

Transportation Customer care strategy



WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL delivers

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TRANSPORTATION **CUSTOMER CARE STRATEGY**

INTRODUCTION

Good customer care is the responsibility of everyone and the aim of this strategy is to provide guidance to staff that will enable them to deal with customers effectively.

We should treat customers with honesty and respect. Remembering the council's values:

- focus on our customers needs;
- being open and accountable;
- providing equality of opportunities;
- developing employees;
- making best use of resources; and
- working in partnership.

Any one of us may be the only contact a customer has with the council and the council will be judged on our performance.

The key customer care principles are:

- be welcoming, attentive and courteous;
- be honest and fair in dealing with customers;
- respond quickly to requests for assistance;
- provide services that are fair and accessible to all;
- set and publish standards;
- record, monitor and publish comments and complaints;
- ensure complaints are dealt with efficiently and fairly;
- actively seek the views of customers and staff;
- explain services and keep the public informed of what is happening;
- review our customer and staff commitment;
- help our communities; and
- share good practice.

The aim of this strategy is to show how we will deliver quality services by adopting high standards across the service and address sensitively the needs of our customers.

Transportation is committed to providing fair and equal access to services that focus on our customers needs; are honest, open and accountable; and are reliable, courteous and effective.

Who are our customers?

Our customers are the people we come into contact with during our work time. This includes people who:

- live in West Lothian;
- work in West Lothian;
- run a business in West Lothian;
- visit or travel through West Lothian;
- elected members and community representatives; and
- agents who act on their behalf.

Our customer care principles will also apply when dealing with colleagues in the council and partner organisations.

What is customer care and why is it important?

We are all here to provide a public service. Customer care is all about treating other people the same way you would like to be treated. People want accessible, efficient services and we must all strive to meet these demands.

Customer care means providing a good quality service in a friendly, efficient and helpful way, continually striving to improve services, by ensuring good communication and a positive attitude to customers.

Whatever the situation, our customers have the right to be treated with dignity, respect and courtesy. In all cases we should provide our customer with as much information as possible, and if a service is not available an explanation must be given.

Highlighting areas of good practice

There are many areas of good practice across the service. It is important that these are highlighted:

- we need to acknowledge the hard work and innovation displayed by staff;
- if something is working well in one area of the service it may be possible for other areas to follow this example; and
- we need to introduce systems so that good practice can be communicated to all staff.

SERVICE STANDARDS

As a part of our commitment to continuous improvement our Service Standards will be reviewed regularly and revised in line with this strategy and also in line with customer consultation.

The council's transport vision is:

"To provide all people who live, work and visit West Lothian with a genuine choice of transport which fulfils their needs and provides opportunities for access to work, health, retail and leisure on a sustainable basis."

Our aim is to support the council in delivering this vision by providing a quality service that is continually improving. To help us achieve this staff should:

- *answer phone calls promptly;*
- *be courteous and acknowledge initial communication within five working days;*
- *give as much information and immediate advice as possible to the customer;*
- *advise the customer of the officer who will deal with their request and give their contact details;*
- *investigate the inquiry and take action as deemed appropriate to the inquiry; and*
- *keep the customer up to date about what we are doing on their behalf.*

Dealing with the customer

Our customers can contact us in many ways:

- in person
- by telephone
- by e-mail,
- in writing
- by fax
- through third parties, e.g. community councils, elected member or MSP

It is important that we respond in an appropriate way to our customers preferred method of communication.

Dealing with correspondence

When dealing with correspondence:

- if a full response is not possible at the first point of contact we must inform our customer of the delay;
- outline how we intend to progress their inquiry giving the name and contact details of the member of staff dealing with it along with the time scale for a full reply; and
- if we are unable to meet this time scale then we must inform our customer of this giving a further time scale for us to respond.

E-mails

Before going on leave, remember to:

- set your *out of office assistant* facility;
- include where help can be obtained whilst you are away; and
- ensure you display the dates you will be absent.

Follow the guidelines on using Plain English.

Answering the telephone

When answering the telephone staff should:

- aim to answer all calls within 20 seconds (approximately four rings);
- aim to respond to all initial communications within five working days;
- take responsibility for every call. Take the caller's name and contact details, give your name and inform the caller what you can do to help or when you, or a colleague, will get back to them with a response;
- if it is not possible to deal with an enquiry at the first point of contact make arrangements for the appropriate member of staff to contact the caller;
- if away from their desk, make suitable arrangements for any telephone contact;
- keep a notepad and pen by your phone and offer to take a message if you are answering a call for someone who is unavailable or help the caller yourself if you are able to;
- try not to interrupt the caller. Ask them to repeat a message if you do not understand; and
- be polite rather than aggressive but don't be afraid to say no. There are times when staff will need to be firm with a caller in order to help them.

Remember, the council believes that employees should not be subject to verbal abuse or threats of violence. If you are subjected to either of these the caller should be advised that you will terminate the call if the behaviour continues. If you have to terminate the call then complete a case report, noting the details of the call and pass this to your line manager immediately.

General guidance on *face to face* contact

When meeting people remember:

- you are representing the council and you should display a clean and smart appearance at all times;
- that your identity badge should be worn at all times;
- always to reply courteously;
- to take responsibility for each enquiry and ensure any action is followed up;
- if a member of the public has an enquiry you cannot answer, direct them to the appropriate contact point within Transportation or other council service; and
- that any violent or aggressive incident from any source should be reported to your line manager as soon as possible. An incident report form should be completed.

Outside visits and appointments

When visiting people remember:

- to show your identity badge before going into a customer's home or business premises, whether they ask to see it or not;
- the customer should be offered a visit from someone of the same gender if it is more appropriate or makes them feel more at ease;
- to make sure you check all the details of the customer and that you know their circumstances before you visit them;
- if you are running late, telephone the customer and explain this, offer a revised time.
- do not cancel a visit unless unavoidable;
- if you are unexpectedly absent from work ensure that a colleague is able to contact the customers who made appointment with you; and
- to follow the council's policy and Transportations risk assesments on lone working.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

We are keen to hear the views of our customers. We must listen to our customers, apologise if we get things wrong and take action to ensure our services are improved because of this. We must listen when our customers say things are going well or make suggestions about the way we deliver services and how we prioritise services. Monitoring this information will highlight any problem areas as well as showing areas of good practice.

Conducting surveys and encouraging customers to give us feedback will help customers feel that we are committed to listening to them. Remember colleagues can also be customers.

We must deal with complaints openly. It is important to remember that complaints are often presented as being about an individual member of staff. However, those individuals are acting in their capacity as employees of Transportation and the wider council. In most cases it is the action of the council that is being complained about, not the individual employee.

Complaints procedure

A complaint can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about a member of staff, Transportation or the council.

How can a customer make a complaint

A complaint may be made to any member of Transportation:

- in person;
- by telephone;
- in writing, either by letter or e-mail;
- by using the council's corporate complaints procedure *Points of View*;

- by a third party acting with the complainant's consent; and
- via any of the council's Elected Members, Members of the Scottish Parliament or Members of Parliament.

Complaints made via Members

- the Transportation Manager, Graeme Malcolm, will monitor complaints received.
- members can make a complaint on behalf of an individual at their request. Complainants have the right to refer their complaint to their Elected Member at any time during the complaints handling process.
- members may also wish to complain on their own behalf about any matter, which they consider, has not been dealt with satisfactorily.
- members will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of complaints submitted and will receive copies of all related correspondence within an agreed timescale.

Anonymous complaints

- the member of staff receiving an anonymous complaint will require to use their discretion as to whether any action requires to be taken and this should be discussed with the Transportation manager.
- whilst a complaint in these circumstances cannot be acknowledged, due consideration should be given as to whether an investigation is required or simply a need to record the complaint.
- staff require to be sensitive to the reasons why a person may choose to make an anonymous complaint e.g. fear of reprisals.

Transportation staff procedure to deal with complaints

If you receive a complaint direct from a customer then you should ensure that you adhere to the following procedure:

- log the complaint on our complaints database (ETS/Confirm);
- ensure you listen to the complaint and check that you have interpreted the complaint correctly. All complaints must be dealt with courteously and impartially;
- some customers may prefer their dissatisfaction to be dealt with initially as a comment/enquiry. If this is the case then record the outcome. If the customer remains unhappy after this process they still have the right to make a complaint;
- if the complaint is made in person or by telephone, discuss the complaint with the customer at the time it is received and do your best to try to resolve the issue at this stage; and
- ask the customer if they are satisfied with the outcome of the discussion. If they are happy then record this on the complaints database. If not, then ask them to write or e-mail a formal complaint to the Transportation Manager.

Standards for dealing with formal complaints in writing

If a customer complains in writing or by e-mail then ensure that:

- the complaint is acknowledged within three working days following receipt. Respond in the same format as received confirming that we have received the complaint and are dealing with it;
- you respond to all complaints within 10 working days of receipt. This will involve either:
 - a. informing the customer of the action that we have taken or propose to take; or
 - b. arranging to discuss the matter with the customer, in which case after the discussion confirm to the customer the outcome of the discussion and any action we propose to take.
- when responding to complaints make sure that all points raised by the customer are answered and c.c. your manager on the response; and
- if in exceptional circumstances we cannot respond to the complaint within 10 working days, you must keep the customer fully informed of the progress until the complaint has been dealt with.

Customer comments and suggestions

Customers sometimes do not wish to complain but simply wish to either comment on or make a suggestion about Transportation. It is important that this information is recorded using Confirm.

A thank you letter should be sent to the customer, or a full written response, within five working days.

Compliments

Customers give compliments in many ways. They can be verbal, in written form, either by letter or card and these should be accepted gracefully. The line manager should be advised and the card/letter should be distributed throughout the team.

Employees of the council cannot accept compliments in the way of gifts. These should be returned with a note of appreciation and an explanation to the customer, asking them if they would perhaps wish to donate the gift to a local or other charity.

Equal opportunities

Transportation recognises the diversity of its local community and the value this diversity brings to community life. The aim is to provide each member of the community with fair and equal treatment in all its activities.

Staff should make every effort to ensure that anyone who is entitled to a service does not receive less favourable treatment on grounds of any irrelevant consideration, including age, disability, gender, marital status, nationality, race, creed or sexual orientation.

Transportation aims to treat all customers fairly, consistently, impartially and with respect.

Staff comments and suggestions

It is also important that staff have the opportunity to comment on service delivery and working practices and environments. Often staff are best placed to offer suggestions on improving services.

A variety of systems are in place to enable staff comment and suggestion, and managers will record and action agreed suggestions. Suggestions can be made in writing, at team meetings, in service mornings, through the PRPDP process or at any time to the appropriate line manager.

A staff suggestion box is also available. Please make use it.

STAFF TRAINING AND INFORMATION

Staff Training

Transportation staff undertake a programme of continual development through performance review and personal development planning.

Training opportunities are available to all staff members, and the full staff training programme is recorded on Transportation's training database.

Information and communication

In order to provide good customer care, you must be aware of information available regarding the council. The more knowledgeable you are, the better the service provided to customers. Information can be found on the council's intranet site and the council's website **www.westlothian.gov.uk** Information specifically targeted at the business community can also be found on **www.westlothian.com**.

You should be aware of current information leaflets relating to your service and where to get information for a customer who requires a service you are unfamiliar with.

It is important that managers pass information to staff and time will be set aside in regular team meetings for information sharing. It is also the responsibility of staff to read council policies and procedures and to read material such as newsletters and information sheets.

It is a vital part of customer care to actively seek the views of customers to ensure we are meeting their needs. It is also a key requirement under best value. Systems are also in place to enable staff to make suggestions about service change and service delivery. It is important that consultation takes place at an early stage. After any consultation exercise it is vital to provide feedback to participants and inform people about any action being taken as a result of the consultation.

Performance monitoring

Managers will be responsible for monitoring many targets, through performance meetings and individual personal development plans.

The customer care standards and targets will be reviewed regularly and new standards set so that we can continue to improve our services to our customers. In order to do this effectively, all staff are encouraged to contribute to this process.

Supporting policies and procedures

- Best Value
- Code of Conduct
- Race Relations Scheme 2002 – 2005
- Customer Care Strategy
- West Lothian Way
- Disability Discrimination Act
- E-Procurement
- Equal Opportunity Policy
- Fair Treatment at Work
- Internet Access Policy
- Initiative Database
- Shared Information
- Personal Development Planning
- Sickness Absence Policy
- Working Alone in Safety
- Freedom of Information Act
- Data Protection Act

Information is available in Braille, on tape, in large print
and community languages

Please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service on 0131 242 8181.

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West Lothian
Council

County Buildings
High Street
Linlithgow
West Lothian
EH49 7EZ