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CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS



CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL

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CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS



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About this booklet

We have produced this booklet as a reference for all our staff. As well as setting out our standards for customer care, it is full of practical information to help you meet them. We use the term 'customer' throughout to refer to all the people we work and interact with, including our colleagues within the council, members of the council, local businesses, people working for our contractors and partner companies and organisations, as well as members of the public.

Staff across the whole council were involved in deciding what standards we should have and what information needed to be included. If you have any comment to make please contact the Corporate Service Development Officer on extension 4596 or email suggestions@charnwood.gov.uk.

Introduction

Customer Charter

Our Customer Service Strategy says that we will be **Customer Focused**; putting the customer at the heart of everything we do and being dedicated to serving the needs of our customers.

We aim to delivery services which are:

- of a good and consistent quality
- responsive to the needs and expectations of our customers
- accessible by all our customers
- value for money

Customer care standards

We have promised our customers that when they contact us we will:

- Respect all customers and will always be polite, helpful and professional;
- Ensure all customers are treated fairly and will try to provide, wherever possible, different ways to deliver our services to meet the needs of individual customers such as different languages, Braille, audio tape, large print, or home visits;
- Ensure that the information our customers provide is treated confidentially and share that information with other services so they don't have to give us the information again;
- Ensure our customers' enquiries are dealt with promptly and efficiently and, wherever possible, ensure that their enquiries are dealt with by the first person they contact.

To help us achieve our promises we ask that our customers:

- Are courteous and respectful towards us;
- Provide the information we need as soon as possible;
- Let us know if they need a service to be provided in a different way to meet their individual needs;
- Make suggestions on improving our service.

Further support

You have a responsibility to make sure you maintain high standards. If you have concerns about this or would like further information and support, you should speak to your manager. All managers have specific responsibilities under the standards and must take the time to discuss them with you.

Where to find information about our services

This section explains where you can find information about our services.

Our website: www.charnwood.gov.uk

Our website allows the public to access many of our services quickly and easily.

Info

Info is our intranet. You can find this by typing <http://info/default.aspx> into your web browser address window.

Staff Matters

The weekly staff e-magazine. You can find a copy on our intranet under Staff Matters and copies are posted on the notice boards. Your manager may discuss this with you and your team at your regular team meeting.

Charnwood News

The Charnwood Borough Council magazine is distributed three times a year to all properties in the borough. It contains news and articles about our services and information about what is happening across the borough.

Further support

If you need more information and support, or would like to publish an article in Staff Matters or Charnwood News you can look on the intranet, speak to your manager or contact the Communications & Consultation team on extension 4603 or e-mail communication@charnwood.gov.uk.

Best practice in customer care

This section explains the general standards of customer care that we expect that will help you to help your customers.

Getting the basics right

Enjoy helping people

Try to help people identify their needs and solve their problems. A problem can be an opportunity to provide a service. Your customers will quickly respond to you and see you as ready, efficient and willing to help them.

Treat people well

Know how to do your job and treat people well. Sometimes, it won't be possible for you to provide the service your customer wants but you still need to treat them well. Be sensitive to people's needs and know how to care for them in different situations.

Care for your customers

Make sure visiting areas are clean, safe and comfortable. The way we provide services should be convenient for our customers - look for ways to improve the service you and your team provide.

Treat everyone fairly and equally

Give everyone the same care and attention no matter what their age, religion, sex, disability, sexuality or ethnic background. Respect those you are serving and make sure everyone is treated fairly. Make sure that you take account of the needs of people of all ages and abilities and those from different cultures and religions. Seek further advice if you need to.

Keep your promises

Never make a promise you can't keep and always keep the promises you do make. Don't make promises in the hope that the customer will go away. If you do, they will get angry and distrustful, and lose faith in you and us.

Developing skills to deal with your customers

Know your job

Every job needs technical knowledge and skill. Know your job and do all part of it well. Be proud of your ability to know what to do, when and how. Learn new things quickly to maintain your high standard of efficiency.

Reassure people about your service

Many people have had bad experiences of public services. Some people expect bad treatment and may be ready to get angry or annoyed. Take some time to reassure

your customers that you will give them the best possible service. You may be able to avoid problems and misunderstandings before they happen.

Refer people when necessary

If you are not able to help, make sure you know where to advise people to go for help. Know who in the council or in other organisations might be able to help. Only refer people when you are sure that you are not able to help them and that the person you are referring them to will not simply refer them on again.

Always be polite

Be friendly and polite even when dealing with an angry customer. Most people when seeing others being polite and friendly will act the same way.

Use your time well

People won't want to be dealt with too quickly. But they also don't want their time wasted or to be delayed unnecessarily. Learn to take the right amount of time to help and respond quickly to your customers.

Help educate customers

You can improve your service by giving good explanations. Simply explaining a form or procedure will speed up the process for the next time the customer needs that service. Comment positively when someone has the right forms or provides information ahead of time to help make providing a service easier.

Preventing dissatisfaction

Keep people informed

Never leave your customers wondering what's going on. Keep them well informed. Tell them what you are doing and why, and what will happen next.

Anticipate their needs

Your experience will soon allow you to anticipate what your customers need, sometimes even before they are aware of those needs themselves. You may also be able to offer them help beyond what they ask for.

Take the initiative in solving problems

If you know a customer may be having a problem with a service, try contacting them straight away to let them know about it. Try to solve the problem as best as you can and, if you are not able to solve it, take the initiative in helping them find a solution to their problem. Never say 'Sorry, that's not my problem', even when the problem is not your fault.

Do the job carefully the first time

Try to reduce mistakes and the time-consuming, costly need to do something again or correct a mistake. Be fast and efficient, but take time to make sure you do the work correctly the first time.

Coping with problems

Stay cool in a crisis

Getting into a panic never helps. You will never be able to give your best effort if you are angry or upset. Stay cool and calm, and others around you will tend to calm down. You will find things go a lot easier for everyone.

Be positive about complaints

Complaints are opportunities for us to improve our services. Complaints are a normal, useful part of providing a service. You should handle complaints quickly and effectively. You should not be afraid of complaints and never avoid complaints. Be positive and helpful, and try to solve any problems.

Always improving

Improving services

If you have a suggestion for how to improve our services, mention it to your line manager or submit a suggestion through the Staff Suggestion Scheme on the intranet.

Learn from mistakes

We all make mistakes. What is important is that we learn from them and use them to improve the service.

Recognising outstanding service

If you see colleagues doing a particularly good job, nominate them for our 'STAR' Awards. Details are on the intranet.

Further support

If you have concerns about this or would like further information and support, you can look on the intranet, speak to your manager or contact the Corporate Service Development Officer on extension 4596 or e-mail complaints@charnwood.gov.uk.

Make your service accessible

There are a number of ways you can help make your service accessible to all customers.

Our customers get in touch with us in a variety of ways:

- in person;
- in writing;
- by phone;
- by e-form through www.charnwood.gov.uk;
- by e-mailing;
- by completing and returning pro-formas provided by your service;
- by minicom;
- by fax;
- in Braille;
- in any language.

You should try to make it as easy as possible for your customers to contact you whichever way they choose.

Regardless of which channel a customer uses to contact you, there are elements of your dealings with that customer to provide them with the service that will be the same. These are:

- **Definition of a service request**
Details of the service that the customer requires/needs
- **Acknowledgement of a service request**
The contact you have with a customer to let them know you have received their service request and are dealing with it. This may be a telephone call, a standard letter or an automated email response. This should include confirmation of the service they have requested; the key actions you will be taking; any relevant information they need to have; details of any information they need to provide to you; any timescales or deadlines; how they can get further information or answers to queries they may have; when you or someone else will contact them again.)
- **Fulfilment of a transaction**
Completion of a particular key action or task needed to provide the service
- **Closure of a case**
Confirmation that the service has been provided to the customer and the customer is happy with that service.

Minicom

The minicom is a phone for people with hearing impairments. The public number for general council enquiries by minicom is 01509 215996.

General tips when using minicom

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- Greet the caller in the same way as with a phone but type in the message on the keyboard instead of speaking;
- Be brief and use plain English;
- If you have not understood what the caller is typing, ask them to repeat it;
- Type 'GA' (go ahead) when you have finished saying something so that the caller knows it is their turn to type;
- 'SK' (stop keying) means you want to finish the call. It is polite to wait for the caller to reply with 'SK' so that you know they are happy to end it.

Language Services

The service includes:

- Face-to-face or phone interpreting services, and written translation in a wide range of community languages;
- Arranging documents to be converted into Braille for people with visual impairments;
- Advice and guidance on translations and large print;
- British Sign Language (BSL) interpreting services for face-to-face communication.
- For further information or advice you can phone Communications & Consultation team on 01509 634603 or e-mail them at communication@charnwood.gov.uk.

Language Line

Language Line is an external company that offers interpreting and phone conferencing facilities. We have a corporate contract with Language Line and you can book an interpreter or translator through the Language Line service by phoning 0845 310 9900. You will need to give Language Line the following details: your name and contact details, and the name and contact details of your customer and the language they require. If a customer telephones you and you are having difficulty in understanding them, you should advise them to telephone 01509 634560 to access the Language Line service via the contact centre. They will be asked to leave their name, contact details and details of the language required and Language Line will arrange a phone conference.

Dealing with complaints

**Complaints are opportunities for us to improve our services.
Complaints are a normal, useful part of providing a service. This section should help you when using and managing complaints.**

Defining a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a customer, whether justified or not. A customer may be unhappy because:

- We made a mistake in the way we provided the service;
- We delayed in providing a service;
- We failed to act in a proper manner;
- We provided an unfair service.

A complaint is **not**:

- Initial requests for service e.g. the **first** time a service is requested;
- Initial requests for information or for an explanation of Council policy or practice;
- The correct application of the law or a Council policy, or to matters for which there is a right of appeal (an appeal within the Council or to an independent tribunal).

Complaints can be received:

- in person;
- in writing;
- by phone;
- by e-form through www.charnwood.gov.uk;
- by e-mailing complaints@charnwood.gov.uk;
- by completing and returning the Feedback Form in our 'Have Your Say' booklet
- by minicom;
- by fax;
- in Braille;
- in any language.

Be positive about complaints

- Deal with complaints quickly and effectively;
- Don't be afraid of or avoid complaints;
- Be positive and helpful, and try to solve any problems.

The complaints process

If you are in a position where you may be the first point of contact for someone who wants to complain about our services, you should:

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- Have a good understanding of our complaints procedure;
- Know how to contact your department's Service Development Officer (SDO) and other departments' SDOs.

Standards when dealing with someone who is not satisfied

- Give your name;
- Listen to what they are saying;
 - be open
 - be polite
 - be honest
 - be clear
 - apologise, if we have done something wrong
- Let them decide if they want to take their complaint further. If they do not want to make a formal complaint, follow the informal complaints guidance;
- If they want to make a formal complaint, tell them what will happen next and explain the stages of the formal complaints procedure;
- Give them or offer to send them a copy of the complaint form in the format that would be best for them. You can also tell them to visit www.charnwood.gov.uk/complaints;
- If they want to speak to someone else:
 - get their name, address and phone number;
 - phone your line manager or the SDO for your service and put them through to that officer;
 - if no-one is available to speak with them tell them that you will ask someone to get back to them within one working day.

Service Development Officers

Each department has a Service Development Officer (SDO) who is there to:

- Give you advice and guidance on dealing with complaints;
- Monitor how well we deal with complaints and suggest improvements to our services.
- The contact details for SDOs are on the intranet.

Informal complaints

Informal complaints are not put into writing but are other expressions of dissatisfaction. They are an opportunity for us to take quick action to solve a problem.

If you receive an informal complaint, you should:

- Tell the customer what they can reasonably expect you to do, what you can or can't do and the time limits;
- Give them a contact name and phone number;
- Make sure they do not have to repeat their complaint to many staff;

- Look at the problem from their point of view;
- Keep them informed about what you are doing to deal with their complaint;
- Carry out any necessary actions or promises you have made;
- Don't delay in giving a service or information;
- If you can't deal with the problem, tell them how they can take the matter further (that is, make a complaint under stage 1 of our complaints process).

Monitoring informal complaints

We don't always monitor informal complaints. This means that we do not always make the best use of this information to help us improve services. You should think about how you can use informal complaints and how these messages can help improve services,

Examples of how you can do this include:

- Using team meetings to go through issues;
- Keeping records of what the more common informal complaints have been about and what action you have taken in response.

Formal complaints

If you are unable to resolve an informal complaint and the customer wishes to make this a formal complaint, OR, you feel the issues require formal investigation the complaints procedures must be followed.

Complaints can go through three stages. At the end of each stage, if the complainant is not satisfied, they can continue to the next stage. The last stage is a referral to the Local Government Ombudsman, who is independent of our organisation.

Stage 1 (service complaint)

All formal complaints first go to stage 1, which will normally be dealt with at service level. An officer can't investigate any complaint that directly relates to him or her as an individual. The SDO or SDO Administrator for that service will log the complaint on the CRM complaints software and send an acknowledgement to the complainant within 5 working days. The acknowledgement will state the details of the complaint, the name of the officer who will investigate the complaint, and the date by which a full response will be sent. The SDO/SDO Administrator must send a full response in writing within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint. The response must include details of the complaint, what investigation/research has been undertaken and by whom, the findings of the investigation, the conclusions that have been reached, the decisions that have been made, and whether we consider the complaint to be wholly justified, partly justified or not justified. If we consider the complaint to be wholly or partly justified the response must also include details of any actions that need to be taken as a result including the payment of compensation, and any lessons that we have learnt (if appropriate). All responses must also include information about how the complainant can appeal against the decision.

Stage 2 (service unit review)

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome from stage 1, they can ask the service to review the complaint at stage 2. They must state the reasons why they are unhappy. The process is exactly the same as for Stage 1 but the investigating officer can't be the same person as at Stage 1 and a full response must be sent within 20 working days.

Stage 3 (Corporate Service Development Officer review)

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome from stage 2, stage 3 provides a means of appeal. This stage will be managed by the Corporate Service Development Officer (CSDO) who will either investigate the complaint or ask a senior officer to do so. The results of the investigation will be sent to the SDO and/or Head of the service concerned before the response is sent to the complainant. The CSDO will issue a response on behalf of the Chief Executive within 20 working days and must also give details about how to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman,

Monitoring formal complaints

The SDOs in each department are responsible for ensuring that complaints are dealt with in accordance with the Corporate Complaints Procedure in that service and that statistics produced from the Complaints software are discussed within the service and are used to improve our services.

Guidance on handling complaints

The following written guide is available from the CSDO and is on our intranet:

- Dealing with complaints – Best Practice Guidelines for Staff

The following training sessions are run on a periodic basis and for details of forthcoming sessions please contact the CSDO or Human Resources:

- Effective complaints handling – one-day duration
- Investigating complaints – half-day duration

Further support

If you have questions or concerns about the complaints procedure or would like more information and support, you can look on the intranet; speak to your manager, the SDO for your service, or the CSDO on extension 4596 or e-mail complaints@charnwood.gov.uk.

Telephones

Most of our residents prefer to use the phone to contact us. Whether the experience is positive or negative has a huge effect on how people see us as a local authority.

Standards for taking phone calls

- Answer the phone within ten rings (30 seconds);
- Greet the caller, giving your service and your name;
- Check you understand what the caller's needs are;
- Answer their question or explain what is going to happen next to deal with it;
- If necessary, transfer the call or take a message for someone else to call them back;
- Ask if you have answered their questions and if they need any more help;
- Tell them they can visit www.charnwood.gov.uk;
- End the call politely, thanking the caller and encouraging them to call again.

More details on each of the standards

Answering the phone within six rings

Our customers feel frustrated and impatient when they have to wait more than 30 seconds before their call is answered. You can meet this standard by:

- Answering your colleagues' phones;
- Ensuring that there is a duty officer or making proper arrangements for the phones during lunch breaks, team meetings or away days;
- Using voicemail and always returning your messages;
- Speaking to your manager if it is difficult to meet this target.
- If you are away from your desk:
 - arrange to transfer your calls to someone else in the office;
 - arrange for someone else to pick your calls up;
 - use your voicemail;
 - let your colleagues know when you expect to be back in the office.

Giving the correct greeting

Speak clearly and slowly;

- Say 'Good morning or afternoon';
- Say 'Charnwood Borough Council' or 'Charnwood Council' followed by your service name (for example, 'You have come through to Jane in Charnwood Housing Repairs').

Understanding the caller's needs

Charnwood is a varied place and the people we deal with may not speak English as a first language, or may find it difficult to describe what help they need.

- Be patient;
- Speak slowly and clearly;
- Use specialist phone services such as Language Line and minicom resources when needed (see page 10 for more information);
- Ask for any more information you will need to help the caller;
- Explain to the caller why you need to ask for this information. For example, in Housing Benefits, the section that deals with the caller depends on where they live. ('Good morning, Charnwood Borough Council, Housing Benefits, you've come through to [your name]. In order to help with your call, I need to know the address you are currently living at.')

Answering the query

- Explain to the caller what action you are taking and make sure they understand why;
- Speak in plain English and avoid using jargon;
- Ring the caller back if you have promised to do so;
- Send the caller the information you promised within ten working days;
- If it is appropriate in your service, tell the caller who they can contact if their query isn't dealt with.

Transferring calls

- Try to meet the caller's needs first;
- Use tools such as www.charnwood.gov.uk, our intranet and our switchboard (dial 0) to find the information the caller needs or to transfer the call (or both);
- Transfer calls only if necessary;
- Explain to the caller why you need to transfer them and who you are transferring them to;
- Ask the caller if you can put them on hold while you try to transfer their call and wait for them to respond 'Yes' or 'No';
- Dial the number you are transferring the call to and wait for an answer;
- Always speak to the person you are transferring the call to and give the name of the caller and explain their query before you connect the caller;
- If the person you are transferring to is not available, return to the caller and explain what has happened. Then ask them if they mind holding before you try ringing anyone else or if they want to leave a message;
- The call will be transferred when you hang up, or you can push the transfer button again to bring the caller back to your phone;
- If you are not sure how to transfer your call, or if you are having trouble with your phone, ring the Computer Service Unit helpdesk on 4777.

Dealing with abusive callers

We do not expect you to have to put up with abuse. If a caller becomes abusive:

- Ask them politely to stop being abusive;
- If the abuse continues, tell them you may end the call;
- If the abuse still carries on, tell them you are ending the call and hang up;
- Make a note of what happened and tell your line manager as soon as possible.

Summarising the call, offering further help and ending the call

When serving people over the phone, it is important to go over the main points of the call, anticipate and respond to their needs, and end the call politely.

- Ask if you have answered all their queries;
- Ask if they have any other queries;
- Suggest they visit www.charnwood.gov.uk to:
 - find more information about us;
 - carry out some transactions (such as pay a Council Tax bill).
- Thank them for their call;
- Give them your name and contact details (if appropriate).

Monitoring calls

We monitor calls across the council in the following ways:

- With effect from autumn/winter 2007, statistics will be available on phone calls that are made to each number and will be provided to departmental management teams.
- Your manager will have information on the performance of your service.
- We will use mystery shoppers from time to time.

Telephone functions and voicemail

The following functions are available on the majority of our phones (but not Advisers within the contact centre):

Function	To Activate Function	To Cancel Function
Transfer a Call	Press R (Recall) Dial the destination extension number Wait for response Replace Handset	If no response press R to get the call back
Short Dial	Dial *11 followed by the short dial code (3 digits)	Not applicable
Camp-on	Dial the extension At the engaged tone press R*16 You will hear 3 short beeps to acknowledge Replace handset Your phone will ring when the other person is free	Lift Handset press #16
Forward Calls only when Busy or No Answer	Dial *17 Enter your extension number Followed by the destination extension number You will get 3 short beeps to	Dial #17 followed by your extension You will get 3 short beeps to acknowledge

	acknowledge	
Forward all Calls	Dial *18 Enter your extension number Enter the destination extension number You will get 3 short beeps to acknowledge	Dial #17 followed by your extension You will get 3 short beeps to acknowledge
To Pickup a Call within your Pickup Group†	When the other phone is ringing dial *22 on your phone	Not applicable
To Pick up a Call outside of your Pickup Group	When the other phone is ringing dial *00 on your phone followed by the extension of the phone you want to pick up.	Not applicable
Last Number Redial	Dial *33	Not applicable
† You can set up group pick-ups by phoning the CSU helpdesk on 4777.		

- **Voicemail**

Reply to voicemail messages within 24 hours (or the next working day) of the message being left;

- If you are out of the office for longer than 24 hours update your message or ask a colleague to return your voicemail messages;
- Update your message often.

Your voicemail message should give the following information;

- Greet the caller and tell them they have reached Charnwood Borough Council;
- Give your name and section;
- Apologise for not being able to take the call;
- Tell the caller when you will be able to call back;
- Offer an alternative number or colleague if the call is urgent;
- Ask the caller to leave their contact name and number, plus brief details.

To use the voicemail system:

- Dial extension number 4599;
- The automated system will ask you to enter your extension number followed by the # key (this is so you can gain access to your messages from anywhere via a touchtone telephone) if you are sitting at your desk you do not have to enter your extension number just press the # key at this prompt;
- You will then be asked to enter your password followed by the # key (no passwords have been put on the system) so at this prompt dial the # key;
- The first time you dial into the system it will ask you to record your name by pressing 1, say your name after the beep then press 1 again;
- The system will now talk you through all the options;
- 1 - is to record and send messages;

- 2 - is to retrieve messages that have been left on your voicemail:
 - 0 - is to listen;
 - # - is to save the message and skip onto the next one (Messages will be saved for 4 weeks);
 - *3 - is to delete the message.
- 3 - is to administer personal greetings:
 - 0 – is to listen to a message that has already been recorded;
 - 1 – is to create, change or delete a message;
 - 2 – is to scan all your messages;
 - 3 – is to activate a message;
 - # - is to confirm a recording.

Further support

If you have questions or concerns about the telephony system or need to report maintenance and technical issues, or would like more information, training or support, you can look on the intranet, speak to your manager or contact the Computer Service Unit helpdesk on extension 4777 or CSU Helpdesk@charnwood.gov.uk.

If you have any questions about the customer contact centre you can contact the Customer Contact Centre manager on extension 4610 or email contactcentre@charnwood.gov.uk.

Public correspondence

As a council we aim to deliver excellent services. Our residents and service users judge the quality of our services on their experiences when dealing with us. If they have good, positive experiences, this will influence their opinions of us. As a result, it is essential that when dealing with letters we are efficient and effective.

This section covers the standards for written communication when corresponding with the public by post, e-mail, fax and compliment slips.

What is written communication?

Defining a letter

A letter is written communication between our customers and us. We can receive letters by fax, e-mail or post.

Written communication standards and good practice

General written communication standards

- Think carefully about what you write – under the Data Protection Act, everything you write about a person can be seen by that person (with certain exceptions).
- All written communication should be:
 - written clearly and in plain English;
 - avoid jargon or technical terminology your customer may not understand, if you have to use it explain to you customer what you mean;
 - checked for content, grammar and spelling;
 - polite and customer-friendly;
 - accurate and brief;
 - in the correct font and format.

E-mails

The same standards and rules apply to e-mails as apply to paper correspondence. E-mails tend to be informal and conversational in tone because they are so much quicker and easier to use, compared with other written communication. However, we need to be polite and customer-friendly while maintaining professional standards.

Receiving written communication

When you receive written communication, you should:

- Stamp it with the date (unless it is an e-mail);
- Log it onto a monitoring system.

Misdirected letters, e-mails and faxes

If you have received a letter, e-mail or fax by mistake, you should still stamp it and log it before you pass it to the appropriate person on the same day. Use Outlook, our intranet and your colleagues for help on finding the appropriate person for correspondence you have received by mistake.

Abusive, threatening or offensive letters and e-mails

Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect at work. We will not accept bullying and harassment, and our Employee Handbook (available from Human Resources or our intranet) helps us all deal with these issues.

If you receive a letter or an e-mail that you feel is abusive:

- Record the letter or e-mail in your monitoring system as usual, noting the abusive nature of the correspondence (do not send a response immediately);
- Read the letter carefully to assess if the customer is making a valid complaint (if so, follow the complaints procedures — see page 10 for more information);
- Speak to your line manager or team leader about the incident and how to deal with it.

Anonymous letters

We can not respond to letters which have no return address. If the author is suggesting an improvement to your service you can record the letter and include it in your service delivery improvement process but it will not be possible to let the author know what action, if any, you propose to take. If the letter is malicious you should record it and take no further action.

Responding to written communication

Standards when responding to written communication

- Reply to all correspondence within 10 working days;
- If you cannot reply within 10 working days, you should send an acknowledgement and include a date by which the customer can expect to receive a reply;
- Reply in the same format you received the correspondence in, unless there is a good reason not to do so (for example, legal obligations);
- Deal with all the issues in the customer's query. If it is not your area, consult the appropriate member of staff to give a full response to the customer in a single letter;
- Reply to letters in the standard format described on page 22.

Response times

- You should respond to all letters you receive within 10 working days;
- You should create and use standard templates, when appropriate, to respond to frequent requests for information;
- When you receive a letter, you should count day 1 as the day after you receive the letter;
- You should count day 10 as the 10th working day after you receive it.

Acknowledgements

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If it is going to take you more than 10 working days to respond in full, you should send an acknowledgment. The acknowledgement letter should say:

- When you received the letter;
- Who is dealing with the enquiry (including full contact details);
- When a full reply will be available (response date).

You should then send a fuller response by the date shown in the acknowledgement. You should log all acknowledgment letters on your team's monitoring system.

Reply in the format the letter was sent in

- Unless there is a good reason not to (such as accessibility or legal issues, or the person asking for the reply in a specific format), you should reply to letters and e-mails using the same format they used to contact you;
- If they send an e-mail asking for information (for example, a brochure or an application form) to be sent by post, you should acknowledge the e-mail and tell them that you have sent the documents to the address they provided.

Answer the entire customer query

When someone sends a letter asking two or more questions, it isn't important to them that your service doesn't deal with all the aspects. What is important is that they get the information they need the first time.

- Try to answer the entire query even if that means you need to contact other services and departments to do so;
- Keep the customer updated throughout the process if it takes longer than 10 working days;
- When answering a query that involves information on other services, explain to the customer where the information came from and invite them to contact those services direct for more.

Formats for replying to letters

Standard response letters

Standard response letters should be always be:

- As friendly and pleasant as possible;
- Personalised if you know the name of the person.

This is the standard letter template you should use for all correspondence:



Recipient name
Address line 1
Address line 2
Address line 3
Address Line 3 Post Code

Southfield Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire. LE11 2TN

Ask for: Joe Bloggs, Asst Head Gilder

Direct Line: 01509 634XXX

Email: first.lastname@charnwood.gov.uk

My ref: if you wish

Your ref: if you wish

Mobile: 07 if you wish

Fax: 01509 if you wish

Minicom: 01509 215996 if you wish

DX 19628 Loughborough if you wish

Today's date: Day of week, day, month, year

Dear Recipient,

Subject of Letter

Body of Letter: Install this Template from our intranet by first Opening it with File – Open... as a .dot file.

1. Next modify the Sender's address to you usual address.
2. Do not put a Mobile, Fax, Minicom or DX number in if you do not routinely use them. They are just clutter otherwise. Over leaf are the normal addresses used by Charnwood, with relevant post codes.
3. When you are happy with the template; you can trim these words off if you like, but leave the Greeting, Subject and first line for guidance.

For information, we use Gill Sans MT font in the new corporate style, but when you use this template you will find all the Styles automatically come up in Gill Sans.

The style for letters is Body Text, but you can also use:

- Numbered or
- Bulleted

If you need help please contact ICS. If you are a regular Microsoft Word user ask about ECDL or ECDL Wordprocessing Advanced. It's a good way to learn some new tricks of the trade.

Finally, when you press Enter after a paragraph, you'll find you drop 6pt before the next line. If you want to simply drop one line without creating a paragraph space, hold down the Shift when you press Enter; that's called a new line, rather than Enter which gives you a new paragraph. Ctrl Enter gives you a new page ... here goes!

This is the second page. We hope these notes have helped you. Please let us know how they can be improved.

General styles available are:

Heading 1

Heading 2

Heading 3

Normal (12pt)

Body Text (10pt)

4. Numbered (10pt)

• Bulleted (10pt)

That's all

Yours sincerely,

Sender's name (new line, not paragraph: Shift Enter)

Sender's Title

This information is available in different formats. To access these please phone (01509) 634560.

এ তথ্যাদি অন্যান্য মাধ্যমে পাওয়া যায়। এসব পেতে হলে দয়াকরে (01509) 634560 এ নাম্বারে টেলিফোন করুন।

這資料具不同的格式，請致電 (01509) 634560 索取。

आ माहिती शुद्धी शुद्धी पद्धतिओमां उपलब्ध छे. ते मेणववा माटे कृपा करी आ नंबर पर झेन करो (01509) 634560.

यह जानकारी अलग-अलग प्रारूपों में मिल सकती है। इनको पाने के लिये कृपया यह नंबर डायल कीजिये (01509) 634560.

ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਵੱਖ-ਵੱਖ ਸ਼ਕਲਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਮਿਲ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਹਾਮਿਲ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮਿਹਰਬਾਨੀ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ (01509) 634560

PS When you have edited the template to your satisfaction save it with a distinctive name in the Documents and Settings/username/.../Templates folder. It'll be ready for you next time in General Templates.

Here are the other addresses:

Limehurst Depot, Limehurst Avenue, Loughborough, Leicestershire. LE11 1PF

Charnwood Lifeline, Victoria Place, Victoria Street, Loughborough, Leicestershire. LE11 2EP

Charnwood Museum, Granby Street, Loughborough, Leicestershire. LE11 3DU

Loughborough Town Hall, Market Place, Loughborough, Leicestershire. LE11 3EB

South Charnwood Leisure Centre, Parkstone Road, Syston, Leicestershire. LE7 1LY

Ark Business Centre, Gordon Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire. LE11 1JP

Oak Business Centre, 79-93 Ratcliffe Road, Sileby, Leicestershire. LE12 7PU

Railway Terrace, Loughborough, Leicestershire. LE11 1HW

All letters should follow this guidance

- Type your letter in Gill Sans font, in 11 point (or 18 point [or larger] for customers who need larger print) using the template above which can be found on our intranet;
- Give the full date in the following format: 'Thursday, 01 March 2007';
- Start your letter 'Dear Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr, etc ' You should only use 'Dear Sir or Madam' if you don't know whether the reader is male or female;
- Mailshots (letters to many people) should, where possible, use an appropriate opening (for example, 'Dear Tenant or Claimant');
- Try to begin with 'Thank you for your letter of [date], which we received on [date]';
- End with 'Yours sincerely' if the opening was 'Dear Mr or Mrs....' and 'Yours faithfully' if the opening was 'Dear Sir or Madam';
- Type your name, your manager's name or the name of whoever is appropriate at the bottom, leaving room for a signature. If you are signing for someone else, write 'pp - next to your signature (this means 'on behalf of');
- Envelopes should have typed addresses (using window envelopes, printed labels or printed onto the envelope).

All e-mails sent to the public should follow this guidance

- Always type in a relevant subject title;
- You should use 'Dear Mr or Mrs, etc' instead of 'Dear Sir or Madam';
- Include their reference and yours if necessary;
- Start with 'Thank you for contacting us' or some other opening line referring to their e-mail;
- Use an appropriate ending — 'Yours sincerely' or 'Yours faithfully';
- Add your e-mail signature using the standard e-mail signature template (see page 24);
- When attaching a document, make sure it is in a format the receiver can open;
- Be aware of copyright laws (see your IT code of conduct);
- Check your e-mail's format, tone, spelling, grammar and punctuation before sending it.

E-mail signature

- Your e-mail signature is as important as headed paper on posted letters. It tells the reader your full contact details and directs them to the website.
- Your signature should appear on all e-mails you send.
- You can set up the feature on Outlook using the standard template shown below:

Create and insert a signature in email messages

From the main Microsoft Outlook window, on the **Tools** menu, click **Options**, and then click the **Mail Format** tab.

In the **Compose in this message format** list the default is set at **Rich Text**, which should be left unless you want to change it.

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Under Signature , click Signatures , and then click New .
In the Enter a name for your new signature box, enter a name. This could be your name or anything else you want to call it.
Under Choose how to create your signature , select the option you want. If you have not previously created a signature you should click the first option Start with a blank signature .
Click Next .
In the Signature text box, type the text you want to include in the signature. As a minimum standard, this should include: Your name Your job title Your service/department Your telephone number Your email address The hours/days you work if you are part-time Weblink to CBC website: www.charnwood.gov.uk You can also paste text to this box from another document.
To change the paragraph or font format, select the text, click Font or Paragraph , and then select the options you want. These options are not available if you use plain text as your message format.
Click Finish when you are done editing the new signature.
Then click OK which returns you to the Mail Format tab.
Under Signatures , use the drop down box against Signature for new messages and Signature for replies and forwards to choose the signature that you want to use for new messages and for replies and forwards. You can create and use a different signature for each if you wish.
Click OK .
Your signature will be automatically added to new messages, replies and forwards.
To edit your message follow steps 1 to 3 above. In step 3 click Edit rather than New . Edit your message and click OK .

Best practice on sending e-mails

Remember that e-mails are letters too

If you wouldn't do or say something in a professional letter, don't do or say it in an e-mail:

- Don't use smiley faces or mood stamps;
- Don't write in CAPITALS;
- Don't copy in half a dozen people; unless really necessary;
- Don't enclose a picture of your dog;
- Don't send an e-mail trail with your last five letters, unless really necessary.

Confidentiality and sensitivity

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- Be aware that whatever you send could be sent to other people or even published on the internet (this is much easier to do with e-mails than paper letters). As a result, you should always be professional in the tone and language you use.
- Documents may be confidential if they contain information that:
 - is sensitive;
 - is about certain people;
 - has been received under a duty of confidentiality.
- If you need to send confidential information, you should send it by post.
- IT Support Services staff can give you more advice if you have to send confidential documents by e-mail.

Security

- It is possible for anyone to send an e-mail under another person's name;
- Where necessary and appropriate, check that directions or instructions you receive by e-mail are genuine, especially if the reply contains confidential or sensitive information.

IT code of conduct

This code applies to all staff and covers the use of our IT equipment, including e-mail and the internet. You can get the IT code of conduct from your manager, from Human Resources and on our intranet,

Copying in and replying to everyone

- Think before you copy in anyone or reply to everyone.
 - Would you copy in the same people if it were a letter sent by post?
 - Would you reply to everyone if it were a letter sent by post?
- Be aware that you cannot guarantee the identity of the person sending the e-mail or the identity of the person (or people) the sender may have copied in.

E-mail trails

An e-mail trail is the history of the original message sent that appears automatically when you reply to or forward an e-mail. It is very easy for an e-mail trail to be seen by people it was not originally written for. As a result, you might consider writing a new e-mail when replying to a member of the public. If you are concerned that the person won't remember what they wrote in their enquiry, you should refer to their enquiry as you would in a letter.

Attachments

- Always introduce your attached document with a message that explains why you are sending it;
- Be aware of sending large attachments that may be bigger than the size of your customer's mailbox. If it is too large for their mailbox, the e-mail may be returned as undelivered mail;
- Send attachments in a format that the customer can read. Not all computer software is compatible;

- When sending attachments, you should add the following line: 'If you have difficulty opening the attachment, ring or e-mail me on... and I can send it to you in another format.';
- Generally, most computer programs can read MS Word documents saved as 'text only' or 'rich text format' and MS Excel documents saved as 'text delineated' or 'comma separated'. For more information on sending documents in these formats, phone CSU Helpdesk on Ext 4777;
- By saving documents as 'text only', all formatting (including logos) will be lost. It may be better to offer to send the document by post if the customer is having difficulty viewing the file.

Writing and formatting e-mails

- E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text;
- Avoid using formatting or colours in your e-mails. The reader might not be able to view formatting, or find the formatting distracting (this includes photos, or moving or flashing text);
- Avoid using unnecessary CAPITALS, as it may appear that you are shouting;
- Check your spelling before sending the e-mail (turn on the spellcheck feature in Outlook).

Priority levels and follow-up flags

If you need to set the priority level of an e-mail or attach a follow-up flag, you must clearly explain why you are doing so in the e-mail. This is because when you send a letter by post, you would explain to the person why they needed to get back to you and when.

Managing e-mails when you are out of the office

- When you are out of the office for more than 24 hours, you need to arrange for your e-mails to be checked and for your customers to know who they can contact when you are not there. You should make the specific arrangements with your line manager.
- You should also set up an out-of-office message. An out-of-office message tells the person sending you an e-mail:
 - That you are not currently available;
 - When you will become available;
 - Who they can speak to instead.
- Rules Wizard and Out of Office Assistant are two tools you can use to set up out-of-office messages:
 - Rules Wizard allows you to set up specific rules for directing or responding to any incoming e-mail (external and internal). It can send a notice to the sender each time a message is received (telling the sender that you aren't available) and a number of other specific functions (for example, automatically forwarding e-mails to colleagues).
 - Out of Office Assistant will only send an out-of-office response to senders listed in the internal address book. The message will only be sent to the sender once during the time you have set to be away.

- For more information on setting up either of these functions, see MS Outlook Help or contact CSU Helpdesk on Ext 4777.

Faxes and compliment slips

Fax coversheets should:

- Be on black and white headed paper;
- Include your full name, phone number, fax number and e-mail address;
- Include the full name and address of person you are sending it to;
- Say what the fax is about using appropriate references.

Disclaimer for the fax coversheet

The fax coversheet should include the following disclaimer in case the fax is sent to or received by the wrong person. “This fax is to be read only by the addressee named above, its contents are confidential and may also be the subject of legal privilege. If you are not the intended recipient of this fax and it has therefore reached you by mistake, please notify this office immediately. You are hereby placed on notice that any copying, publication or any other form of dissemination of this fax or its contents is prohibited.”

Compliment slips

You should only use compliment slips with information you have posted if you don't need to send a full letter.

Compliment slips should:

- Be on headed paper;
- Include your name, section, e-mail address, fax number and phone number;
- Briefly say why you are sending the information you have enclosed.

Never use a compliment slip instead of a letter.

Logging correspondence

- Wherever possible you should log and monitor all correspondence (including letters and e-mails) to and from your customers (but not circulars and junk mail);
- You can use the electronic systems and software you have in your service or the corporate Customer Relationship Management software;
- Whatever system you use, it must be effective and accurate and include the following information:
 - The name of the person who sent the communication
 - How it was received;
 - The date it was received;
 - A brief description of the issue(s) raised;
 - The date and name of the person who sent an acknowledgment (if this applies);
 - The date and the name of the person who sent the response (if this applies);
 - A brief description of how the issue(s) was dealt with;
 - Any further actions or outcomes that took place as a result (including changes made to services);
 - Where the letter or e-mail is filed.

Storing correspondence

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- Your e-mail box has limited space. You should not store e-mails in your mailbox;
- When you no longer need the e-mail, you should store it in a personal or shared folder (depending on your service's requirements);
- Keep correspondence you have received and sent together, either electronically or on paper (for auditing purposes);
- Record where the file is stored as a part of your monitoring system.

Further support

If you need more information and support you can look on the intranet, speak to your manager or contact the Communications & Consultation team on extension 4603 or e-mail communication@charnwood.gov.uk.

Face-to-face communication

We need to ensure that the contact our customers have with the council and council staff is a positive experience. Our buildings should be bright and welcoming and our customers should find it easy to find the right information, the right person and the right place to go.

Standards for face-to-face communication

- Treat everyone as an individual;
- Greet people with 'Good morning, afternoon or evening';
- Give your customer your name;
- Be sensitive to the environment (that is, be aware of the privacy of the customer and their body language, what is happening in the area and so on);
- Be sensitive to the needs of your customer (based on their culture, religion, age, disability);
- Give your customer your full attention;
- Speak slowly and clearly;
- Be polite and listen to the customer's issue in full;
- Tell them what action needs to take place;
- Summarise the meeting to make sure you've covered all the points (provide a written summary for the customer if appropriate);
- End the conversation politely, provide relevant brochures or leaflets to take away, and remind the customer of any action they need to carry out.

Communicate effectively

If there appears to be communication difficulties between you and the person you are serving, you should work out with them the best way this can be improved.

- Be patient;
- Ask a colleague for help if needed;
- Use translator and interpreter services through our in-house language service or through Language Line;
- Arrange to invite people with hearing impairments to a private interview room or an area where there is less background noise or an induction loop available.

Appearance

- Wear your identity badge so that it is visible, especially on home visits and at customer service points;
- Have a neat and tidy appearance.

Meeting customers

- We meet customers in many different ways, from behind a customer service point, in an interview room and at their homes.
- These are the main standards that apply to meeting customers.

- Deal with the issue thoroughly and sensitively;
- Anticipate and offer further help if appropriate;
- Summarise the meeting and close it properly.

Dealing with the issue thoroughly and sensitively

- Make sure you deal with the issue thoroughly by making sure the person understands:
 - What we are going to do and when;
 - What we need them to do and by when;
 - What will happen next.
- Being sensitive means understanding the customer's point of view and meeting their needs:
 - Does the person have special needs such as eyesight or hearing difficulties?
 - Does the person need a translator at their next appointment?
 - Do they want to speak to you privately?

Reminder notes

Some services use reminder notes for their customers to sign and keep to ensure they understand what we need them to do and what they can expect from you.

Anticipate and offer further help if appropriate

As well as meeting the needs of why they came to see you, you should think about how else you could help them.

Summarising and closing the meeting properly

When you have come to the end of the meeting with the person, you should summarise it and close it appropriately.

- Summarise what you both discussed;
- Check they understand what is going to happen next;
- Check that they know what they have to do and when;
- Ask them if there is anything else you may be able to help with;
- Give them more information (such as your contact information, our website address, relevant brochures and so on);
- Thank them for coming in or seeing you;
- Show them to the exit (or, if you are at their property, ask to be shown out).

Tackling inequality

Tackling inequality is one of our overall aims. One way we can do this is to respond to people's needs as individuals. These needs may be based on cultural, religious or other grounds. A good example of this is offering to summarise your conversation in an accessible format for the person. For example, you could write down the information, offer to e-mail it to them, or arrange for translation services.

Personal Safety

Abusive customers

You have a right not to be harassed, threatened or abused by violent or aggressive customers. If you feel threatened in any way, you should:

- Politely ask the customer to stop their abusive or threatening behaviour;
- If the abuse continues, calmly tell them that security (or police) will be called and why (if you are on a house visit, you should leave immediately);
- If the abuse carries on, tell them you are calling security (or police) and do so;
- Make a note of what happened and tell your manager as soon as possible.

Corporate warning system

The Corporate Warning System is used to circulate/share information throughout the Council to ensure staff are made aware of any incidents of a violent or threatening nature and where it is felt that customers pose a genuine risk. The System reflects the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and health & safety best practice. You are encouraged to report any incident to your manager that you feel other staff should be made aware of.

Hate Incident Monitoring

A hate incident is any incident where you or someone else has been targeted because they or you are believed to be different, or any incident you believe was motivated by age, disability, gender, identity, race, religion, belief or sexual orientation. If you are subjected to or witness a hate incident you are encouraged to report it to your manager and the Community Safety team on extension 4920 or email community.safety@charnwood.gov.uk.

Home visits

Home visits are not necessarily a high-risk activity but the risk to you may be increased depending on who you are visiting and the reason for your visit. Significant risks should be assessed prior to home visits being made and any controls required to enhance your safety must be undertaken. Discuss any concerns you have with your manager and further information can be found in the intranet or by contacting Human Resources on extension 4506 or email HumanResources@charnwood.gov.uk.

Customer service points

Waiting times

For transactions from a customer service point, you should aim to serve all customers within 3 minutes of them arriving;

- For customer service points, you should aim to acknowledge all customers and the reason for their visit within 3 minutes of them arriving and they should see an appropriate person within 20 minutes of their arrival;
- Where customers have made an appointment, you should meet the customer within 3 minutes;
- Explain lengthy waits as soon as possible, giving an approximate waiting time.
- Ask your manager or other team members for help if:
 - the queue becomes too long;

- you expect to be busy with one customer for a while.

Helping people who have come to the wrong place

If someone has come to the wrong place:

- See if you can help them first before sending them somewhere else;
- Ring the place you are sending them to tell them their query. They can then confirm that they are the correct service provider to meet your customer's needs, and help them over the phone.

Displaying information in leaflets and on monitors and televisions

Information given to customers in leaflet format or displayed on monitors and televisions should follow our design standards. Phone our Communications & Consultation team on 01509 634603 or e-mail them at communication@charnwood.gov.uk.

Monitoring face-to-face contacts

We monitor our face-to-face contacts to show where we are keeping to our service standards and identify areas where services need to be improved. We collect this information by using our systems and databases and report on it through our performance management processes.

Further support

If you need more information and support regarding face-to-face communication you can look on the intranet, speak to your manager or contact the Customer Service Centre Manager on extension 4595 or e-mail customer.services@charnwood.gov.uk.

For more information or support regarding the Corporate Warning System you should speak to your manager or contact Community Safety on extension 4556 or email Corporate Warning Register@charnwood.gov.uk.

For more information or support regarding your personal safety you can speak to your manager, look on the intranet or contact Human Resources on extension 4506 or Human Resources @charnwood.gov.uk.

Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information Act 2000

Data Protection Act 1998

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, members of the public can, with certain exceptions, see all personal information we hold on them. The Act covers all information recorded about a person on paper or on a computer, and includes opinions and comments about that person. As a result, it is important to always think carefully and act professionally when corresponding with members of the public, or when referring to them in any written form. If a customer asks you to see the information we hold about them in files, please contact your manager and the Standards and Monitoring Support Officer on extension 4785 or e-mail FOI@charnwood.gov.uk.

The Act also requires the Council to obtain, hold, use and disclose all personal information in ways which comply with the eight data protection principles set out in the Act. More information can be found in the Council's Data Protection policy which is available on the Council's website and the intranet.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives people the general right to access all non-personal information we hold. We have developed our publication scheme to make it easier for members of the public to see information we hold and information about us. The scheme tells customers what information we publish, how they can get it and whether they will have to pay for it. If people want information that is not available through the publication scheme they can make a request for the information. Providing the information is not covered by an exemption or would take the Council an unreasonable amount of time to provide, the Council must provide the information within 20 working days. There are separate but similar regulations which deal with access to environmental information.

If a customer requests in writing (letter, e-mail or fax) information and refers to the Freedom of Information Act this request must be dealt with under the terms of the Act. Please forward any such request to the Standards and Monitoring Support Officer or e-mail FOI@charnwood.gov.uk.

Further support

If you need more information and support, or if a customer asks you to see the information we hold about them in files, please look on the intranet or contact your manager and the Standards and Monitoring Support Officer on extension 4785 or email FOI@charnwood.gov.uk.