

# East Sussex County Council Customer-care charter

## August 2010

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You can get this charter in large print, in Braille, on audio tape, on CD or in other languages if you ask us.

Please phone 01273 481857.



# What is a customer-care charter?

When you contact us, we want you to be satisfied with the quality of our service, whichever way you choose to get in touch. To achieve this, we have produced a set of minimum 'customer-care standards'.

Customer-care standards are a set of values that explain how we treat you, whether it is the way we answer the phone or how we respond to email communications.

In the Customer Satisfaction Survey 2006, we asked our Residents' Panel about the level of service they expect from us when they contact us by letter, phone, in person or email. Their responses to the survey have been essential in creating these standards.

This document is our customer-care charter, written for you so you know what our customer-care standards are and what service you can expect from us.

If you would like to contact us about this charter, here are the details of our departments' customer service officers.

## Customer-service contacts

### Adult Social Care

Customer Access Manager

Phone: 01323 466592

Email: [socialcaredirect@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:socialcaredirect@eastsussex.gov.uk)

### Chief Executive's Office

Policy Officer

Phone: 01273 481857

Email: [lee.banner@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:lee.banner@eastsussex.gov.uk)

### Children's Services

Customer Access and Information Manager

Phone: 01323 747435

Email: [john.harrison@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:john.harrison@eastsussex.gov.uk)

### Corporate Resources Department

Performance Improvement Officer

Phone: 01273 481387

Email: [CRDfeedback@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:CRDfeedback@eastsussex.gov.uk)

### Governance and Community Services

PA to Assistant Director Legal and

Phone: 01273 481178

Democratic Services

Email: [lynn.harris@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:lynn.harris@eastsussex.gov.uk)

### Transport and Environment

Customer Care Manager

Phone: 01273 482317

Email: [tecomplaints@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:tecomplaints@eastsussex.gov.uk)

# Summary

## Calling us

- We will answer your call within 5 rings, either personally or through a voicemail or answerphone service;
- We will greet you with the name of our service, and the name of the person answering the call;
- If your call needs to be redirected, we will explain and tell you who we will transfer you to; and
- We will offer you another method of contact if you need it.

## Voicemail

- We will divert calls to another member of staff rather than voicemail wherever possible; and
- When voicemail is used, we will give you another number. This will include an out-of-hours number where appropriate.

## Writing to and emailing us

- We will let you know we have received your letter or email within 5 working days of receiving it;
- We will send a full response within 10 working days. If this is not possible, we will write to you and let you know when we hope to sort out your query;
- We will write to you in plain English (explained below); and
- We will include our contact details and a reference number.

## Electronic forms and web enquiries

- We will send electronic forms and web enquiries to the appropriate department within 24 hours. We will deal with these in the same way as emails (see above).

## Visiting us

- We will make your visit to us as comfortable as possible.

## Complaints

- We will write to you to say we have your complaint within three working days of receiving it. We will send you a copy of the complaints procedure and contact details in case you need them in the future; and
- We will send a full response within 10 working days or, if not possible, provide regular updates on the progress.

Plain English is a style of writing, written with the reader in mind and with the right tone of voice, that is clear and concise.

# Phone service standards

## **When you call us, we will:**

- answer within 5 rings;
- greet you with our name and the name of our service;
- speak clearly and use plain English;
- be friendly and polite;
- listen without interrupting;
- take responsibility for your call and give you detailed information;
- offer you another method of contact if you need it; and
- if possible, give you emergency contact numbers if you call when our offices are closed.

## **If we need to put you on hold while we find the answer to your query, we will:**

- explain why we need to, and ask your permission; and
- offer to call you back if we cannot deal with your query straight away.

## **If we need more time to go away and find the answer to your query, we will:**

- arrange a convenient time to call you back;
- keep you updated on progress; and
- give you a contact name in case you want to ask about our progress.

## **If we need to pass your call to someone to answer your query, we will:**

- explain why we need to do this;
- give you the contact details for that member of staff, if they are in our organisation; and
- explain, if necessary, why we need to direct you to another organisation and, where possible, we will give you their contact details.

## **If we need to pass your call to someone else, we will:**

- pass calls to another member of staff during office hours; or
- use voicemail when a member of staff cannot take the call.

## **Before ending the call, we will:**

- confirm details of your enquiry and the action we have agreed;
- confirm that we have dealt with your query; and
- give you a contact name in case you want to call back and enquire again.

## How you can help

- Before you call us, spend some time deciding what questions you need to ask.
- Be prepared to quote any reference shown on letters or forms. This helps us find your details as quickly as possible.
- If you don't understand something that has been said, don't be afraid to ask us to explain this.
- Tell us about your communication needs, such as if English is not your first language, or you are hard of hearing, so we can arrange a more suitable way of communicating with you.
- Give us feedback on how we are doing. Your [comments](#) are important to us to make sure we improve our service to you.

# Written service standards (letters and emails)

## **When you write to us, we will:**

- acknowledge your letters and emails within 5 working days of receiving them;
- send a full response within 10 working days of receiving them, or send a holding response;
- reply using plain English; and
- reply giving you contact details for future letters and emails.

## **If we cannot answer your query within 10 days, we will:**

- confirm receipt of your query and will let you know what we are doing and when we hope to sort your query out; and
- give you contact details in case you want to check on progress.

## **If we need to forward your letter to someone else in our department to answer your query, we will:**

- tell you why we need to do this; and
- give you the contact details for that member of staff.

## **If we need to direct you to another organisation to answer your query, we will:**

- tell you why you need to contact another organisation;
- if possible, give you the contact details for the other organisation; and
- where necessary and with your permission, pass your details directly to the organisation on your behalf, asking them to respond to you directly.

## **How you can help**

- Explain your query clearly and simply.
- Be prepared to quote any reference shown on previous letters or forms. This helps us find your details as quickly as possible.
- If you don't understand something that has been said, don't be afraid to ask us to explain.
- Tell us about your communication needs, such as if English is not your first language, or you have sight difficulties, so we can arrange a more suitable way of communicating with you.
- Give us feedback on how we are doing. Your [comments](#) are important to us to make sure we improve our service to you.

## **SMS text messaging**

If you text us, this comes into us through our email system. We will then follow our email service standards.

# Visiting service standards

Our offices are spread across East Sussex and are designed for different purposes. While libraries and day centres are well designed to receive visitors, some of our administration offices are less accessible. If you visit your local office, we may not have the right facilities or staff to answer your question, so we encourage people to contact us on the phone or in writing.

## **When you visit us, we will:**

- see you within 15 minutes if you do not have an appointment (if the correct person is not available, another member of staff will come to explain this to you);
- show you our identification;
- if appropriate, take you into a quiet area to discuss your query;
- be friendly, polite, speak clearly and use plain English;
- in unstaffed reception areas, make sure there are clear signs and arrangements for contacting a member of staff;
- arrange for you to sign in our visitors' book (for fire safety purposes) if we need to take you into another part of the building to talk to you; and
- follow our equalities policy.

## **If we are not available to see you straight away, we will:**

- explain why you need to wait and how long you may need to wait; and
- offer other contact arrangements (for example, a phone number or an email address) if you are not able to wait.

## **If we need more time to answer to your query, we will:**

- arrange a convenient time for you to visit again or offer other contact arrangements if you do not want to visit in person again; and
- keep you updated on progress.

## **If we need to pass your query to someone else in the council to answer, we will:**

- explain why we need to do this;
- give you the contact details for the correct office;
- tell them about your enquiry, so you don't have to repeat yourself; and
- arrange for them to contact you directly.

## **If we need to direct you to another organisation to answer your query, we will:**

- tell you why you need to speak to another organisation; and
- if possible, give you the contact details for the other organisation.

## How you can help

- Before visiting us, see if we can answer your query on the phone or in writing.
- If you do need to visit us, arrange an appointment so that we can make sure we are available to see you when you arrive and have had a chance to look at possible answers to your enquiry beforehand.
- Be prepared to quote any reference shown on letters or forms. This helps us find your details as quickly as possible.
- If you don't understand something that has been said, don't be afraid to ask us to explain.
- Tell us about your communication needs, such as if English is not your first language, or you have sight difficulties or are hard of hearing, so we can arrange a more suitable way of communicating with you.
- Give us feedback on how we are doing. Your [comments](#) are important to us to make sure we improve our service to you.

# Complaints standards

If you are unhappy with a service you have received from us, we hope that we can solve this. We welcome comments and complaints, as we know that your feedback will help improve our services. We have a complaints procedure that we must follow when we receive a formal complaint.

## **When we receive a letter or email of complaint, we will:**

- write to you within 3 working days to say that we have received your complaint;
- give you details of the complaints procedure when we reply to your complaint;
- aim to provide a full response within 10 working days;
- write in plain English;
- give you the contact details of the appropriate complaints manager; and
- give you our contact details and a reference number.

If we cannot provide a full response within 10 days we will send you updates so that you know what is happening.

If you are not happy with the response, we will guide you through the stages of our complaints procedure.

## **When we receive a complaint from you by phone we will:**

- make detailed notes about the call; and
- pass you to a supervisor or the complaints manager if we feel it is appropriate.

## **How you can help**

- Be clear about what you are complaining about.
- Let us know what you want the outcome of your complaint to be.
- Be prepared to quote any reference number shown on previous emails, letters or forms. This helps us find your details as quickly as possible.
- If you don't understand something that has been said, don't be afraid to ask us to explain this.
- Tell us about your communication needs, such as if English is not your first language or you have sight difficulties, so we can arrange a more suitable way of communicating with you.
- Give us feedback on how we are doing. Your [comments](#) are important to us to make sure we improve our service to you.

## Abusive or threatening behaviour

We understand that when someone is upset or angry, they won't always be calm and polite when they call or visit us. Although our staff will always do their best to deal with these situations, we support their right to politely end an abusive call once we've told the caller that this is what will happen if the abuse continues. We also support our staff's right to ask a visitor to leave our premises if the abuse continues. If a caller or visitor is simply malicious, deliberately threatening or racist, we may choose to refer the matter straight to the police.