

# Customer Care Policy



## Background

Chorley Council is recognised nationally for providing high quality customer services. This Customer Care Policy supports the Council's continuing commitment to improving services by making them more customer focussed and ensuring consistent standards are applied across the organisation.

The Policy supports the delivery of the Council's Corporate Strategy, particularly Strategic Objective 6: Ensure Chorley is a Consistently Top Performing Organisation.

The policy's principles are supported by the Council's core values: Forward Thinking, Respect, Professionalism, Pride and One Team, One Council.

## Application of this policy

This policy applies to all employees of Chorley Council, regardless of the level of contact that they may have with customers during their normal duties. It also applies to internal and external customers alike. The policy is championed at a senior level by the Corporate Director (People) and at a Cabinet level by the Executive Member for People.

## Objectives of this Policy

The Council is committed to providing the highest level of customer care to all its customers. In order to achieve this, the policy has the following objectives:

- to establish consistent standards across the Council in contacts with customers.
- to clearly establish our commitment to customers.
- to set out the Council's complaints procedure.
- to establish the measures that will be put in place to monitor and manage the policy's implementation.

## Our Commitment to Customers

The Council has a Customer Charter which sets out what customers can expect from us, and what we ask in return from customers. The Customer Charter is Appendix 1 of this policy.

## Customer Care Standards

There are some general principles of good customer care that should be applied in all contacts with customers:

- Any person taking a query, request or complaint from a customer should take responsibility for dealing with the contact, even if it is passing the information onto a colleague. Customers should be kept updated about the progress of their contact and when they can expect a response.
- Information should be made available in other formats, such as a different language, Braille or large print, if a customer requests it.

There are also specific standards for each customer channel, as the Council recognises that each has specific requirements to ensure that high levels of customer satisfaction are maintained. These standards are outlined below:

### Face-to-face contact

- Ensure that you introduce and identify yourself. This is particularly important when visiting a customer rather than seeing them in Council offices. In these circumstances, identification should be shown.
- If an appointment is made, this should be kept to. If an appointment time has to be changed or cancelled, an apology and explanation must be given to the customer.
- If a customer's query cannot be dealt with in the first instance, the person taking the initial query should explain why they cannot deal with it, and what action they will take to resolve it.
- Customers should not have to wait any longer than 10 minutes to be seen. If this happens an apology and an explanation should be given.

- Special arrangements may be required by some customers. The Council will make every reasonable effort to ensure that our customers can access services in the way they need.
- The Council uses the Language Line service for language assistance. Each of the interview rooms in the One Stop Shop is set-up to facilitate the use of Language Line, and instructions on how to access it can be found in each room.

## Telephone contact

- Ringing telephones should be answered promptly, and should ring out for no longer than 20 seconds. Everyone should be prepared to answer a ringing phone, even if only to take a message.
- The Council's standard telephone answering script should be used for all external calls:  
"Good <Morning/Afternoon> Chorley Council <Your name> speaking. How may I help you?"
- Internal calls may be answered with a greeting and your name.
- Customer Services undertake monitoring on a monthly basis of some numbers within the Council to ensure that phones are answered in a correct and timely manner. The results of these phones calls are fed back to the relevant director.
- If the person taking the initial query cannot answer the call, it may be necessary to connect it to another colleague. The customer should know who they are being transferred to and why they are being transferred. The colleague receiving the transfer should be updated so they do not have to repeat questions to the customer.
- If the query will take some time to answer, take the customer's name and number and ensure that you ring them back.
- Voicemail should be used sparingly, when there is no-one available to answer the phone. If it is used, any messages left must be responded to promptly.

## Electronic contact

- All e-contact should receive an acknowledgement within 1 working day. The acknowledgement will indicate when a full response can be expected. This may be an automated response.
- A full response to a text message, email or request via the website should take no longer than 2 working days. If this timescale cannot be met customers should receive an explanation, apology for the delay, and an indication as to how long a full response is expected to take.
- Everyone should use the standard email signature to ensure that contact details are easily found:  
<Your Name>  
<Job Title>  
Chorley Council  
<Telephone number>
- Malicious, abusive or 'junk' emails require no reply

## Written contacts

- A full response to a fax or letter or should take no longer than 7 working days. If this cannot be made, explain and apologise to the customer and indicate how long a full response is expected to take.

## Complaints

Complaints and comments are important feedback on our services. We can use this information to ensure we are responsive to customer needs and concerns. Dealing with customer complaints well will show our commitment to customer care and continuous improvement.

## Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the Council's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by the Council or its service provider.

## Principles of good complaint handling

When dealing with complaints some general principles should be applied:

- Approach complaints with an open mind and deal with them fairly and impartially.
- Meet response deadlines

- Keep customers regularly informed of progress
- Readily apologise when things have gone wrong
- Avoid being defensive
- Explain what action will be taken to improve our services as result of the feedback

In all cases the customer care standards in the Customer Care Policy should be applied.

## Procedure

Complaints and feedback may be received in writing, by email or text, or verbally.

- Complaints and feedback will be initially logged in CRM by Customer Services. Wherever possible, things will be put right immediately.
- Where it is not possible to resolve the issue immediately the complaint will be passed to the relevant Service Head or Senior Manager.
- An acknowledgment, including an explanation of the procedure and the name of the person dealing with the complaint, should be sent within 5 working days
- A full response should be sent within 10 working days
- If the response is likely to take longer than 10 working days, the customer needs to be informed why this is and when they can expect to receive a full response.
- A copy of the response should be sent to the Customer Services Manager for recording centrally

Where the customer is still not happy the complaint may be escalated to the Chief Executive.

Some complaints, depending on the degree of seriousness, may go directly to the Chief Executive.

- An acknowledgment should be sent within 5 working days and a full response within 10 working days.
- The customer should be advised that if they are still dissatisfied they may refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman and should be sent a leaflet explaining how to do this. These are available from Customer Services.

In all cases it should be considered whether direct contact with the customer is the most appropriate way of dealing with the complaint. It can help to clarify any issues and to quickly reach agreement on an outcome.

## Local Government Ombudsman

The Ombudsman will only normally investigate complaints where they have been dealt with by the Council's own complaints procedure.

Contact Details:

Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Tel No 0845 602 1983

Website [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

Email [advice@lgo.org.uk](mailto:advice@lgo.org.uk)

## Working in partnership

The Council remains accountable for those services which it delivers in partnership. It is important that procedures for dealing with complaints are agreed and are in line with the Council's own procedure.

## Other procedures and legislation

Some services have specific statutory procedures for dealing with complaints, for example Housing Benefits and Planning.

Some complaints will be subject to automatic escalation:

Allegations of financial impropriety	Assistant Chief Executive (Business Transformation and Improvement)
Allegations of discrimination or harassment	Corporate Director Human Resources and Organisational Development
Allegations of criminal behaviour against the Council or a member of staff	Chief Executive
Complaints against elected members or Chief Officers	Corporate Director of Governance for Members. Chief Executive for Chief Officers Executive Leader for Chief Executive

Other legislation such as the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act may also need to be considered. The Corporate Director (ICT) and Information Manager in the ICT Directorate have corporate responsibility for the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts, so should be consulted with any queries.

## Avoidable Contact

Avoidable contact is a contact from a customer that is of little value to either the customer or the Council. This could be any circumstance when a customer should not have had to contact us, and includes seeking clarification about a contact from the Council, reporting that a service has not been completed properly, or a customer chasing progress on a particular issue. Identifying the reasons for this type of contact can help us to improve our services. Good customer care can also help to reduce the level of avoidable contact from customers.

## Other Feedback

Other comments and compliments can also help us to plan and deliver better services and to learn from best practice.

- Comments and compliments will also be recorded centrally in CRM by Customer Services.
- Information will then go to Service Heads to pass on to the staff involved.
- Where possible and appropriate, feedback from our customers should be acknowledged.

## Monitoring and Review

The implementation of this policy will be monitored through the local performance indicators below. These are included in the People directorate Business Improvement Plan:

- % of contacts which are avoidable (NI 14). The trends in types and reason for avoidable contact will be monitored and reported to Strategy Group on a monthly basis.
- Overall customer satisfaction with Contact Chorley (CS 6.5.1)
- % of customers seen within 10 minutes in the One Stop Shop
- % of random monitoring calls answered correctly
- Number of complaints received (broken down by directorate)
- Number of complaints upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman. Complaints information will be reported to Strategy Group on a monthly basis



## Appendix 1 Customer Charter

The Council has values that set out how we will work:

- **Forward Thinking** - we are always ambitious to do better
- **Respect** - responding to the different needs and aspirations of our customers and those we work with
- **Professional** - striving to provide high quality services
- **Pride** - in our jobs, pride in the Council, pride in Chorley
- **One Team - One Council**

The Council also commits to ensuring that you experience the best possible customer service. This means that:

### If you visit:

- You should not have to wait more than 10 minutes before being seen.
- We will try 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 whom.

### If you call:

- We aim to answer the phone within 20 seconds.
- If we have to transfer you we will tell you who you are being transferred to.
- If the person you need is not available we will always take a message.

### If you write:

- We aim to acknowledge your letter within 5 working days and respond fully within 7 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.
- Our response will always include the name of the person dealing with the enquiry and how you can contact them.

### If you text or email us:

- We will respond within 1 working day (this may be an automated acknowledgement).

We monitor our performance against these standards and publish this information every month on the Council's website. If you have a particular requirement, or need support in accessing our services, we will do all that we can to ensure that you receive this.