

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE OF MEETING:** 20 JULY 2021

**TITLE OF REPORT:** HART DISTRICT COUNCIL CUSTOMER CARE POLICIES

**Report of:** Joint Chief Executive

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor David Neighbour, Leader

### 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek Overview and Scrutiny's endorsement of the updated Customer Care Standards and the Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policies, subject to any comments and recommendations, to Cabinet.

### 2 OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

That Overview and Scrutiny review and provide comments and recommendations to Cabinet on:

- 2.1 The revised Customer Care Standards as set out in Appendix A.
- 2.2 The revised Policy and Guidance for Dealing with Unreasonable Customer Behaviour as set out in Appendix B.

### 3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Council adopted, back in 2013, refreshed Customer Care Standards and a new policy for the management of dealing with persistent, vexatious and unreasonable customer behaviour. These policies have been reviewed and retained every two years since that time.
- 3.2 As part of an ongoing broader review of policies and procedures, a real opportunity has arisen to further refresh and update the Customer Care Standards and Policy for dealing with Unreasonable Customer Behaviour in light of experience of managing these policies over a period of years, changes in customer expectations and evolution in our digital agenda, most recently exemplified during the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. [a move from face to face to virtual Employment Skills Centre](#))
- 3.3 As a Council, we aim to be customer focussed, and this is embedded into the DNA of our organisation via [the HART values](#), which we use in both the recruitment and performance management of our staff.
- 3.4 Naturally, there will still be times when we occasionally get things wrong and our approach is to investigate and solve problems as quickly as possible. As part of this, the Council welcomes criticism and complaints as a legitimate part

of the relationship between the council and its local community. Most complainants pursue their complaints in a reasonable and acceptable manner.

- 3.5 However, in a minority of cases, people pursue their complaints in a way which can either impede the investigation of their complaint, can have significant resource issues for the council or are unreasonable by virtue of their behaviour. This can happen either while their complaint is being investigated, or once the council has finished dealing with the complaint.

## **4 CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1 To help our residents, to understand what they can expect from the Council, bearing in mind we have established a series of different methods by which they can contact us on a variety of different topics,
- The Customer Care Standards sets out our public commitment to our residents, how we will continue to develop our staff, systems and processes to improve customer service excellence.
  - The Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policy set out the behaviours that are not acceptable when accessing the Councils services, via any channel and what actions we might take if behaviours persist.

As such these documents can be viewed as twinned documents providing a clear statement of expectation on both parties.

- 4.2 The Customer Care Standards has been considered by the Councils 'Change Champions' Group; a group of officers drawn from across the organisation who are committed to service excellence and improvements. The standards have been rewritten with simplified language, making it easier for our residents to read and easier to understand; with the use of streamlined response times, plain English and removal of jargon. They have also been considered by Management and Leadership Teams.
- 4.3 The Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy has been updated to reflect the most recent guidance provided by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Whilst the policy remains true to the original policy adopted in 2013, in keeping with the updated LGO guidance, this policy makes specific reference to the use of racist, sexist, homophobic or other discriminatory language as being unacceptable. This is in line with our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and our own policies which celebrates diversity, challenges intolerance and discrimination and positively promotes equality and community cohesion.
- 4.4 The Customer Care Standards removes standards which the Council is unable to record, measure and report on. However recognising the changes within the communities which we serve, it has been updated to reflect the greater reliance on electronic forms of communication and the commensurate reduction in letters that the Council is now receiving. For instance, it provides more detail regarding the Council's 'offer' with regard to channels that have been developed, such as Web Chat functionality and both policies refer to what can be expected if contacting us via social media platforms.

4.5 The Unreasonable Behaviour policy in particular establishes:

- 4.5.1 The definitions of such behaviours
- 4.5.2 Triggers which may cause the policy to be invoked
- 4.5.3 A list of options available to the council
- 4.5.4 A clear delineation regarding the decision to invoke the policy
- 4.5.5 Guidance on the nature of records to be kept
- 4.5.6 What information is provided to the complainants when the policy is applied
- 4.5.7 Details of when the complainant can expect their case to be reviewed.

#### **4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### **5 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND CRIME AND DISORDER**

5.1 A screening assessment for equalities has been carried out on the two attached documents and there are no identified negative or positive impacts arising. There are no crime and disorder implications to be considered

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#### **APPENDICES**

Appendix A Customer Care Standards  
Appendix B Policy and guidance for dealing with Unreasonable Customer Behaviour