

Customer Service Code of Practice and Standards

Customer Service

April 2016

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CUSTOMER FIRST - CUSTOMER SUMMARY

Our key aim is to.....

Promote the wellbeing of all sections of the community by continually improving the quality and efficiency of our services

All of us at South Derbyshire District Council will:

- Be welcoming and courteous
- Be fair and respectful
- Be helpful and responsive
- Provide good quality information suited to your needs
- Communicate clearly
- Let you know what we can provide, who to contact and how
- Let you know how to make suggestions for improvements
- Keep you informed

If you telephone us we will:

- Try to answer within 10 seconds or four rings
- Tell you who you are speaking to
- Try to deal with your enquiry within one working day
- Respond to any voicemail message you leave us within one day

If you write, fax or email us we will:

- Acknowledge your e-mail within 24 hours
- Try to reply to you within 10 working days by telephone, fax letter or email
- Be clear and use plain language
- Use Braille, large print and different languages if you need us to

If you visit us we will:

- Welcome you on arrival
- Deal with you promptly keeping any delays down to 20 minutes
- Keep our reception areas clean, warm and comfortable

If we visit you we will:

- Be prompt and try to keep any delays down to 10 minutes
- Show you our South Derbyshire District Council identity card

CUSTOMER FIRST - CUSTOMER SUMMARY

We will ask for your views on the services you use. We will:

- Use your comments to help us improve

If you are unhappy with the service you receive, we want to know. You can

- Fill in a leaflet available from reception area or call us on 01283 595795

If you make a complaint we will:

- Acknowledge your complaint within five working days
- Investigate your complaint
- Provide a written response within 20 working days.

Customer Service Code of Practice and Standards

Introduction

This document has been written for all employees of South Derbyshire District Council to use as a practical tool to providing good customer service.

The document contains:

- The Code of Practice and Standards
- Monitoring and Evaluation Information

It is important to say at the very beginning of this document that these standards have been brought together in one document for the whole Authority in order that we may bring some consistency to customers who contact the Council. However, it is also very important to say that these standards are not intended as a straight-jacket to force employees and their managers to meet them no matter what. We appreciate that local circumstances and tight resources may make it difficult for employees to, for example, answer the telephone in 4 rings. What needs to be emphasised is that we should be aiming to achieve these standards, thinking about how that might be possible and setting realistic targets for how often these standards can be met.

Improving customer service is the aim of this Authority and setting standards makes it possible for us to measure by how much we have improved. These standards will help us to build on the investment already made in the Customer First project and the reception refurbishment.

What is Customer Service?

Customer Service is ensuring that we give our customers the sort of personal service and response that we ourselves would want, if we were in their place.

Our customers have a right to expect from us the best possible standards of personal service. They should be treated with equal respect, listened to and responded to in a manner that is polite, helpful and timely.

Who are our customers?

Our customers are all the people and organisations for whom we provide a service. This includes citizens of South Derbyshire and surrounding areas, visitors to South Derbyshire, business and partnership organisations, in fact, anyone who contacts us in any way. It is important to note that your ***internal colleagues*** servicing these groups are also your customers.

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

There is already a lot of good customer service practice within the Authority, there is however, a need to formalise this good practice ensuring that the principles are embraced and adopted by all employees.

This will allow us to respond to and communicate with our customers in a consistent manner no matter whom they contact and the method they choose to do so.

Also, the Government is committed to improving and modernising public services and is keen for us to provide high standards of customer service to local citizens. We need therefore to be confident that we consistently deliver high standards of customer service.

The Code of Practice sets out the way in which we should deal with our customers whether by letter, telephone, face to face, e-mail or another form of communication.

Standards, Targets and Performance Measures

What are standards, targets and Performance Measures?

This document sets out the standards for the Authority.

Standards are the promises that we make to service users about the level and quality of service they can expect.

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

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

For example:

Standard: We promise to answer all letters within 10 working days.

Target: We aim to meet this standard 85% of the time

Measure: This year we answered 85% of all letters within 10 working days.

Customer Service Code of Practice

Our Promise to our Customers

The Code of Practice applies to all forms of communication and states the following:

When you make contact with us we will:

- Be welcoming and courteous
- Be fair and respectful
- Be helpful and responsive
- Provide good quality information suited to your needs
- Communicate clearly
- Let you know what we can provide, who to contact and how
- Let you know how to make suggestions for improvements
- Keep you informed

To help us achieve this we ask that you:

- Are courteous and respectful towards us
- Provide the information we need
- Make suggestions on improving our service

In addition:

- All employees need to work within the Data Protection Act, confidentiality guidelines and the Equal Opportunities Policy
- The Data Protection Act requires that any information we keep about our customers must be accurate, up-to-date and relevant.

Telephone Customer Service Standards (CSPI1)

Here are the minimum standards the Council aims to achieve:

When you answer the telephone, you should:

- Aim to answer within 10 seconds or 4 rings
- Greet the caller in accordance with the Customer Service Code of Practice, in a welcoming manner.
- Use good morning/afternoon to give the caller the opportunity to get accustomed to your voice and pace, but keep the introduction short and concise

- Identify the name of the authority, your department and yourself early in the conversation
- Use the caller's name where appropriate
- Log the call if appropriate
- Use clear, positive language
- Listen carefully to what is being said and summarise the conversation for clarification.

It is not necessary to have a fixed "script", however, a simple framework for a call can often be useful, for example the contact centre uses:

"Good Morning/Afternoon, South Derbyshire District Council, Customer Services, xxxxx speaking"

When passing callers on to other people, either through referral or wrong number, the caller should:

- Find out to whom they need to speak and make the call for them if they have already been passed on more than once
- Apologise for the need to pass them on
- Let them know what you are doing and the person you are passing them on to
- Identify yourself to the person you are transferring the call to, making sure that he/she is the person who will deal with the query. Inform them of who is on the telephone and why they are calling. If the line is engaged, or the person isn't available then offer to take a message or inform the caller of the direct line number to call later.

If a telephone number is not known, the person answering should take all reasonable steps to ensure that the caller is transferred appropriately. (see Telephone user guides on the SDDC intranet: Corporate Services/IT & Customer Services/Telephone user guides).

Messages

When someone makes a call, it is frustrating when a telephone is not answered or is answered by someone who cannot deal with the query and asks you to ring back.

If you are going to be away from your usual work area for some time, you should always:

- Let team members know where you will be where possible, how you can be contacted, and when you are likely to be back
- Make arrangements where possible for calls to be redirected either to you or to someone who can take a message
- On your return to work, ensure calls are returned within 1 working day where practically possible
- Remember to use voice mail if available and applicable

If you take a message for someone else:

- Make sure it is clear and concise. Take a note of the caller's name, location, designation, telephone number, date, time and when the caller is available to receive the return call
- Be prepared to slow the caller down and ask for difficult spellings or complex points to be repeated
- Check with the caller that the message covers the points at issue
- Don't make promises for other people unless you are certain they can keep them

Voice Mail

If you have access to voice mail, it can be used when you are away from the work area to pick up messages from a different location:

Voice Mail should:

- Contain a welcoming greeting and a clear message that they are through to voice mail at South Derbyshire District Council, the name of your department and whose voice mail has been reached and, where possible, when you will be returning
- Contain a message where possible informing the caller about when to expect a call back or, where appropriate, an alternative number, or emergency number if appropriate
- Be checked as often as possible
- Be responded to within 1 working day where practically possible

If you are likely to be absent for whatever reason, e.g. annual leave, then re-record your message giving details of when you will be returning and make sure that your voice mail is checked and responded to by someone else.

Monitoring Telephone Customer Service Standards

Average time taken to answer the telephone (CSPI1) - Aim to answer all telephone calls within 10 seconds or 4 rings

This indicator will be collected corporately through the use of our telecoms system and will be reported in terms of the average time taken and also the number of rings that this equates to.

For the purposes of this indicator, the technology used will not be able to differentiate between those calls answered in person or those answered by voicemail.

Customer Service Standards for Written Communication (CSPI2)

Written communication can take a variety of forms and we need to ensure that we answer appropriately and professionally. Performance standards are set for how quickly we should respond to mail. Where mail can be responded to sooner, all efforts should be made to do so.

When responding to any written communication you should:

- Reply within 10 working days
- Reply to an enquiry using the community language/script within which it was received (see Appendix B)
- Produce the reply and supporting documents in an appropriate format where necessary in Braille or large print (see Appendix B)
- Reply in plain jargon-free language
- Be accurate, especially when using or referring to names
- 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, job title and service area of the person responding
- Include the website address: www.south-derbys.gov.uk
- Check for grammar and spelling before sending using the automated tools available e.g. spellcheck, thesaurus

If a reply requires detailed research or translation:

- Acknowledge the enquiry within 5 working days and keep the customer informed about when to expect a full response
- Send a detailed response within 20 working days

If this is not possible, you should

- Agree a date with the customer by when they can expect a response.
- It is important at all times to keep the customer fully 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. An acknowledgement should be sent within 5 working days. If someone is not in a position to deal with the enquiry, a reply should be made to the customer, saying when the enquiry will be dealt with.

Redirecting Mail

Sometimes it is necessary to redirect correspondence as customers may be unsure where to send mail. It is poor customer service to move documents around the Authority without dealing with them effectively.

If mail needs to be redirected:

- You should check to see if the mail has already been forwarded to you and make all efforts to find the right addressee
- You should aim to do so within 1 working day where practically possible
- You should check that the person is the correct recipient and that you have their correct contact information
- The redirected correspondence should include an explanation saying from where and to whom it has been sent
- Where appropriate, an explanation should be sent to the customer stating what action you have taken, together with the name and contact details of the person who is dealing with the enquiry

Letters

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

Responses should:

Be printed on standard Council letterheaded paper

Contain a telephone contact number, e-mail address and any relevant links to your web page

Use the standard letter layout (see Appendix D)

Quote any references

Confidential Letters

If an item of correspondence is confidential, then this must be written on the letter and/or the envelope when responding. If the mail is for the addressee only, then the letter and/or envelope should be marked personal.

E-mail

E-mail is becoming a common form of communication, however, it is often seen as informal, but all e-mail correspondence should be treated with the same attention to customer service as with other forms of communication.

All enquiries should be responded to within one working day, even if this is simply an acknowledgement. If this initial response does not answer the question, then a full answer (Service Response) should be provided within 10 working days.

E-mails should:

Be typed using the font Arial in 12 point. Users of e-mail should regard this as a formal communication and adhere to the same levels of formality as for paper correspondence.

For further information, please refer to the SDDC Electronic Communication Policy on the intranet at: *Corporate Services/Human Resources/Electronic Communication Policy*.

Your e-mail should be formally addressed as

- Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms/Sir/Madam

and contain the following signature detail:

- Yours/sincerely/faithfully
- Name
- An auto signature
- Job title
- Department
- Name of authority
- Website address
- E-mail address
- Tel Number
- Fax Number

Out of Office

If you are out of the office for any longer than one day, your out of office auto reply should be switched on, giving clear details of when you will be returning and who to contact in your absence.

Redirecting e-mail

If you do not know to whom you should redirect e-mail:

- Check the internal e-mail directory
- Check the website
- Check the A-Z of services

Website

Our website: www.south-derbys.gov.uk contains a great deal of information about our services and provides useful links to other agencies. This can be offered as a further source of information.

Facsimile (Fax)

When sending a fax, you should:

- Send a cover sheet containing the South Derbyshire District Council Logo, date, address, telephone number and fax number
- Include the name, organisation, department and fax number of the person receiving it
- State the number of pages being faxed (including the front sheet) and any message or action to be taken. If necessary, the fax front sheet should be signed.

Monitoring Written Communication Customer Service Standards

Percentage of written enquiries responded to within ten working days (CSPI1)

Written enquiry

A written enquiry is any form of written communication that requires a response or action.

Ten working days means Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays). A letter may be posted or received over the weekend, but Monday would count as the first working day for the purposes of this indicator.

Random audits on a cross section of 10 responses should be carried out during the collection periods.

Information for this indicator will be collected departmentally and reported to the customer services manager in line with the collection periods (see below).

Face to Face Customer Service Standards (CSPI3)

When visiting the Council, customers should be treated in accordance with the standards set out in the Customer Service Code of Practice. The Authority has a duty to provide reasonable access to all users of the service using clear signs about where to go.

When dealing with customers at the first point of contact, you should:

- Aim to greet or at least acknowledge, customers as soon as they enter the building or approach an enquiry desk.
- Speak clearly and face the customer. If the customer needs an interpreter, guidance should be sought (see Appendix B)
- Wear your name badge or identity badge at all times
- Make customers feel welcome and find out how they can be helped
- Not keep customers waiting for more than 20 minutes once they have made initial contact at a reception point. If this is not possible, they should be given the option of waiting until they can be seen (and told how long this will be) or making a specific appointment. If the customer has an appointment with you, you should be on time

If the customer has an appointment with someone else, you should:

- Let the member of staff know that they have arrived

If for any reason, you are unable to keep an appointment, you should:

- Make arrangements for the customer to be seen by someone else
- Or make another appointment with as much notice as possible

If you are visiting the person's home or place of work, you should:

- Make sure you have an appointment and present an identity badge
- Fully explain the reason for the visit to their home/business
- Treat them and members of the household/business and their property with respect

Monitoring Face to Face Customer Service Standards

Average time taken to greet visitors at reception (CSPI3)

Aim to greet or at least acknowledge customers as soon as they enter the building or approach an enquiry desk

Not keep customers waiting more than 20 minutes for an appointment

Greeted visitors

For the purpose of this indicator the time taken to greet visitors should start from the time they enter the reception area and stop at the point in which a member of the reception team greets them.

Reception areas to be monitored

This indicator will focus on the visitors reception and the customer services desk.

It is expected that the following time periods will be monitored at least once during the collection week:

08:30 to 10:00

10:00 to 11:30

11:31 to 13:00

13:01 to 14:30

14:31 to 16:00

16:01 to 17:00

16:01 to 16:30

This has been designed to reduce the resources required but to give a spread of time periods throughout the week.

Monitoring & Performance

A monitoring and performance report will be produced on a quarterly basis and will be reported to Corporate Management Team and the Finance and Management Committee.

Collection periods

Information will be collected during the following periods

Q1 – during 2nd week in March

Q2 – during 2nd week in June

Q3 – during 2nd week in September

Q4 – during 2nd week in December

Gaining Customer Feedback

Comments, Compliments and Complaints (CSPI4)

Comments, Compliments and Complaints are an essential way of gaining feedback from our customers. They allow us to review and evaluate our services and should be acted upon.

The Council has a procedure for gathering comments, compliments and complaints, from customers. The full procedure is outlined in the leaflet "Listening to You" which available on the intranet/internet or hard copy leaflets are available from support services.

Anybody can telephone, write, e-mail, send in the leaflet or come in person to make a comment, compliment or complaint about the Council. We will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days, telling them who is dealing with the complaint and when they can expect to receive a reply. We will aim to give a full reply within ten working days but if it is going to take longer, we will keep them informed.

A list of people to contact for further information is attached in Appendix D.

Appendices

A Language and Disability

B Access Facilities

C Comments and Complaints Contacts

D Standard Letter layout

Appendix A -

What is a Disability?

We have a responsibility under the Disability Discrimination Act to consider all areas of disability so that we provide equal access to all our customers whatever their needs.

Medical Model

This model looks at disability from the point of view that it is an individual problem facing people with a medical condition or disease. The solution to disability is seen as treatment/cure and/or other professional intervention.

Social Model

This is when the disability is not caused by impairment but by the physical barriers presented by society. This then excludes people with disabilities participating in activities, thus causing them to be discriminated against. Therefore if these barriers were to be removed by reorganisation or redesign this discrimination would then no longer stand in the way.

The Social Model has been developed by Disabled People's organisations and is now accepted by the United Nations and European Commission.

What is Disability Equality?

Employees should be aware of the following factors:

- The importance of valuing people for what they are and for the abilities and skills which they have
- The variety of disabilities, including physical, sensory, learning and hidden
- Negative language and dangers of "stereotyping" and "labels" - by which society often sees all people with disabilities as the "same" and makes negative assumptions about them
- The needs which people with disabilities may have and the extra support which they may need
- That people's impairments are not the disability but the attitudes of society
- The importance of access and of barriers which prevent exclusion, for example structural barriers, barriers of communication, barriers of attitude and so on.
- The "hidden" discrimination which people with disabilities often face - for example, invitation to share in meetings which take place in inaccessible rooms with no communication aids; lack of involvement in decision making, especially things which affect them

Further Information

A number of publications have been produced by:

Employers Forum on Disability
Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London
SE1 2NY
Tel: 02074 03 30 20
Website: www.employers-forum.co.uk
e-mail: website.enquiries@employers-forum.co.uk

Appendix B

Access Facilities

To make our services and documentation accessible to all the citizens of South Derbyshire District Council we can provide the following services:

Braille, Large Print, Audio Tape and CD

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) can provide services for Braille, large print, audiotape and/or CD. They will quote over the telephone, but as a guide the cost is £6.95 per page based on an A4 sheet containing 300 – 350 words for the master copy, with extra copies at 50p per page. For audiocassette or CD the cost is £4.07 per page (A4) for the master with further copies at £2.75 per copy. The RNIB operate a Rapid Business Transcription Service for urgent items, these can normally be supplied within 2/3 days. The RNIB prefer documents for transcription to be sent via email.

Contact: Royal National Institute of the Blind
108 – 110 Lichfield Street
Hanley
Stoke on Trent
ST1 3DS

Contact: John Hayne or Lyn Mills on 01782 215755
Email: john.hayne@rnib.org.uk, or
Lyn.mills@rnib.org.uk

All of the above quoted prices are current at time of going to print and are likely to change.

Communication Support for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The Royal National Institute for the deaf can provide communication support. They will quote over the telephone.

Contact: RNID Communication Services Midlands,
Norwich Union House,
31 Waterloo Road,
Wolverhampton WV1 4DJ
www.rnid.org.uk

Telephone: 0845 685 8000 Textphone: 01902 423716 Fax: 01902 714456 Email:
csuwolverhampton@rnid.org.uk

Sign-language interpreters are also available from: **Cintra Ltd**
Tel: 0800 3169640. Their minimum charge is £150 for 3 hours + VAT

Translation and Interpretation Services - Document Translation

Document translation is available and can usually be produced within 24 hours:

Language to Language
Multi-Lingual Translation & Typesetting Specialists
15 Broughton Avenue
Littleover Derby
DE23 6JA

Tel: 01332 272 171
Fax: 01332 273 655
Email: info@lang2lang.co.uk
www.lang2lang.co.uk

Cost: No minimum charge. £135 per thousand words

Or Language Line (quote customer ID code: L40921)
Tel: 0800 917 6564
Email: translations@languageline.co.uk

Cost: Minimum charge £90 or £120 per thousand words

Standard Document Translations

A range of standard translations for use on published information are available on SDDC intranet: Corporate services/IT & Customer Services/Customer Services/Translations
Or contact: Angela Leese, Customer Services Team Leader
Tel: 01283 595989

Telephone or face to face Interpretation Services

Telephone translators are available at:

Language Line (quote customer ID code: L40921)
Tel: 0845 310 9900

Cost: £2.25 for first 15 mins, £1.85 per next 16-30 mins, £1.60 for further 31+ mins

For face to face translations:

Cintra Ltd
Tel: 0800 316 9640

Cost: £45 per hour with minimum charge of 1 hour

Appendix C

Comments Compliments and Complaints Contacts

South Derbyshire District Council Contact:

Angela Leese
Customer Services Manager
South Derbyshire District Council
Civic Offices
Civic Way
Swadlincote
Derbys
DE11 0AH

Tel: 01283 595784
Email: Angela.Leese@south-derbys.gov.uk

Pam Wilson
Complaints Officer
South Derbyshire District Council
Civic Offices
Civic Way
Swadlincote
Derbys
DE11 0AH

Tel: 01283 595847
Email: Pam.wilson@south-derbys.gov.uk

The Local Government Ombudsman
Beverley House
17 Shipton Road
York
YO30 5FZ

Telephone: 01904 663200
www.lgo.org.uk

Appendix D

Standard Layout for Letters

A letter sent out on behalf of the Authority conveys a number of messages to the recipient in terms of paper quality, document layout and standard of printing. The actual message you seek to deliver in your letter is certainly hampered by a poor standard of presentation and enhanced by good presentation.

For this reason the following standards should be adopted when producing letters on behalf of the Authority.

Spacing

- Single spacing in the main body of the document

Page Numbering

- Letters that continue over more than one page should be numbered from 1 to x (x being the final number of continuation pages)

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 individuals should be signed "Yours sincerely"
- The sender's name and job title should be in lower case.
- A formal letter should include the sender's name title for example Ms, Mrs, Miss or Mr in brackets after the sender's name, for example Juliet Smith (Ms)
- If the letter is marked "Private", "Confidential" or "Personal" then this should appear on the envelope

Enclosures

- Where enclosures are to be attached type "Encs" at the end of the letter at the bottom of the page.

**Head of Service
Division**

Civic Offices, Civic Way,
Swadlincote, Derbyshire DE11
0AH

{Addressee Only/Private and Confidential - if appropriate}

Name (line 27)
Address
Address
Address
Post Code

5 clear lines

Dear Salutation (Mr/Mrs/Ms or Sir or Madam)

1 clear line

Heading – (Bold – no underscore)

1 clear line

Main body of letter

1 clear line

Yours sincerely (if called by name) Faithfully (if called Sir or Madam)

5 clear lines

Name
Title

Page set up:

Top - 1 cm
Bottom - 2 cm
Left - 2 cm
Right - 2 cm

Please ask for: Your name
Tel: (01283) Your number
Fax: (01283) Your fax
Minicom: (01283) 595849
DX 23912 Swadlincote
E-mail: your e-mail address

Our Ref: Your initials

Your Ref:

Date: Today's date

Pam Carroll
Customer Services Manager

Civic Offices, Civic Way,
Swadlincote, Derbyshire DE11
0AH

Please ask for: Pam Carroll
Tel: (01283) 595847
Fax: (01283) 595720
Minicom: (01283) 595849
DX 23912 Swadlincote
E-mail: pam.carroll@south-derbys.gov.uk

Mr and Mrs R Smith
17 Main Street
Swadlincote
Derbyshire
DE11 0AH

Our Ref: PLC

Your Ref:

Dear Mr and Mrs Smith

Date:

Official Complaint No 157

I acknowledge receipt of your complaint, received on , concerning

I have asked , the , to investigate the issues you have raised and to reply directly to you by .

If we are not able to investigate fully by that date we will update you and advise when we feel we are able to respond in full.

If you need any further information in the interim please contact me on the above Direct Dial telephone number.

Yours sincerely

Pam Carroll (Mrs)
Customer Services Manager