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# Briefing Note – Customer Charter Refresh

<b>Produced for:</b>	Executive 19 September 2024
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## 1 Purpose of the Briefing

- 1.1 To review and refresh the formal public-facing Customer Charter created in 2022.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 In 2022, the current Customer Charter (Appendix A) was developed as an output of the Communications & Engagement Strategy. Two years on, and considering our current Council Strategy, it is appropriate that we revisit the content and style to ensure it remains aligned with our strategic objectives and we review how well it is embedded in the organisation.
- 2.2 Prior to the introduction of the Charter in 2022, a significant amount of work was undertaken, including a full consultation exercise, to consider the appropriate criteria and service standards which underpin good customer service. This review does not propose any fundamental changes as the content of the Charter remains relevant but despite efforts at the time, it is still not widely referred to or embedded in the authority.
- 2.3 It is proposed that this refresh incorporate a slight rebranding and a supporting communications campaign to revitalise the Charter and ensure that customers remain at the core of all services across the council. The refresh exercise is not subject to consultation given the principles of good customer service remain unchanged there is no requirement to reconsult.
- 2.4 As stated above, the commitments are essentially unchanged and align with our [Priority Area 1 \(Services We are Proud of\) Goal 1A](#) 'Ensure West Berkshire Council offers good customer service to our residents and business'. The Charter centres on how the council delivers its services to customers and sets out clear service standards which customers can expect, regardless of the method of contact which include;
- Telephone
  - Email or letter
  - Social media
  - At our offices
  - In their homes/ the community

- 2.5 It also sets out how customers can escalate their concerns, compliments, or feedback so that we can resolve issues and use this to further improve service delivery. Most recently we have enabled call recording through our new telephony system which will further aid our training and monitoring capabilities.
- 2.6 The final part of the Charter seeks to outline what we ask of our customers in return to perform our roles effectively and help them in a timely manner.

### 3 Current Status and Refresh Option

- 3.1 The original Charter was rolled out with a view to supporting the culture of good customer service being the responsibility of the entire organisation. All teams interact with customers, either directly with residents and suppliers, or internal customers. Whilst this has been successful up to a point, some two years on as it is not fully embedded in the consciousness of the organisation or our customers. Adult Social Care have created their own Charter which would indicate there is a lack of awareness that the corporate Charter exists, or that they feel they require a specialist version, given the nature of the services they provide but this should complement the council's main customer Charter. There are also other areas of the organisation who have expressed an interest in creating a Charter to enhance their offer to customers so a corporate Customer Charter may well suffice for those services and prevent duplication of effort.
- 3.2 The introduction of the Behaviour Framework provides us with another opportunity to strengthen the status of the Charter across the council and the refresh will remind everyone of our commitment to our communities. The Behaviour Framework will be embedded into the performance framework for the organisation and this too enhances the focus on customer service across all services of the council ensuring everyone commits to delivering good customer service. It is further supported by the Council's Strategic priorities and Delivery Plan as outlined in 2.4.
- 3.3 Customer Focus is one of the three main corporate values in [the Behaviour Framework](#) alongside two main behaviours around **Customer Excellence** for everyone through;
- Working to understand individual customer needs
  - Being proactive and deliver on my promises made to customers
  - Understanding and displaying excellent and consistent customer service
  - Keeping customers informed of progress and;
  - Being honest about what I can deliver to manage customer service expectations
- 3.4 **Responsibility and Accountability** for everyone through;
- Taking responsibility for my own actions and wellbeing and act with integrity and honesty
  - Doing what is right and act in a way that supports WBC as a whole not just my area
  - Acting objectively and take decisions impartially and fairly without discrimination or bias
  - Taking decisions in an open and transparent manner
  - Recognising and understanding the impact of my own behaviours and emotions on others

- 3.5 The Charter also sits alongside other activity designed to transform how customers interact with us through the continuation of digital self-service routes being developed and promoted and understanding the importance of ensuring the experience is consistent, regardless of how they choose to contact us.

## 4 Refresh options

- 4.1 Research across other councils shows that there are many options available in terms of the customer Charter could be presented and feedback indicates that the existing version is very text heavy, so we have opted to simplify it and use graphics to enhance its appeal. It is important to make the Charter eye-catching to draw people's attention to reading the basic messages we wish to convey. The detail of how we will provide that level of service will be contained in a supporting leaflet and available on the website in time.
- 4.2 Appendix B shows a mock-up of the potentially simplified version which still contains the core messages about what the customer can expect and what we expect of them but is less text heavy. It can be displayed in windows, receptions and libraries, as the current version is but the more detailed content could be available in a smaller DL paper leaflet for those who wish to read more, as shown at Appendix C.
- 4.3 By way of background to this paper, other council examples were reviewed and a separate Appendix D (available upon request) was shared with Members and officers setting out different styles, although many have simply opted to have the Charter available on their websites with no other supporting documentation, although Gosport offer a leaflet for customers, as proposed for West Berkshire. The content itself though is similar across all of them and from initial conversations and Operations Board feedback, this style appears to be favoured.

## 5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The existence of a customer Charter which was designed, produced, and agreed upon by all service teams in the council demonstrates our commitment to the communities of West Berkshire. Taking the time to revisit and reflect on its contents and relaunch it also shows we are serious about maintaining the high standards of customer service and supports our council priorities.
- 5.2 The council is facing huge financial pressures and our focus on improving digital services and responding to requests in the most cost effective way continues to drive how we adapt and deliver our services. Throughout all that change, it is important to show the public that we are listening to them and making ourselves available to support them when and how they need us.

## 6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Executive Members review the revised documents (Appendices A-C) and provide approval to proceed with the revised version.
- 6.2 The revised document will be produced, uploaded on the website, printed copies produced for reception, libraries, museums etc at minimal cost to the council.

- 6.3 A small, but targeted communications campaign, will be developed to get the refreshed version out to customers on WhatsApp, Let's Chat, other social media channels and relaunched on our website, amongst other options to assist with embedding the new version and how it links with our behaviour and performance management frameworks.

## **7 Appendices**

- 7.1 Appendix A – the current Customer Charter
- 7.2 Appendix B – the proposed simplified refresh Charter poster
- 7.3 Appendix C – supporting leaflet
- 7.4 Appendix D – available on request but due to the length is not included here.

# West Berkshire Council Customer Service Charter

We want our district to be a great place to live, work, learn and visit, as outlined in our Council Strategy, and for our customers to have the best possible experience. In our Customer Charter we let you know how we will interact with you when you contact us.

## Our commitment to you and how we will work together

We will	In return, we ask that you
be polite and open	treat our staff politely
listen to you and respect your needs	inform us if you are unhappy with the service you receive and let us have feedback if we have done well
treat all customers fairly and equally	treat our offices with respect so that everyone can enjoy them
make sure that our employees are trained to give you the advice that you need	let us know in good time if you need to cancel or rearrange an appointment
use easy to understand language and provide information in other languages or formats on request	tell us if you need information in another language or format
deal with your personal information sensitively and in accordance with data protection requirements	ensure we have up to date details for you and your household
	make use of our online portal, if you can, to carry out transactions

### When you write to us, we will:

- aim to respond within 15 working days by post dependent on mail providers.
- acknowledge receipt of your letter if you provide an email address or contact telephone number

### When you call us, we will:

- answer calls to our switchboard within **2 minutes**
- greet you politely
- tell you who you are speaking to and the name of the service or place you are calling
- put calls through to the right place first time
- arrange a call back if we are not able to put you through
- return your messages within **24 hours**

### When we visit you, we will:

- arrive on time
- wear name badges or carry identification
- provide our contact details and clearly explain follow up actions, where appropriate

### When you e-mail us, we will:

- provide an automatic response to all enquiries received to generic email addresses
- We will respond **within the timescales laid out in this automated response**
- acknowledge your email within **2 working days** and confirm what will happen next when emailing all other council email addresses

### When you contact us on social media, we will:

- provide an acknowledgement where requested
- give you details of who is dealing with your enquiry
- if you ask us a question, we will respond within **24 hours** when our offices are open'

### When you visit us, we will:

- create an environment that is welcoming
- provide clear signage
- make sure you are greeted within **1 minute** of your arrival
- provide self service facilities where appropriate, including access to relevant IT equipment
- provide private areas where you can discuss confidential matters
- start meetings on time

### When dealing with complaints, comments and compliments, we will:

- provide you with information about how to report a complaint, comment or compliment
- record your feedback and use it to improve our services
- respond to complaints within **15 working days**
- treat complaints confidentially and fairly
- inform you how you can take your complaint further if you are not satisfied
- apologise when we are at fault and work to put things right

### We will keep customers informed and involved by:

- publishing accurate, useful and up to date information
- providing information in other languages and formats on request
- publishing customer service performance data
- reviewing our customer standards every year
- using your feedback to help us make decisions

Our services commit to these standards during their hours of operation. If your enquiry is an out of hours emergency, please call 01635 42161 where your call will be answered promptly.



# West Berkshire Customer Charter

## West Berkshire is a great place to live, work and visit

Our Customer Charter sets out how we will interact with you and value your opinion to ensure we deliver great customer service, value for money and put you at the heart of everything we do.

### This Charter is our commitment to you

#### We promise to...

- Be polite, open, and friendly
- Listen and respect your needs
- Treat all customers fairly and equally
- Be responsive, helpful, and courteous
- Make sure our teams are trained to help with your needs
- Deal with your personal data sensitively
- Use easy to understand language and provide other formats if needed

#### In return we ask that you...

- Treat our staff politely and with respect
- Inform us if you are unhappy with the service you receive and let us have feedback if we have done well
- Treat our offices with respect so that everyone can enjoy them
- Tell us if you need information in a different format or language
- Make use of our online portal wherever you can to conduct transactions and seek advice
- Keep us up to date about changes in your circumstance or household

If you would like to know more about our commitment to you or details on how we can support you in all forms of communication visit [www.westberks.gov.uk](http://www.westberks.gov.uk)

## Appendix C – proposed supporting leaflet

# West Berkshire Customer Charter

*West Berkshire is a great  
place to live, work and visit*

Our Customer Charter sets out how, when using council services, we will interact with you and value your opinion to ensure we deliver great customer service, value for money and put you at the heart of everything we do.



*This Charter is our  
commitment to you*



### We promise to...

- be polite, open, and friendly
- listen and respect your needs
- treat all customers fairly and equally
- be responsive, helpful, and courteous
- make sure our teams are trained to help with your needs
- offer a variety of ways to access our services, including a quicker and easier online experience
- deal with your personal data sensitively
- use easy to understand language and provide other formats if needed

### When you call our contact centre or switchboard on 01635 551111....

- we will answer your calls within 2 minutes (*please bear in mind this may not be possible during our busy periods, or for our more complex services but we will let you know where you are in the queue and offer you an alternative way to contact us or request a call back*)
- if you request a call back, when we return your call, you can expect our staff to state their first name, their department and their reason for calling.
- we aim to answer your query first time wherever possible
- if we have to transfer your call, we will tell you who we are transferring you to and ensure they are available before connecting you

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- we may record your call for training and monitoring purposes
- we will be available during our published opening hours
- out of hours, your call will be transferred to our 'out of hours' service for emergencies

### When you call a direct dial number or contact a service directly.....

- we will answer your call within 1 minute
- if your call is unanswered for any reason, you will be able to leave a voicemail. We will respond to your voicemail messages before the close of business on the next working day. If we are out of the office, within 24 hours of our return

### When you visit us and use our face to face services we will....

- welcome you within 1 minute
- ensure our reception areas are comfortable, clean, tidy, and accessible
- provide helpful advice and information
- keep your waiting time to a minimum whenever possible

### When we visit you we will....

- ensure that, where appropriate, it is by prior agreement at a time and place mutually agreeable to both parties
- aim to arrive promptly
- ensure that all staff visiting have an ID badge with the council logo name/team

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When you contact us by email or letter we will.....

- provide an automatic acknowledgement to all generic email addresses
- respond within the timescales set out in the response email
- confirm how your query will be dealt with and by whom as well as any further steps
- respond to your letters within 15 working days by post (dependent on mail providers)

When using our online services and website, we will....

- ensure our systems are available 24/7
- ensure the information provided is up to date, relevant and easily accessible
- ensure we offer help and support to enable you to use our online services
- consistently review our online services to improve your experience
- encourage your feedback and provide a route for you to do so
- provide you with council news, information and keep you updated with decisions and consultations

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When you use our social media channels, we will....

- provide an acknowledgement if you have made a service request
- aim to respond within 24 hours when our premises are open (working hours)
- provide you with useful information such as highway closures, or events

When using our social media channels, we ask you to...

- treat our staff and officers with respect
- behave responsibly with regard to offensive language, behaviour, and comments

When dealing with complaints, comments, and compliments, we will:

- provide you with information about how to report a complaint or compliment
- record your feedback and use it to improve our service provision
- respond to complaints within 20 working days
- treat complaints confidentially and fairly
- inform you how to take your complaint further if you are not satisfied

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- apologise when we are at fault and work to make things right
- ensure that compliments and comments are passed onto the relevant recipient

For Freedom of Information requests, we will.....

- acknowledge receipt of the request
- supply FOI responses within 20 working days, except in exceptional circumstances.
- Reserve the right to decline the request if it will take an unreasonable amount of time to collate the information or it is not available

In return we ask that you

- treat our staff politely and with respect
- inform us if you are unhappy with the service you receive and let us have feedback if we have done well
- treat our premises with respect so that everyone can enjoy them
- tell us if you need information in a different format or language
- make use of our online portal wherever you can to conduct transactions and seek advice
- Keep us up to date about changes in your circumstance or household

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