

SHAFTESBURY TOWN COUNCIL

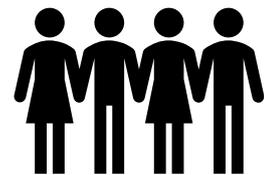
*Delivering Excellence across the
Shaftesbury Community*

Customer Service Policy

Date of Adoption: 15th November 2022

Last Reviewed:

Review Date: April 2025



Managing People Policies

1. Introduction

Shaftesbury Town Council is committed to ensuring that customer service excellence is an integral part of the planning, resourcing, and delivery of all services. When customers access Council services they will receive consistently excellent standards of customer service and this policy will ensure that all sections of our diverse community are able to access services. The policy recognises development in technology and the opportunities for customers to contact the Council and access services digitally.

Whilst this policy is concerned with service standards the Council has a specific policy for dealing with compliments, comments and complaints which is available via the website www.shaftesbury-tc.gov.uk or from the Town Hall (contact details included in this document). The Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy guides customers through the processes for passing on a compliment about a service, expressing a concern or suggestion about a service and when a customer is dissatisfied with a service, the process to follow to make a complaint.

1.1 Guiding principles

When customers contact the Council, Town Council staff will

- Identify themselves
- Be helpful and courteous
- Be professional and positive
- Be well informed, so that they are able to help
- Be effective in listening and responding
- Be fair and support individual needs

1.2 Why the Town Council needs customer service standards

This policy outlines the Council's approach to customer service and related issues. The standards set out in this policy are the minimum that customers can expect from the Council as a starting point. Wherever possible the Council will respond to customer enquiries at the first point of contact.

Customer service standards set out the Council's expectations for its employees to ensure that the Council remains a modern and efficient customer-focussed organisation. These standards define a corporate framework for the achievement of excellent customer service which will:

- Ensure that all customers, whether they are residents or visitors receive the same consistent, high standards of customer service.
- Ensure that customer service is an integral part of the planning, resourcing, and delivery of all Council Services.
- Enable the Council to achieve its corporate key priorities, as set out in the Council's Strategic Plan 2020-2023.

1.3 Contacting Shaftesbury Town Council

When telephoning the Council office, customers can expect

- A polite response
- The call to be answered within 4 rings
- A call back when the Council cannot deal with the enquiry immediately
- To be given the name of the person if transferred to someone else
- An informative voicemail message and the ability to leave a message outside of office opening hours

When contacting the Town Council digitally customers can expect

- Acknowledgement of their correspondence (e.g. e-mails and website enquiries) within 3 working days
- A full response to be given within 10 working days;
- STC to respond to direct communication through social media channels in line with other digital correspondence targets, recognising that some social media posts will not require a response;

When visiting the Town Hall customers can expect

- To be greeted politely
- That appointment times are kept and if appointments are running late or have to be rearranged the customer will be informed
- Provide accurate, up to date information

When writing to the Town Council customers can expect

- An acknowledgement of the letter within three working days
- A full response to letters within 10 working days of receipt
- The Council will meet the needs of customers with visual impairment, through the use of large print or other specialist services.

1.4 Measuring success

This policy is backed up by Customer Service Standards (Part Three). The Council will develop ways of engaging with customers and encouraging customer feedback. Performance will be monitored through self-assessment, comparison with other local councils, customer feedback and recommendations following external audit inspections. This customer insight will help to establish what the Council is doing well and what it can do to improve.

1.5 What the Town Council expects from its customers

In times of trouble or distress, some people may act out of character when accessing Council services. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a customer contacting the Council. The Council believes that all customers have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, the Council also believes that employees have the same rights. Shaftesbury Town Council, therefore, expects customers to be polite and courteous in all dealings with the Council. The Council will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence; this includes any threat, abuse or harassment towards employees on social media (e.g. Facebook) which will be reported to the police. Any threat of physical violence will always be reported to the police.

2. Guidance for the Town Council's workforce

2.1 In developing the Customer Service policy the Council has sought to:

- Set standards which are user friendly, customer focused and measurable
- Clearly state how employees should behave when dealing with customers
- Give consideration to legislation, good practice and national standards
- Ensure employees are equipped to deliver services taking into account equality and diversity so that all members of our diverse community can access services in their preferred way

2.2 Customers

The Town Councils customers are all the people the Council comes into contact with; this includes people who live in, work in or visit the area, and people acting on behalf of people who live in the area. Customers could also be employees, local businesses and partner organisations.

2.3 What customers want

Customers access Council services through various channels including digital (e.g. website, e-mail, social media), telephone, face to face, letter, application forms, etc. whatever the channel, customers want accessible, efficient and responsive services and the Council must strive to meet these demands. The Council will respond to the needs of customers in terms of access and recognise that one method will not suit everyone.

Customers want their dealings with the Council to be efficient and that they receive their desired outcome. To meet this the Council must attempt to deal with customer enquiries at the first point of contact and ensure mechanisms are in place for monitoring and measuring performance against desired outcomes.

2.4 Customer service and its importance

Improving customer service is a key priority for the Council and means:

- Providing quality services in a friendly, efficient and helpful way; the Council will continually strive to improve services by ensuring excellent communication and a positive attitude towards customers
- Treating each person as an individual – respect for diversity and, in turn, having the flexibility to adapt behaviour and actions in a way that is appropriate for the individual
- Treating people with dignity, respect and courtesy
- Offering choices where possible
- Giving information about what is available and providing an explanation if a service is not available.

2.5 General principles when dealing with customers

When dealing with customers, whether using the telephone, digital services (e.g. e-mail, Facebook), face to face or via letter:

- Identify and address any specific requirements with sensitivity, tact and diplomacy
- Record customer contact details accurately
- Ensure that the nature of the customer's enquiry is understood clearly
- Resolve enquiries at first contact where possible
- Keep the lines of communication open with customers and keep them informed.

2.6 Digital

- Acknowledge digital correspondence (e.g. e-mails and website enquiries) within three working days
- Respond to digital correspondence as soon as possible but no longer than 10 working days of receipt
- Respond to direct communication through social media channels in line with other digital correspondence targets, recognising that some social media posts will not require a response
- All outgoing council e-mails will include the standard signatory template giving contact details of the author
- E-mail 'Out of Office' messages will be enabled at times of absence giving return dates and alternative contact details
- Support customers to deal with the Council through the use of digital services.

2.7 Telephone

- Answer the telephone within four rings
- Greet the customer in a polite and courteous manner, giving your name
- Give your full attention to the customer
- Take ownership of the call, resolving the customer's enquiry wherever possible
- When taking a call for a colleague, use an effective message taking system and make sure the customer is called back
- End the call with a thank you and confirm with the customer the outcome.

2.8 Use of Voicemail

- Only use voicemail to ensure that telephone calls do not go unanswered
- Use voicemail only for short periods or specific purposes
- Ensure recorded messages are audible, accurate, and appropriate and where possible, provide alternative contact details
- Respond to all messages within 24 hours or the next working day if the message is left over a weekend or Bank Holiday (this includes messages referred to from colleagues)
- Regularly check for messages and update your voicemail message

2.9 Face to Face contact – this covers personal callers with or without appointments, contact with customers at events, meetings out and about and site visits.

- Give clear instructions about the location of the face-to-face contact
- Greet customers within five minutes of their arrival at a council building / event
- Greet the customer in a polite and courteous manner
- Give your full attention to the customer
- Keep the customer informed of the length of time they are likely to wait to see the person they need
- Offer an appointment where this may be more appropriate, responsive or efficient
- When a customer has specific requirements, find out what they need and aim to provide it
- When discussing personal information, always arrange to do so in a confidential environment

2.10 Written communication

- Respond to all written communication within 10 working days of receipt
- There may be occasions when a full response cannot be given within the timescale. This is unavoidable but there is still a requirement to keep the customer informed by making contact or sending a holding response. This can give an expected date for a full response or give the reason why a full response cannot be given
- Ensure the presentation of all written correspondence is easy to understand (plain English), professional and accurate
- Include a contact name and telephone number, together with any other information needed (e.g. reference number) to assist the customer
- Meet the needs of people with visual impairment, through the use of large print or other specialist services.

2.12 Service Standards

This Customer Service Policy document provides the guiding principles for setting standards to assist in establishing a consistent approach to customer service across the organisation.