treat the customer according to their needs. (Appendix B provides information on access facilities)
- Avoid arguments with members of the public
- Not criticise the council, colleagues or other sections to customers – it gives a bad impression and in the customers' eyes all Officers **are** the council
- Close the enquiry by asking whether there is anything else they need help with.

If the personal caller is being abusive or aggressive, Officers should:

- Stay calm and be mindful of their body language
- Give customers an opportunity to state their case, not interrupt or finish their sentences as this can often inflame the situation - before advising how they will try and do what they can to help
- Encourage customers to use a private interview room (preferably secure) so that both the customer and the Officer are free from distractions. If a secure interview room is not available then Officers should make a judgement as to remain in a public area or to be accompanied by a colleague in an open interview room
- Recognise when someone is swearing because they are frustrated rather than swearing at an individual
- If the customer continues to be abusive, Officers should explain firmly but politely that they are finding the behaviour to be abusive. They should give customers an opportunity to calm down and resume the conversation in an appropriate manner
- If the customer continues to be abusive, Officers should advise that they are going to refer the matter to their supervisor/line manager
- If at any point in time Officers feel threatened or in any danger then they should use the panic buttons where available and/or remove themselves from the situation
- If a customer advises that they are recording the interview, the Officer can proceed **only** if they feel comfortable in doing so. If not, they can terminate the interview by advising that they will be seeking clarification from their line manager
- Gain assistance from colleagues as required, make a file note of what has happened, whilst still fresh in their memory, and report the incident promptly to their line manager, for escalating through the Employee Protection Policy and Guidance.

Appointments

If the customer has an appointment Customer Advisors should:

- Make the member of staff aware that the customer has arrived
- Ask the customer to take a seat if they are waiting to attend an appointment with another member of staff and they are delayed

- Tell the customer the reason for any delay
- **Not keep customers waiting more than 10 minutes.**

If for any reason staff are unable to keep an appointment, Customer Advisors should:

- Make arrangements for the customer to be seen by someone else where practically possible or
- Make another appointment.

Private Interviews

If the customer requests a private interview, Officers should:

- Conduct the interview in an interview room with a panic button, where available. If Officers do not feel comfortable giving a customer a private interview on their own, they should ask a supervisor/ manager for assistance
- Not continue to discuss the customer's private case details in front of other customers or members of staff
- Advise the customer if an interview room is not available and offer the choice of waiting or making an appointment to return.

Home/ Place of Work Visits

In certain circumstances Council Officers will visit a person's home or place of work. They should:

- Be appropriately dressed and always wear a name badge or identity card as appropriate
- Let colleagues know where they are and when they will be back
- Check the Employee Protection Register if applicable
- Make sure they an appointment where appropriate, and present an identity badge
- Fully explain the reason for the visit to the customer's home/business
- Treat customers and members of the household/ business and their property with respect
- If the customer is not at home, leave a card with contact details saying that they have called
- Be sensitive to and try to observe different customs
- Not make personal remarks about the customers' home

- If the customer asks a question that they cannot answer, Officers should give them the name of the person at the Council who will be able to help them or find the information on their behalf and get back to them
- If there is paperwork to complete, go through this and explain what is needed
- When the visit is complete, Officers should summarise the visit and its outcome. If Officers promise to do something – they should **do it!** If there are any difficulties or outstanding issues, the customer should be kept fully informed. Where appropriate, following the visit, a letter should be sent to the customer confirming what has been agreed
- Not smoke – in line with the Council’s ‘No Smoking Policy’
- If at any point Officers feel uncomfortable or threatened, leave the premises.

When driving on Council business, Officers should:

- Drive in a safe and responsible manner and within the legal requirements, for example, speed limits and not use of mobile phones
- Park in appropriate places
- Not smoke – in line with the Council’s ‘No Smoking Policy’.

Gaining Customer Feedback

Consultation

In order to check how good our customer service is from a customer’s point of view, it is important to gain feedback using consultation.

A variety of mechanisms are available for obtaining customer feedback. These include:

- Citizens’ Panel – 1000 people age 18 and over from across the District representative of the location, age and gender distribution of residents
- Satisfaction Surveys – many services routinely conduct surveys of service users to gauge their levels of satisfaction
- Customer Compliments, Comments and Complaints – made whilst receiving services, on the Compliments, Comments and Complaints form, through consultation exercises or on the Council’s website.

The Councils have a variety of tools to provide guidance and best practice on who and how to consult. The Councils employ Officers at both Bolsover District Council and North East Derbyshire District Council who provide advice and information regarding consultation.

Appendices

The following Appendices have been provided as a means of supporting the Code of Practice and Standards for Council officers to use.

Appendix A	Call Handling (including telephone answer machine service) Procedure
Appendix B	Disability Information and Access Facilities
Appendix C	Standard Layout for Letters
Appendix D	Standard Layout for E-mails

Appendix A - Call Handling (including telephone answer machine service) Procedure

1. Answering Calls

Our protocol for answering calls is to include a greeting, introduction and query as to the nature of the call. You should include the following:

- a. Good morning/ afternoon, [name of department], this is [name] speaking, how can I help you?
- b. Ask for the name, address and telephone number and any other relevant details from the caller
- c. After taking all the details, whilst being polite with the customer, summarise the call and ask if there is anything else you can help them with.

2. Transferring a Call

Customers may simply need to be transferred to another department or section, consequently when passing callers through to another department, you should:

- a. Advise the customer that they are being transferred and who to
- b. Introduce the caller to the department transferred to and why they are calling (this gives the recipient the opportunity to advise if they are the correct person to take the call)
- c. If the call is not transferred, or is taking a long time, reclaim the call
- d. If the extension number has voice mail activated, check to see if the message explains when the officer will be back in the office/available, reclaim the call and explain the situation and ask if they would like to leave an answer phone message – if they do transfer the call.

Do not keep callers on hold for long periods – ensure you reclaim the call and explain you are having difficulties connecting them to an appropriate/ specific person. Offer to take a number and call them back if you cannot easily find out who the call should be directed to.

Remember to keep the caller informed, let them know you are still there and trying to help and give them the opportunity to change their mind.

Contact Centres have their own procedures for handling calls.

Ending the Call

- Ask if there is anything else you can help the caller with
- Thank them for their call
- Sign the call off with a 'goodbye'.

3. Answering Machines/Services

Where appropriate, some Officers use an answering machine/ service to capture calls whilst out of the office. Messages must contain a greeting and a clear message about whose answer phone has been reached.

For example:

*"You are through to the * Department/Section. This is * (Name). I'm sorry but I'm not available at the moment. If you wish to leave a message, please do so after the tone and I'll call you back as soon as I can."*

Answer services must contain an additional message if staff are likely to be away from the office for more than one day. The message should be re-recorded to reflect this.

For example:

*"I will be away from the office until * (day and date)."*

Alternatively, if Officers are likely to be away from the office for more than one working day, arrangements could be made for answer service messages to be checked and acknowledged by a colleague. Answer phone messages should contain a more detailed message if on leave, include a return to work date and contain a message where possible informing the caller of an alternative number.

For example:

*"I'm sorry but I'm not available until * (date). If you need to speak to someone urgently, please re-dial and ask to be put through to * (Name) or ring the direct number 01246 2****. Thank you."*

Answer service messages must be checked upon return to the work area and messages acknowledged within 1 working day where practically possible.

Other issues for consideration:

- Answer services must be checked regularly to ensure they are in working order.
- If an Officer with an answer service is off sick, the telephone must be diverted to another phone or messages taken off the machine regularly and customer messages acknowledged.
- Speaker volumes should be kept low when playing back messages to minimise disruption to colleagues and to ensure customer confidentiality/ data protection is not breached.

Anonymous Callers

Some customers may elect to remain anonymous. Whilst we will respect their decision to do so, we may need to point out any restrictions this may cause us in trying to resolve the matter, for example, unable to provide feedback or provide a service or request further information at a later date.

Bomb Threat Calls

Whilst a rare occurrence, Officers will need to be alert to bomb threat or other security threat calls. They should refer to the Bomb Threat Procedure on the Intranet and alert their direct line manager as soon as the call is complete.

Dealing with Difficult or Abusive Callers

There are many reasons why callers may be angry or frustrated. It is important to try to defuse the situation by listening to what the customer has to say and apologise where appropriate. The Council does not expect and will not tolerate Officers having to suffer abusive or aggressive behaviour from customers. It is recognised that individuals have different levels of tolerance and therefore the decision about whether a customer is being abusive or aggressive has to be made by the Officer concerned. They should be confident that a decision made by them as to whether a caller is abusive will be supported by the Council. Specific guidance is noted below and under Face to Face Customer Service Standards.

If the caller is being abusive or aggressive, Officers should:

- Stay calm and do not raise their voice
- Recognise when a customer is swearing it is because they are frustrated, rather than swearing at the Officer as an individual
- Try to explain that they will do their best to sort out the problem
- Give customers an opportunity to state their case, not interrupt or finish their sentences as this can often inflame the situation, before advising that they want to try and help and, to be able to do so, need to get certain details
- If the caller continues to shout or be abusive, Officers should explain that this behaviour is making it difficult for them to sort the problem out and it will help if the customer can calm down and provide the details required
- If a customer continues to be abusive explain, firmly but politely that Officers are not required to listen to such language or suffer such abuse and give the caller an opportunity to calm down and resume the conversation in an appropriate manner
- If the abuse continues, Officers will explain firmly but politely that they will be ending the conversation by putting the telephone down
- If they feel disturbed or anxious following the call, Officers should make sure they take some time away from the telephone to compose themselves
- If a caller advises that they are recording the call, Officers can proceed with the call only if they feel comfortable in doing so. If not, they should terminate the call by advising that they will be seeking clarification from their line manager
- Officers should gain assistance from colleagues as required, make a file note of what has happened, whilst still fresh in the memory, and report the incident promptly to their line manager, for escalating through the Employee Protection Policy and Guidance.

4. When Making a Call

Our protocol when making calls is to include a greeting, introduction and to include the reason for your call. Officers should be mindful that, especially if calling a mobile number or work contact number, it may not be convenient for the recipient to accept the call. Officers should include the following:

- a) Good morning/ afternoon, this is [name] from [name of department] [name of Council] speaking
- b) Advise of the nature of the call
- c) Ask if it convenient for customers to continue with the call, if it is a mobile or work contact number
- d) If Officers reach an answer service, leave their **name and contact details** (name of Council and telephone number).

Appendix B – Disability Information and Access Facilities

Access statement

To make our services and documentation accessible to all, both Councils provide the following services:

Staff Assistance

If any customer has difficulty in reading or understanding a council document then a member of staff can go through the document with the customer at the office or at their home, if that is more appropriate. Alternatively, the document could be produced in a more suitable format, see below for details.

Braille, Large Print and Digital Copies

Documents can be produced in other formats, if requested. Producing documents in a larger print size which have been created internally can usually be managed by the person/service receiving the request. Guidance should be sought from the respective Council's Equality lead Officer. It is important to let the customer know how long it is going to take to produce the required format and to keep them informed of developments, if necessary.

Induction Loops

Induction loops assist deaf or hard of hearing people to hear speech, they replace the sound path between the sound source and the listener with an inductive signal that is not affected by acoustics or other sounds. It is a cable that encircles the audience area e.g. enquiry desk and is fed by a loop amplifier. This gets its signal from a microphone placed in front of the person speaking. The resulting electric current in the loop produces a magnetic field corresponding to the speaker's voice. The listener uses their hearing aid to convert the signal back to sound. The system helps users to hear from anywhere covered by the system. The sound that people hear without a receiver is unaffected.

Translation and Interpretation Services

The Council subscribes to an interpreter service over the telephone or face-to-face, if required. Guidelines on how to use this service have been produced and can be accessed via the respective Council's Equality lead Officer, the Contact Centres and on the relevant Council's Intranet.

There are also a number of organisations who provide translation services. If a document requires translation then please contact the respective Council's Equality lead Officer for advice.

The Equality lead Officer is available for information and advice regarding access facilities. Please contact the relevant officer responsible for Equality on 01246 242407, e-mail enquiries@bolsover.gov.uk or 01246 217047, e-mail connectne@ne-derbyshire.gov.uk

Appendix C – Standard Layout for Letters

A letter sent out on behalf of the Council conveys a number of messages to the recipient in terms of layout and standard of grammar – use **spellcheck!** The actual message you seek to deliver in your letter is certainly enhanced by good presentation and is easier to read.

For this reason the following standards should be adopted when producing letters on behalf of the Council:

Font:

- Black Arial Point 12.

Margins:

- Left 2 cm
- Right 2 cm
- Top 2 cm
- Bottom 2 cm

Spacing:

- Single spacing in the main body of the document
- Discretion may be used when laying a document out when, for instance, only one or two lines continue on to the next page, you may consider reducing spacing or margins to achieve a pleasing presentation.

Page Numbering:

- Letters that continue over more than one page must be numbered (position – top of page and centre) from 2 to 'x'. ('x' being the final number of continuation pages)
- Letters that continue over more than one page should, where possible, use both sides of the paper.

Punctuation:

- Addresses on letters and envelopes should not use punctuation.

Address, Greetings and Signing off:

- Letters addressed to organisations and for 'Dear Sir/Madam.....' should be signed 'Yours faithfully'
- Letters addressed to named individuals should be signed 'Yours sincerely'.
- The sender's name and job title should be in lower case
- If the letter is marked 'Private', 'Confidential' or 'Personal' then this should also appear on the envelope, if a window envelope is not being used.

Enclosure:

- Where enclosure(s) are to be attached type 'Enc(s)' at the end of the letter at the bottom of the page
- Consider listing the enclosures if there are more than one.

Appendix C – Standard Layout for Letters continued

Your Ref:
Our Ref:
Please Ask For:
Direct Line: 01246 242
E-mail:
Date:

Council
letterhead

Council address as per
letterheaded paper

A N Other (Mr Other)
(Name of Organisation, if relevant)
Address 1
Address 2
Address 3
Address 4
Postcode

1 clear space

Dear Sir/Madam (Mr Other)

1 clear space

Re: Subject heading in bold

1 clear space

Main body of letter in blocked paragraphs and left aligned

EXAMPLE

1 clear space

.....
Yours faithfully (Yours sincerely)

5 clear spaces

Name of person sending letter
Title of person

Appendix D – Standard Layout for E-mails

To: E-mail Recipient
CC:
BCC:
Subject: Subject Heading

Dear/Hello (First Name/Surname as appropriate)

Good morning/ Good afternoon

Main body of message in blocked paragraphs and left aligned

An ending – e.g. Please contact me on (contact details) if you require any further information.

Regards

Name of person sending e-mail
Job Title
Department
Name of Council
Address of office base
Tel: 01246 xxxxxx
Fax: 01246 xxxxxx
Mobile: If applicable
e-mail: [generic or corporate e-mail@council.gov.uk](mailto:generic.or.corporate.e-mail@council.gov.uk)

Out of Office - Standard message for absences:

To: E-mail Recipient
CC:
BCC:
Subject: Subject Heading

Thank you for your e-mail. I am out of the office until xx/xx/xx. I will respond to you when I return to the office.

If your enquiry is of an urgent nature please call xxxxx xxxxxx or e-mail xxxx xxxx on xxxx.xxxx@nameofcouncil.gov.uk

Regards

Name of person sending e-mail
Job Title
Department
Name of Council
Address of office base
Tel: 01246 xxxxxx
Fax: 01246 xxxxxx
Mobile: If applicable
e-mail: [generic or corporate e-mail@council.gov.uk](mailto:generic.or.corporate.e-mail@council.gov.uk)