

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Social Work Committee - 23 August 2004

REPORT ON: Social Work Customer Care Standards

REPORT BY: Director of Social Work

REPORT NO: 578 - 2004

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The report informs members about the proposed new Customer Care Standards which have been compiled with the aim of improving customer service throughout the social work department.

The standards in draft form have benefited from a public consultation process through the council's website and focus groups. Citizens, customers and staff of the department have been encouraged and enabled to comment on the standards prior to finalisation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work Committee:

2.1 note and approve for adoption the standards appended to this report (appendix 1)

2.2 instruct the Director of Social Work to make arrangements for the implementation of these standards

2.3 instruct the Director of Social Work to publicise widely the contents of the standards and make arrangements of the monitoring of their implementation

2.4 instruct the Director of Social Work to carry out an annual review of the Customer Care Standards and report to the Social Work Committee

2.5 instruct the Director of Social Work to work towards achieving the National Charter Mark award

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The financial implications arising from this report will be minimal and will be contained within existing resources.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Improving the service to the public and enabling effective feedback from service users is consistent with the principles and values expressed in the Agenda 21 programme.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Customer Care Standards apply to all care groups, their carers and their representatives.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

- 6.1 Dundee City Council is advanced in the process of developing a customer service approach in relation to citizen contact and enquiries. This work is informed by a customer survey, which was conducted during 2003. The survey included the most frequently contacted council services as remembered by responders, which were; Financial Services; Housing Services; Contract Services; Cleansing Services; Environmental Services and Planning and Building Control.

The Social Work Department also has substantial customer contact at what can be an intensive level, meeting and supporting customers who rely on a professional and caring approach. The standards appended to this report were developed through an extensive consultation process both internal and external. All staff in the department were invited to comment on the draft standards and the final version reflects their views and comments. The draft standards were also made available to the general public including existing customers of the social work department through publication on the council's website.

In addition consultation focus groups of customers from a wide variety of social work services examined the standards and suggested changes. As a result of the considerable influence from citizens, customers and staff the standards will express the Social Work Department's commitment to customers through positive accessibility; respect; effective communication; involvement and partnership.

The Customer Care philosophy of "listen, learn and improve" will be applied throughout the service. The standards to be applied are mutually understandable by customers and workers, clearly stating to customers the standard of service they can expect. They will give the guidance and targets necessary for staff to meet these expectations. There is an emphasis on first contact efficiency and the opportunity for customers to give continuous feedback on how we are doing. There will be support and reinforcement of a good service culture through induction programmes for new staff: workplace mentoring and relevant training.

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) were consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 None.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

Date: 12 August 2004

Proposed Customer Care Policy Statement and Standards

Policy Statement

Our approach to customer care is to aim to get things right first time. We will continually look at ways that will improve our service by listening to customers, by monitoring our performance and by adopting examples of best practice from other organisations.

We will base our understanding of customer's needs and expectations on effective feedback and consultation. We will achieve this through customer involvement in the finalisation of these draft standards; customer surveys and by using customer feedback mechanisms.

Customer Care Standards

The standards we employ will be mutually understandable by customers and staff, clearly stating to customers the standard of service they can expect. They will give the guidance and targets necessary for staff to meet these expectations. Achieving this will require a more active approach to induction and training.

Dundee City Council Social Work Customer Care Standards are intended to give both customers and staff clear expectations and guidance in the following key areas:

- **Contact with Customers**
- **Complaints from Customers**
- **Customer Enquiries**
- **Customer Comments and Feedback**
- **A Positive Commitment to Customer Care**

Contact with Customers.

In our Offices

We will:

- Have user-friendly public offices, with clean and tidy reception areas.
- Provide up-to-date leaflets giving relevant information that is clear and easy to understand.
- Have clear signs and display our opening hours in all our offices.
- Clearly display how a complaint can be made.
- Clearly display information on the Translation and Interpreting Service and provide contact information in minority languages.
- Have induction loops in all our public offices within five years.
- Provide private interview rooms.

On the phone

We will:

- Answer the phone within seven rings whenever possible.
- Clearly announce our name and greet the caller courteously
- Be attentive in our listening.
- Deal with enquiries or complaints on the spot if we can.
- Say what we can do and when, or tell the customer why we can't help and guide them to the appropriate department.
- Return calls within one working day, if the person needed is not in the office
- If the customer calls us in error we will transfer the call to the appropriate person, or will offer to take the customer's details and ask the appropriate person to call the customer back.

Letters and e-mails

We will:

- Answer letters and e-mails within 10 working days of receiving them, or keep the customer updated if a full answer will take longer.
- Make our letters clear and easy to understand.
- Arrange for letters to be translated, explained verbally, or made available in large print or Braille if requested.

Face to face

We will:

- See the customer within five minutes if an appointment has been arranged.
- Say how long the wait might be and who will see the customer if an appointment has not been arranged.
- Offer to make an appointment if the customer can't wait.
- Carry and show identification badges.
- Offer somewhere private to talk if appropriate.
- Offer to fill in forms if help is needed.
- Write to the customer not less than four days prior to a home visit, unless this will cause an unacceptable delay.
- Identify ourselves as Social Work Department employees before entering any home by showing photographic identification.
- Explain the purpose of the visit.
- Be polite, friendly and conduct our business efficiently.
- Let the customer know what is likely to happen as a result of our visit.

Complaints from Customers

We Will

- When revising the complaints leaflet and poster, refer to views and comments from customers.
- Ensure widespread publicity and guidance to customers about making a complaint.
- Meet the response timescales set out in the department's complaints procedure.
- Keep the complainant informed during the process of investigation.
- Put things right quickly if they are wrong.
- Learn by careful analysis of all aspects of each complaint.
- Be fair, thorough and open minded in our investigations.
- Use information from the analysis of complaints to continuously improve our service.
- Value customer complaints as important feedback on our performance.

Customer enquiries

We will

- Provide up to date and comprehensive information describing our range of services, clearly displayed in our reception areas and within the Council's website.
- Ensure that reception staff in our public offices are able to respond to a wide range of enquiries.
- Helpfully redirect enquirers to the relevant department or section if necessary.

Customer comments and feedback

We will

- Welcome customer comments and feedback to help us identify strengths and weaknesses in the quality and efficiency of the service we provide.
- Carry out surveys from time to time to find out how well our customers think we are doing in various key areas of our service.
- Devise and install a system, which will give customers an opportunity to give comment and feedback on a continuous basis.
- All positive comments will be fed back to staff.

Our Positive Commitment to Customers

We will

- Make sure that our services are accessible to customers.
- Treat customers in a caring manner.
- Treat customers fairly and with equity.

- Provide a good quality service and strive to get it right first time.
- Be transparent, open and honest in our approach.
- Ensure confidentiality and privacy are maintained at all times.
- Listen to what customers have to say and learn from this.
- Promote a climate of mutual respect between customer and staff.
- Train our staff.

Monitoring and Measurements

We will

- Undertake reality research.
- Ring tests for telephone response.
- Schedule visits to departmental public offices
- Use customer feedback/comments cards.
- Conduct customer surveys.
- Implement effective customer feedback principles.

Future Strategy

Charter Mark

An organisation that wants to make a significant impact on customer care must make a strategic commitment towards achieving Charter Mark.

- Charter Mark is the flagship of the Citizens Charter initiative, which was launched in 1992. Its purpose is to raise the standards of public services and make them more responsive to the wishes and needs of the user.
- Charter Mark is an award and recognition for organisations, which provide an excellent and innovative service to the public. It is described as a seal of approval, which shows that an organisation puts its users first.
- Charter Mark is important as the both central and local government are committed to modernising public services. People have a right to good quality, convenient and responsive services. These services should focus on the customer and give help to those in need fairly and effectively.
- Charter Mark provides both a stimulus and a means for organisations to raise their performance. In particular it has encouraged a wide range of public bodies to focus their attention on improving the standard of service they provide.

In order to plan toward the Charter Mark standard the Department would be required to undertake action under six main criteria.

1) Set standards and perform well

We need to show that the Department:

- sets clear service and performance standards in consulting with customers;
- meets those standards;
- monitors and reviews performance against standards and publishes the results; and
- designs, puts into practice and monitors standards with as little unnecessary paperwork and administration as possible.

2) Actively engage with your customers, partners and staff

We need to show that the Department:

- actively works with (engages with) customers, partners and staff to make sure it delivers high-quality services;
- consults and involves present and potential customers of public services, partners and staff;
- is open, and communicates clearly and effectively in plain language and in a number of different ways; and
- provides full information about services, their cost and how well they perform.

3) Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice

We need to show that the Department:

- makes services easily accessible to everyone who needs them, offering choice wherever possible;
- treats everyone fairly in access to services and service delivery, and pays particular attention to people with special needs.

4) Continuously develop and improve

We need to show that the Department:

- always looks for ways to improve services and facilities, particularly when using technology;
- puts things right quickly and effectively;
- learns from, and improves as a result of, complaints, compliments and suggestions; and
- has a clear, well publicised and easy-to-use complaints procedure, with the opportunity for independent review wherever possible.

5) Use resources effectively and imaginatively

For the Department's main activities, we need to show that:

- our financial management is effective; and
- we use resources effectively and imaginatively to provide best value for taxpayers service users.

6) Contribute to improve opportunities and quality of life in the communities we serve

We need to show that the Department:

- has reviewed and is aware of its impact and potential usefulness in the local and national communities we serve; and
- has made some contribution to enriching the social or economic life or the physical life of those communities, beyond the strict requirement of excellent service delivery, through positive, discretionary initiatives and imaginative use of resources.

It is apparent that achieving a Charter Mark award will take considerable time and effort. However, in keeping with similar awards, the effort can bring considerable improvements to the participating organisation. It is important that we have systems in place to measure our results in order that we can monitor our progress towards an award.