

**WELWYN
HATFIELD**
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
Customer Services Strategy
2009 -2012

“To deliver high quality and high value services by listening, communicating and delivering for our customers, enabling them to influence and shape our priorities and be at the heart of all we do.”

Executive Member – John Dean
Accountable Director – Bob Jewell
Accountable Officer – Sue Kiernan
29th March 2010

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1. Introduction by the Executive Member for Customer Services

We at Welwyn Hatfield Council are accountable to our community and want to be responsive to the people and businesses in the Borough. We want customers' contact with the Council to be a positive and helpful experience. Our aim is to engage and communicate effectively.

Customer services is everyone's responsibility. It is an integral part of how the public view the Council. We need trained and well-managed staff to ensure customer satisfaction and to guarantee the perception that the Council is always positive.

This strategy has been produced to explain to customers the high level of service they can expect and to tell our staff what we expect from them. We will develop our staff to deliver quality customer services, as stated within the Corporate Plan.

This will ensure our customers will have the best experience of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

Councillor John Dean

2. The purpose of Welwyn Hatfield Council's Customer Services Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to:

- show to our residents the standards of customer care they should expect;
- show our staff the levels of customer care expected of them;
- define ways in which we may improve the levels of care.

This will be demonstrated by:

- providing convenient, timely and efficient access to information and services for our customers across a range of delivery channels most relevant to them;
- introducing Customer Service Standards across the authority and measuring our performance against these, to make improvements and adjustments where necessary.

Ensuring equality and diversity strategies are adhered to

All staff will be expected to follow guidelines in dealing with all customers, Councillors, staff and the wider public to ensure equal access to services by all. This strategic approach will ensure we continue our journey as a fit for purpose authority, fully aligned with local, regional and national public sector priorities.

3. Customer Services Objectives

This section sets out our four medium term objectives for the Customer Services Strategy. It aims to fulfil our corporate promise to be accountable to the community.

The Customer Services Action Plan beginning on page 11 details how these objectives can be advanced and sets out how and when they will be delivered.

1. Develop and co-ordinate the Council's corporate complaints, compliments and comments procedure

We recognise the importance of customer feedback and we value all views. Through the complaints, compliments and comments (3Cs) procedure we can know whether our services are meeting needs and being delivered effectively. We are committed to using the information to help drive improvements.

2. Develop and manage customer care training across the authority

Customers should receive the same level of service across the authority. By training all our staff and partners we can ensure all customers are treated fairly and in accordance with our Customer Service Standards.

3. Promote and enhance customer satisfaction when they contact us

By monitoring our customer satisfaction levels we can give our customers a first class service every time they contact us. Our staff will be trained to deliver a polite, courteous, and realistic response to customers' enquiries.

4. Improve and develop different ways for our customers to contact us

We aim to increase accessibility to the Council for all our customers, as set out in our Equality and Diversity Action Plan. We aim to achieve this by developing the availability of forms online and by increasing front line services offered by the contact centre.

4. Managing Customer Services Strategy Performance

The Customer Services Strategy will be regularly monitored by the Customer Services Team within the Finance and Operations Management Team, and by the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a twelve-monthly basis.

The action plan, set out from page 11 onwards, details how, when and who will deliver this strategy.

Directors and Heads of Service are responsible for making sure their teams adhere to the standards set out in appendix A

The Customer Services Manager is responsible for monitoring the outsourced Customer Services contract with our partner. Our partner is responsible for delivering all phone contact services including a contact centre, as well as a reception service. The customer services contact centre is a central part of the Council's gateway which also includes a highly-respected transactional website.

Key performance indicators and the service level agreements determine standards are adhered to as set out within the contract specification.

The Customer Services Team will employ the use of a mystery shopping company to monitor Customer Service Standards across the authority.

5. Providing better Customer Services

Pathfinder

Hertfordshire Pathfinder consists of 10 local authorities and the County Council. Key working groups have been established as part of Pathfinder for example the Customer Service Group. One of the Hertfordshire's Pathfinder group's core principles is the provision of seamless, single points of contact through which customers can gain access to all services across the County.

The main objectives of the group are to:

- Reducing duplication
- Make savings together
- Streamline our operations
- Work to strengthen each other

We are actively working together as a group to improve our customer services throughout Hertfordshire.

What is the Public Bodies Customer Service Excellence award?

The Customer Service Excellence standard was developed to offer public services a practical tool for driving customer-focused change within their organisation. It is designed to be used by individuals and teams as part of a process of continuous improvement. The self-assessment tool can provide insight into an organisations current performance against the elements in the standard and this information is used to develop an improvement plan.

Customer Service Excellence Award

Welwyn Hatfield will move towards the customer service excellence standard initially by self assessment but our goal is to achieve the recognised award.

Mystery Shopping

At Welwyn Hatfield we are using an external mystery shopping organisation in order to measure and monitor our customer's experiences. We will use this tool to improve our accuracy and quality of our responses to the customer. We will extend this to meet our requirements within our customer service standards. This information will be used to check customer satisfaction.

6. Customer Services Roles

Customer Services Team

The Customer Services Team's role is to ensure everyone is aware of and understands this strategy. It will ensure the provision of training to all staff and other relevant people. The team will monitor any complaints, compliments and comments to improve the service to all customers.

High standards of Customer Services are expected from everyone from our frontline staff to our Council Leader.

Cabinet

The Cabinet's key role is to lead and set the direction for the Council's Customer Services Strategy. This includes setting overall priorities for all key services. The Executive Member responsible for Customer Services will oversee this strategy.

Councillors

All Councillors have a responsibility to ensure the Customer Services Strategy is followed. Any comments, compliments or complaints on service provision should be reported to the Customers Services Manager.

Directors

Directors will liaise between the Councillors, heads of services and the Customer Services Team to ensure all parties are aware of their responsibilities in delivering high quality customer services to all. They have a responsibility to ensure all personnel in their Directorate are delivering to the standards of the strategy.

Heads of Service

The heads of service will communicate this strategy with their departments to promote the Customer Services Standards. They have a responsibility to ensure all personnel in their Service area deliver to the standards of the strategy.

Employees

All employees and partners are expected to represent the Council regardless of rank, role or responsibility. This means they are expected to follow the Customers Services Standards at all times.

7. Customer Services Standards

All our employees will be expected to meet and exceed the standards wherever possible and we will measure our performance against these, so we can take action to improve where necessary.

The particulars of these standards are detailed in Appendix A

- Our customers are central to everything we do.
- When customers contact us
- When customers contact us by telephone
- When customers contact us by letter, fax, email or via the website
- When customers visit us
- When we visit our customers
- Meeting our customers needs
- What we expect from our customers

Appendix A

Customer Services Standards

Our customers are central to everything we do we must

- Work hard to continuously improve our services
- Consult users when we are developing our services
- Measure how well we are delivering our services and publish the results
- Publish and act upon the results of our customer satisfaction surveys
- Monitor the way we work to ensure we work together and deliver value for money
- Address any inappropriate discrimination and make our services accessible to everyone

When customers contact us

- Be polite and treat them with courtesy, fairness, honesty and respect
- Listen carefully and ask for their views
- Use plain language when we speak or write to them
- Explain our decisions and the reasons for them
- Respect confidentiality where possible but subject to the obligations contained under the Freedom of Information Act
- Be realistic about what we can and can't do
- Apologise when we make a mistake and put things right
- Accept our customers right to complain and provide an appropriate response

When customers contact us by telephone

- We will answer the telephone or go to voicemail within eight rings
- We will identify ourselves clearly by greeting callers with a standard greeting “Name of function/name or first name”
- If we can’t answer the call personally, we will provide the opportunity to leave a message and/or a clear indication of when someone will call you back
- If we call a customer we will give our name, say we’re calling from Welwyn Hatfield Council and explain why we’re calling
- If customers have difficulty getting through to a particular services, they can call our customer services centre on 01707 357000. It is open from 8:45am to 5:15pm Monday to Thursday and 8:45am to 4:45pm on Friday. For out of hours emergencies please call 0800 1114484. Our out of hours payment line is available on 01707 357755

When customers contact us by letter, fax, email or via the website

- We will acknowledge correspondence – email, letters and fax – within three working days and where necessary provide a full response within ten working days
- Response times are from date of receipt – of email, letter or fax. This does not affect the 20 working days time limit for Freedom of Information requests.

When customers visit us

- We aim to see them within five minutes of the appointment time
- If we are delayed, we will explain why, say how long they may have to wait and give the option of coming back on an alternative day or time
- If they do not have an appointment, reception will aim to see them within 15 minutes, and if they need to see someone that is unavailable we will offer an appointment. Reception will pass contact details to the relevant department
- We will always have our name badges clearly displayed to identify ourselves
- We will provide clean and comfortable waiting areas, with information about our services
- Wherever possible, we will provide space for our customers to see us in private
- Our public offices will be accessible 8:45am to 5:15pm Monday to Thursday, and 8:45am to 4:45pm on Fridays

When we visit our customers

- Always show our name badge before coming in (customers should always ask to see this – our staff won't mind) **Current name badges do not meet the current requirements for external visiting.**
- Tell our customers as soon as possible if we are delayed or have to cancel the meeting

Meeting our customers needs

We will ask our customers to let us know if they need to access information or our services in a different way. Wherever possible, we can arrange for

- Written translations
- Interpreters – British sign and other languages
- Information in large print, alternative format, audio or Braille
- Public meetings in accessible venues, with induction loops or other suitable systems for people who are deaf or hard of hearing

What we expect from our customers

- Treat our staff with courtesy and respect
- Avoid unacceptable behaviour – including verbal or threatening abuse
- Provide the right information and documentation we need to be able to help
- Tell us when we do or don't meet their expectations, giving your honest views and suggestions on how we could improve our services
- In the event that a member of staff suffers abuse we will take further action in conjunction with our violence policy