

Report of	Meeting	Date
Corporate Director (People) (Introduced by the Executive Member for People, Cllr John Walker)	Executive Cabinet	12/11/09

CUSTOMER CARE POLICY AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To outline proposed revisions to the Council's Customer Care Policy and Complaints Policy.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- Executive Cabinet are recommended to:
 - Note the changes in the policy in respect of service standards and response timescales.
 - Approve the adoption of the revised and combined policy.
 - Agree 1st April 2010 as the effective date for the introduction of the policy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

- One of our principal aims as a Council is to continue to achieve service excellence and improvement. The existing Customer Care Policy and Complaints Policy are out-dated and fail to reflect changes in customer expectations. CRM (Customer Relationship Management system) has changed the way we handle customer contact, enabling a corporate approach, which needs to be reflected in the policy. An updated and more relevant policy will help us to achieve our strategic objective to be a top performing organisation. A copy of the revised Policy is attached.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

- The updated policy better reflects our aims and objectives and will allow us to further raise awareness of the importance of good customer care. The revised service standards and targets reflect raised customer expectations and a better understanding of complaints throughout the organisation which will inform service improvements.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- The alternative option would be to continue with the existing policies. However, as this report explains they are considered to be out-of-date and do not reflect some recent changes to the way our customers contact us and also to the change of focus within the Council.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

6. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the Central Lancashire sub-region		Develop local solutions to climate change.	
Improving equality of opportunity and life chances		Develop the Character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live	
Involving people in their communities		Ensure Chorley Borough Council is a performing organization	√

BACKGROUND

7. The previous Customer Care Policy and Complaints Policy have been in place since 2002. The Council has become much more customer-focussed since the original guidance was issued. The previous policy is a lengthy document and includes information which is unnecessary or is now duplicated in more up-to-date documentation. There is an assumption that the Policy applies solely to Customer Services rather than to the authority as a whole. There are also some changes to the way we now handle customer contact that need to be reflected in the policy. This report addresses these issues.

OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY REVISION

8. To update, simplify and combine the policies, thereby making them more accessible and more widely adopted and applied. The previous Customer Care Policy includes much information and guidance which is now superfluous in view of the increased customer focus throughout the authority. There was also a large amount of staff guidance on handling electronic contact. As email is now a much more familiar method of contact much of this information is no longer appropriate.
9. To review the standards and targets for response and ensure they are still appropriate. There were a large number of different and very detailed service standards included previously. In practice, there was very little monitoring of these. These standards have been simplified whilst ensuring that the focus remains on providing a responsive service and 'getting it right first time'. Further information on response deadlines is included later.
10. To include a focus on 'avoidable contact' ie. customer contact that is of little or no value to the Council. Monitoring the reasons for this type of contact will allow us to identify where service improvements need to be made.
11. To simplify the complaints procedure, making it more about outcomes than about adhering to formal stages and monitoring volumes of complaints received. Recent guidance from the Local Government Ombudsman strongly recommends that complaints procedures do not focus upon dealing with complaints according to a prescribed number of stages. Instead, they should be dealt with in a timely fashion involving direct contact with the customer, wherever appropriate.
12. To bring the logging of complaints in line with all other front-line customer contact, ie. via CRM in Customer Services. This will allow a better corporate understanding of complaints. All complaints will be logged in CRM and will be reported on a Directorate and Council basis. Response timescales can also then be monitored, reported on and improved.

SERVICE STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

13. A significant change in the policy is in respect of some of the service standards for response deadlines for the various forms of customer contact. The table below sets out these changes.

Contact Channel	Acknowledgement	Current Response Standard	Revised Response Standard	Performance Target
Face to Face	n/a	10 minutes	<i>10 minutes</i>	80%
Telephone	n/a	20 seconds	<i>20 seconds</i>	80%
Text/Email/Website	1 Day	10 working days	<i>2 working days</i>	80%
Written	5 working days	10 working days	<i>7 working days</i>	80%
Complaints	5 working days	10 working days	<i>10 working days</i>	80%

14. Electronic contact (text/email/website) has reduced from ten working days to two working days. There is a customer expectation that there will be a quick response to e-contact, particularly email. This is evident from the nature of the emails received to contact@chorley. Failure to reply quickly results in further contact chasing progress, which increases avoidable contact.
15. Telephone calls that come directly into the contact centre are answered by the automatic call distribution (ACD) system and the abandoned rate and waiting times are subject to alternative performance monitoring. Random monitoring of other calls will be carried out to measure the percentage that are answered correctly and in a timely manner.
16. The CRM software will enable monitoring of responses to complaints and emails and the majority of face-to-face contact.
17. There are a number of performance indicators included in the policy which will monitor its' implementation. The table below indicates what they are and how and where they will be reported.

Performance Indicator	Reported	Reported via
% of customer contacts which are avoidable (NI14)	Monthly	Strategy Group
Overall customer satisfaction with Contact Chorley	Quarterly	Business Plan
% of customers seen within 10 minutes in the One Stop Shop	Quarterly	Business Plan
% of random monitoring calls answered correctly/timely	Monthly	Strategy Group
Number of Complaints (broken down by Directorate)	Monthly	Strategy Group
Number of complaints upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman	Monthly	Strategy Group

MEMBERS

18. The Policy will be the subject of a Members learning hour. This will raise awareness of the Policy and its implementation and start a discussion as to how we engage Members in the Policy.

NEXT STEPS

19. The revised policy will need to be publicised and made easily accessible to staff and customers. There needs to be a focus on back office teams as well as the frontline. The roll-out to staff will need to be tailored according to the level of customer contact involved.
20. The revised Policy will become effective on 1st April 2010.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

21. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Corporate Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	√
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	√
Legal		No significant implications in this area	

COMMENTS OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE

22. It is important that we strive to get more things right at the first point of contact which reduces avoidable contact and leads to increased customer satisfaction. This policy is an integral part of this work as we establish standards and performance targets that will drive improvements.

COMMENTS OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (POLICY AND PERFORMANCE)

23. The revised Customer Care Policy is in line with the Council's Equality Policy in that all our Customers should receive the same standards of service. To ensure that we can respond in line with the customer care standards for all our equality groups, where appropriate we have put in place facilities and/or services. For example, the use of language line for customers where English is not their first language and training of some staff located in the One-Stop-Shop in sign language, so that customers who are deaf can be responded to line with the face to face standard.

JAMIE CARSON
CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PEOPLE)

There are no background papers to this report.

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Helen Sutton	5449	26 October 2009	042