

Area North Committee – 25 January 2012

12. Consultation on Proposed Customer Contact Guidelines

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Purpose of the Report

To consult with Area Committees on the proposed Customer Contact guidelines.

Public Interest

It is important to South Somerset District Council (SSDC) that our customers should know the standards of customer service that they should expect when they contact us either by phone or face to face in our offices, and what the Council expects of them. Currently these guidelines are on our website and in our area and community offices asking for public comments and feedback. The reason for taking the proposed guidelines to area committees is to ask for comments from elected councillors who can use their own experience with customers to inform their comments. In addition, parish and town councils are being asked for their comments. It should be noted that these guidelines only covers the quality of operational face to face access, and does not cover strategic or service issues including for example the number of access points or eventual service decisions.

Recommendation

That members comment on the proposals.

Background

SSDC has always been committed to putting customers and residents at the heart of everything we do. We aim for high quality yet value for money services, giving customers a real choice about how they contact us. When they do contact us, we aim to provide a high quality of customer care. There are some extremely good examples of customer care across the authority, these guidelines aim to build a consistent level of service across the council.

The other side of the coin is that our staff also expect certain standards of behaviour from customers. In recent months, there has been a worrying increase in the numbers of difficult and aggressive customers and this has proved extremely stressful for our staff. Several measures have been put in place to address this issue and the three authors of the report were tasked by the council's Corporate Performance Team to update the previous Customer Charter and give a clear message to customers about what behaviours will not be tolerated. It should be noted that these guidelines cover only the

face-to-face or phone interaction between SSDC staff and public. They do not cover specific service issues, which are already covered by service standards for each particular service.

What do we want to achieve?

- (1) The proposed guidelines are intended to concentrate on the positive and show a link between what the customer can expect from us and what we expect from the customer on each row of the guidelines.
- (2) A document that fits on one page of A4 paper and is not overly wordy.
- (3) A document that is written in a simple, easy to read format, using Plain English
- (4) A document that is developed together with our staff, councillors, parish and town councils and those who use our offices and website.

What is the process?

- (a) All of the council's managers have had the opportunity to feed into the draft document.
- (b) Staff, at recent team meetings, have been asked to comment and their views have already resulted in some amendments.
- (c) A survey incorporating the proposed guidelines is on the website, asking for users of the website to comment.
- (d) Hard copies are in our area and community offices and visitors are asked to comment if they wish to do so.
- (e) A copy has been sent to every parish and town council inviting comments.
- (f) All four area committees are being involved and asked to comment.
- (g) In March 2012, all the comments will be pulled together and where there is clear consensus the guidelines will be finalised.
- (h) All employees will then be made aware of the final Customer Contact guidelines and they will also be displayed in all our offices

Financial Implications

None arising from the report.

Corporate Priority Implications

None directly.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Full consideration to equalities has been given in producing these guidelines and a comprehensive consultation is in place to ensure all groups have the opportunity to respond.

Background Papers: None