



Customer Service Policy

A Modern & Efficient Council: Improving Customer Service

Preface

This policy consists of three parts:

Part 1 – Commitment to Customers

The first part of this policy is designed for customers. It advises customers what to expect when contacting Flintshire County Council and the standard of customer service they can expect to receive.

Part 2 – Guidance for our Workforce

The second part of this policy is designed for the workforce and describes how employees can contribute to delivering consistently excellent standards of customer service across all sections of our diverse community.

Part 3 – Customer Service Standards

The final part of this policy sets out Flintshire County Council's customer services standards which are promoted throughout the organisation e.g. at Flintshire Connects Centres, libraries, receptions, online.

Customer Service Policy - Part One

Commitment to customers

1.0 Policy Statement

Flintshire County Council is committed to ensuring that customer service excellence is an integral part of the planning, resourcing, and delivery of all services. When customers access Council services they will receive consistently excellent standards of customer service and this policy will ensure that all sections of our diverse community are able to access services. The policy recognises development in technology and the opportunities for customers to contact the Council and access services digitally.

Whilst this policy is concerned with service standards the Council has a specific policy for dealing with compliments, concerns and complaints which is available via the website www.flintshire.gov.uk or from the Customer Services Team (contact details included in this document). The Compliments, Concerns and Complaints Policy guides customers through the processes for passing on a compliment about a service, expressing a concern or suggestion about a service and when a customer is dissatisfied with a service, the process to follow to make a complaint.

1.1 Guiding principles

When customers contact the Council, we will:

- Identify ourselves;
- Be helpful and courteous;
- Be professional and positive;
- Be well informed, so that we are able to help;
- Be effective in listening and responding;
- Be fair and support individual needs.

1.2 Why we need customer service standards

This policy outlines the Council's approach to customer service and related issues. The standards set out in this policy are the minimum that customers can expect from the Council as a starting point; individual services may produce additional service specific standards or targets that are more relevant to the services they provide or the customers they serve.

Wherever possible the Council will respond to customer enquiries at the first point of contact. Individual service areas will develop mechanisms for monitoring and reporting performance to ensure this is achieved.

Customer service standards set out the Council's expectations for its employees to ensure that the Council remains a modern and efficient customer-focussed organisation. In particular, these standards define a corporate framework for the achievement of excellent customer service which will:

- Ensure that all customers, whether they are residents or visitors receive the same consistent, high standards of customer service;
- Ensure that customer service is an integral part of the planning, resourcing, and delivery of all Council services;
- Enable the Council to achieve its corporate key priorities, as set out in the Council's Improvement Plan 2012 - 2017.

1.3 Contacting Flintshire County Council

The Council encourages customers to contact the Council through digital channels such as the website and mobile app. These access channels continue to develop, and will make contact with the Council simple and efficient. The Council recognises that digital access does

not suit everyone so customers can contact the Council through various channels.

Digital

- ✓ We will acknowledge correspondence (e.g. e-mails, website enquiries and Tweets) within 24 hours (Monday – Friday);
- ✓ We will respond to digital correspondence as quickly as possible;
- ✓ We will guarantee a response within 10 working days;
- ✓ We will respond in the language and format of the original communication

Telephone

- ✓ We will answer telephone calls within 30 seconds;
- ✓ We will deal with telephone calls in English or Welsh. Where there is no Welsh speaker available appropriate arrangements will be put in place to enable customers to deal with the Council in the Welsh language;
- ✓ We will offer access to an alternative system (e.g. language translation services) if customers have additional requirements

Face to Face

- ✓ We will greet customers within 5 minutes of their arrival at a council building / event;
- ✓ We welcome customers to speak in English or Welsh and where there is no Welsh speaker available we will make alternative arrangements.
- ✓ We will offer an appointment where this may be more appropriate, responsive or efficient;
- ✓ We will make arrangements for customers who have specific requirements e.g. interpretation service, British Sign Language.

Letter

- ✓ We will respond to letters within 10 working days of receipt;

- ✓ We will respond to the correspondence in the language of the original communication;
- ✓ We will meet the needs of customers with visual impairment, through the use of Braille, large print or other specialist services.

1.4 Measuring success

This policy is backed up by Customer Service Standards (Part Three); over time, customers will be involved in setting and monitoring these standards. The Council, will develop ways of engaging with customers and encouraging customer feedback. Performance will be monitored through self-assessment, comparison with other organisations, customer satisfaction rating and feedback and recommendations following external inspections. This wealth of customer insight will help to establish what the Council is doing well and what it can do to improve.

Reports showing performance against the targets set for each standard will be reported to the Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees for their consideration.

1.5 What we expect from our customers

In times of trouble or distress, some people may act out of character when accessing Council services. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a customer contacting the Council. The Council believes that all customers have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, the Council also believes that employees have the same rights. We, therefore, expect customers to be polite and courteous in all dealings with the Council. The Council will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence; this includes any threat, abuse or harassment towards employees on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) which will be reported to the police. Any threat of physical violence will always be reported to the police.

Customer Service Policy – Part 2

Guidance for our workforce

2.0 Development of the Customer Service policy

In developing the Customer Service policy the Council has sought to:

- Set standards which are user friendly, customer focused and measurable;
- Clearly state how employees should behave when dealing with customers;
- Set performance targets which can be reviewed regularly;
- Give consideration to legislation, good practice and national standards;
- Ensure employees are equipped to deliver services taking into account equality and diversity so that all members of our diverse community can access services in their preferred way e.g.
 - A service can be delivered in Welsh or English according to the customer's preference;
 - Translation/interpretation can be arranged when languages other than Welsh or English are used;
 - Customers with sensory impairments can be assisted through their chosen medium, such as Braille or British Sign Language;
 - Customers with a learning disability will be offered clear and simple advice and instructions, sensitively provided.

2.1 Customers

Our customers are all the people we come into contact with in connection with the Council's work; this includes people who live in, work in or visit the area, and people acting on behalf of people who live

in the area. The customers of some services will be employees, local businesses and partner organisations. Many customers of the Council receive their service from other providers on behalf of the Council. Where services are procured and funded by the Council, those commissioning the service must ensure that the provider can deliver customer service which is broadly in line with this policy.

2.2 What customers want

Customers access Council services through various channels including digital (e.g. website, e-mail, social media) telephone, face to face, letter, application forms, etc. Whatever the channel, customers want accessible, efficient and responsive services and the Council must strive to meet these demands. The Council, will respond to the needs of customers in terms of access and recognise that one method will not suit everyone.

Customers want their dealings with the council to be efficient and that they receive their desired outcome. To meet this the Council must attempt to deal with customer enquiries at the first point of contact and ensure mechanisms are in place for monitoring and measuring performance against desired outcomes.

2.3 Customer service and its importance

Improving customer service is a key priority for the Council and means:

- **Providing quality services in a friendly, efficient and helpful way;** we will continually strive to improve services by ensuring excellent communication and a positive attitude towards customers;
- **Treating each person as an individual** – respect for diversity and, in turn, having the flexibility to adapt behaviour and actions in a way that is appropriate for the individual;

- **Treating people with dignity, respect and courtesy;** generally customers will request a service from the Council but in some instances the Council may need to be involved with people when this is not welcomed; in all cases, customers have a right to be treated with dignity, respect and courtesy;
- **Offering choices where possible;**
- **Giving information about what is available,** and providing an explanation if a service is not available.

2.4 General principles when dealing with customers

When dealing with customers, whether using the telephone, digital services (e.g. e-mail, Twitter, Facebook), face to face or via letter:

- Identify and address any specific requirements with sensitivity, tact and diplomacy;
- Record customer contact details accurately;
- Ensure that the nature of the customer's enquiry is understood clearly;
- Resolve enquiries at first contact where possible;
- Respond to the correspondence in English or Welsh to match the original communication;
- Keep the lines of communication open with customers and keep them informed.

2.5 Digital

- Acknowledge digital correspondence (e.g. e-mails, website enquiries and Tweets) within 24 hours (Monday – Friday);
- Respond to digital correspondence as soon as possible but no longer than 10 working days of receipt;
- Respond to the correspondence in English or Welsh to match the original communication;
- All outgoing council e-mails will include the standard bilingual signatory template giving contact details of the author;

- E-mail 'Out of Office' messages will be enabled at times of absence giving return dates and alternative contact details;
- Encourage customers to deal with the Council through the use of digital services.

2.6 Telephone

- Answer the telephone within 30 seconds;
- Greet the customer in a polite and courteous manner, giving your name;
- Give a bi-lingual greeting to external callers;
- Welcome customers to speak in English or Welsh and where there is no Welsh speaker available make alternative arrangements (e.g. transfer to a Welsh speaking colleague);
- Where a customer has a hearing impairment offer access to an alternative system e.g. SMS text, BT Text Relay;
- Give your full attention to the customer;
- Take ownership of the call, resolving the customer's enquiry wherever possible;
- When taking a call for a colleague, use an effective message taking system and make sure the customer is called back;
- End the call with a thank you and confirm with the customer the outcome.

2.7 Use of Voicemail

- Only use voicemail to ensure that telephone calls do not go unanswered;
- Use voicemail only for short periods or specific purposes;
- Ensure recorded messages are audible, accurate, and appropriate and where possible, provide alternative contact details;
- Give the caller an option to leave a message in English or Welsh;
- Respond to all messages within 24 hours or the next working day if the message is left over a weekend or Bank Holiday (this includes messages referred to you from colleagues);

- Regularly check for messages and update your voicemail message;

2.8 Face to Face contact – this covers personal callers with or without appointments, contact with customers at events, meetings out and about and site visits.

- Give clear instructions about the location of the face to face contact;
- Greet customers within 5 minutes of their arrival at a council building / event;
- Greet the customer in a polite and courteous manner;
- Give your full attention to the customer;
- In designated customer access areas, provide a bilingual service or clearly indicate access to a Welsh speaking colleague;
- Keep the customer informed of the length of time they are likely to wait to see the person they need;
- Offer an appointment where this may be more appropriate, responsive or efficient;
- When a customer has specific requirements, find out what they need and aim to provide it;
- When a customer needs to communicate in a language other than English or Welsh, make arrangements to provide an interpretation service;
- When discussing personal information, always arrange to do so in a confidential environment.

2.9 Personal calls to customers – this covers visits to customers' homes / properties.

- Wherever possible or appropriate make visits by prior arrangement with the customer, clearly stating the purpose of the visit;
- Keep customers informed of any changes to the visit arrangements;

- Establish the customer's language, communication and other specific requirements prior to the visit and make arrangements to meet these;
- Carry your identify card at all times and show it to each customer before entering the property;
- Encourage customers to check your identity with the Council, for example by telephoning;
- Follow policies and guidelines on Lone Working for your safety;
- Use tact and courtesy as a visitor in another person's home, treating their property with respect;
- Close the visit by explaining the next steps, and leave written information where possible;
- Follow up your commitment to the customer with action.

2.10 Written communication

- Respond to all written communication within 10 working days of receipt;
- Respond to the correspondence in English or Welsh to match the original communication;
- There may be occasions when a full response cannot be given within the timescale. This is unavoidable but there is still a requirement to keep the customer informed by making contact or sending a holding response. This can give an expected date for a full response or give the reason why a full response cannot be given;
- Ensure the presentation of all written correspondence is easy to understand (plain English, Cymraeg Clir), professional and accurate;
- Include a contact name and telephone number, together with any other information needed (e.g. reference number) to assist the customer;
- Meet the needs of people with visual impairment, through the use of Braille, large print or other specialist services.

2.11 Compliments, concerns and complaints

- Be open to receiving feedback from customers and where appropriate use this feedback to improve services;
- Pass comments and suggestions on to your manager, if they may improve the service;
- Ensure compliments are recorded and shared with colleagues;
- Be aware of the Council's procedure for dealing with compliments, concerns and complaints;
- Aim to resolve all concerns raised by customers immediately and informally wherever possible;
- If informal resolution is not successful, tell the customer they can make a formal complaint, and help them to do so;
- In the case of a serious complaint, tell your manager.

2.12 Service Standards

Most Flintshire County Council services have established standards and regularly report on these. This Customer Service Policy document provides the guiding principles for setting these standards to assist in establishing a consistent approach to customer service across the organisation.

2.13 Performance Management

The delivery of excellent customer service and application of these standards rests with council employees and performance against these standards will be assessed through annual employee appraisals.

2.14 Further information

Customer Services Team, Flintshire County Council, County Hall,
Mold, Flintshire CH7 6NG.

www.flintshire.gov.uk or www.siryfflint.gov.uk

e-mail: customerservices@flintshire.gov.uk

tel: 01352 703020

Customer Service Policy – Part 3

Customer Service Standards



Customer Service Standards; Our Commitment to You

We will:

- ✓ Identify ourselves, be helpful and courteous
- ✓ Be professional and positive
- ✓ Be well informed, so that we are able to help you
- ✓ Be effective in listening and responding to you
- ✓ Be fair and support your individual needs

We will set targets to ensure that we...

- ✓ Acknowledge digital enquiries within 24 hours*
- ✓ Answer your telephone call within 30 seconds
- ✓ Answer your query at the first point of contact and if this is not possible arrange for someone who can help to contact you promptly
- ✓ Respond to your enquiry within 10 working days of receipt

We also...

- ✓ Expect you to continue to treat our workforce with respect and consideration
- ✓ Welcome your feedback to help improve our services

*Monday – Friday