

AREA WEST COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 2012

ITEM FOR INFORMATION

Should members have questions regarding any of the items please contact the officer shown underneath the relevant report. If, after discussing the item with the officer and it is felt appropriate, a member may request an item to be considered at a future Committee meeting.

Consultation on Proposed Customer Contact Guidelines

Strategic Director: Vega Sturgess, Operations and Customer Focus
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Elected members of the Council can bring a unique perspective to customer care. Members of Area West Committee are invited to comment on the new Customer Contact Guidelines (attached) and to encourage local councils in their ward to do so.

Comments on the content, style and layout are welcome until the end of February 2012 and should be made directly to Vega Sturgess (see above for contact details).

Background

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 the attached guidelines are on our website and in our area and community offices asking for public comments. In addition, parish and town councils are being asked for their comments. It should be noted that these guidelines only cover 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.

SSDC has always been committed to putting customers and residents at the heart of everything we do. We aim for high quality, value for money services that give customers a real choice about how they contact us and a high quality of customer care when they do. 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.

On the other side of the coin, our staff should expect reasonable standards of behaviour from customers. In recent months, there has been a worrying increase in the numbers of difficult and aggressive customers. This has proved extremely stressful for our staff. Several measures have been put in place to address this issue. The proposed Customer Contact guidelines aim to give a clear message to customers about behaviours that 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.

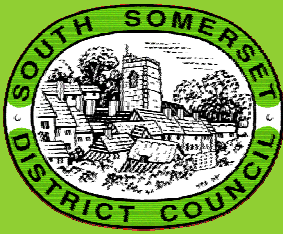
What do we want to achieve?

The proposed guidelines should

1. link the expectations of our customers and our staff.
2. fit on one page of A4 paper
3. be written in a simple, easy to read format, using Plain English
4. be 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.



Customer Contact

Important to you

Important to us

**We care about the quality of our contact with you.
You play an important role in this.**

The Council	The Customer
What you expect of us:	What we expect from you:
Be polite, welcoming and professional	Be polite and respectful
Provide face to face and phone contact during working hours and any time on our website	Use the contact method that you prefer
Provide a high quality customer contact	Recognise that we have busy times and cannot always solve a problem straight away
Listen carefully to what you have to say and do our best to help you	Understand that we can't always give you the answer or result you want
Find the right person to answer your query	Accept you may have to be transferred to someone else to resolve your query
Keep appointments with you	Keep your appointments with us or let us know if you can't
Put things right if they go wrong and learn from our mistakes	Help us improve our service by telling us when we get things wrong
Be clear about the information we need from you	Respond straight away to our requests wherever possible
Provide you with good help and advice	Please tell us if you are unsure about our advice
Treat you as an individual	Remember we are people too
Recognise that you sometimes need to contact us when you are unhappy about something	Behave in a way that does not harass or upset anyone
To allow you to make complaints about our service. Just ask for a form or use our website.	To recognise that we may need to ask you to alter your behaviour or ask you to contact us when you are less upset