

## **Guildford Borough Council**

Report to: Executive

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director: Place

Author: Nicola Haymes, Executive Head of Communication and Customer Service

Tel: 01483 444 500

Email: nicola.haymes@guildford.gov.uk

Lead Councillor responsible: Angela Goodwin

Tel: 01483 824616

Email: angela.goodwin@guildford.gov.uk

Report Status: Open

# **Customer Services Charter**

## **1. Executive Summary**

Our customer charter sets out the service our customers, both internal and external can expect to receive when interacting with us. This charter applies to all customer interactions across the organisation, not just those undertaken through our customer service centres, and covers online, email, phone and in person.

The current charter has been in place a significant amount of time and is no longer fit for purpose for the world that we now operate in and did not strongly reflect the digital contact that is now in place. To ensure that this is fit for purpose it has been reviewed. This report sets out the updated proposed customer charter.

Please note: the charter has been reviewed alongside Waverley Borough Council's customer charter with a view to harmonise approaches at both council's as part of collaboration. A paper will also be going forward to Waverley's Executive for consideration.

## **2. Recommendation to Committee**

That the Committee adopts the new charter for implementation

## **3. Reason(s) for Recommendation:**

- 3.1. It is important that we have a customer charter in place that supports our customers and ensures that we are able to clearly manage expectations for our residents when they contact us.
- 3.2. The current one is no longer fit for purpose and needs to be updated.

## **4. Exemption from publication**

- 4.1 None.

## **5. Purpose of Report**

- 5.1. To provide the executive with the opportunity to comment on the proposed new harmonised customer charter.

## **6. Strategic Priorities**

- 6.1. Customer services is at the heart of what we do at Guildford Borough Council, acting as the front door to the council for our residents.
- 6.2. Customer services contributes to the councils' values of listening to the views of our residents and delivering excellent customer service.

## **7. Background**

- 7.1 The current customer charter can be found on the Guildford Borough Council website. [Corporate Customer Charter - Guildford Borough Council](#)
- 7.2 The charter has been in place for quite some time, and although it was reviewed as part of the Future Guildford project, significant changes in how customers interact with us particularly in the digital space means that there was a need to review this.
- 7.3 As part of this review other Surrey councils were contacted to benchmark their standards. Of those that responded most had longer response times than in our charter and many were looking to further change their customer charters to be more in line with customer service levels within private sector that reflect wider customer expectations outside of the public sector.

## **8. Creating a mutual relationship with our customers**

- 8.1 One of the key changes in this charter is that as well as setting out how our customers can expect to interact with us, we have also set out our expectations regarding customer contact with us.
- 8.2 The revised charter provides an opportunity to form a relationship with our customers that is based on mutual respect in all interactions between customers and the council.
- 8.3 Whilst many of our customers treat our staff with respect, post covid there has been an increase in negative behaviour towards officers from customers verbally, in writing and in person. This is not unique to Guildford as a council but something that is also being reflected from other district and boroughs as well as the private retail sectors. It is important to us that we are publicly demonstrating that we will not tolerate negative behaviour and abuse towards our staff and the charter is part of the way that we can do this, supported by the vexatious, malicious, and persistent complainant policy.

## **9. Harmonisation**

- 9.1 How we interact with our customers is extremely important and it is important that we have high customer service standards in place.
- 9.2 As we work more closely together with Waverley Borough Council it is important that staff are following the same approach to customers at both locations to better help closer collaborative working.
- 9.3 As both councils charters were in need of a refresh and in order to help facilitate collaborative working moving forward this charter has been reviewed at both locations with the review to be implemented in a harmonised way across both.
- 9.4 The charters do also follow best practice customer approach so would also work as a stand-alone charter for both councils.

## **10. Consultations**

- 10.1 The Lead Councillor for Engagement and Customer Services has been consulted on this report and approved its submission to the Committee
- 10.2 CMB and the joint management team have also been consulted and provided feedback on the charter.
- 10.3 The Lead councillor at Waverley Borough Council has also been consulted

## **11. Key Risks**

- 11.1 Customer service covers all contact that a customer has with the council, not just those that are via the customer service centre. There is a risk that the level of service is not replicated across all council departments. By having the updated, fit for purpose charter that is implemented across all services would help to mitigate this risk.

## **12. Financial Implications**

12.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **13. Legal Implications**

13.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## **14. Human Resource Implications**

14.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

14.2 There is training and wellbeing support available to staff to support them with dealing with and managing the impact of interactions with difficult or aggressive customers.

## **15. Equality and Diversity Implications**

15.1 The charter does not limit any routes of contact for customers whether digital or in person. Any future changes to the service will have regard to the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) and may be subject to an equalities impact assessment

## **16. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications**

16.1 There are no climate change or sustainability implications arising from this report

## **17. Summary of Options**

17.1 Approve recommended customer charter for adoption

17.2 Reject the revised customer charter

17.3 Approve the recommended customer charter with requested amendments

## **18. Conclusion**

We know that there is always more we can do to make improvements to the service we offer our customers. We will continue to strive for improvements and work with customers and councillors to ensure that what we are doing meets the needs of our residents.

An updated charter, that is harmonised with Waverley will allow us to further embed a strong customer services culture across the council and the partnership.

We would encourage councillors to share any ideas or feedback you receive from residents on improvements we can make with us via email and would welcome your input.

## **19. Background Papers**

19.1 None

## **20. Appendices**

20.1 Proposed Customer Charter