

## **Summary**

- 1 This report asks Cabinet to approve the policy and procedures as referenced within the report and contained in Annex B.

## **Background**

2. The council has a good relationship with customers across a variety of communication channels, and customers have the opportunity to feed back to the council using our compliments and complaints process where the service is better or worse than expected.
3. The move to West Offices has created additional opportunities to interact with our customers face to face and in conjunction with partner organisations. To help support, educate and mitigate potential issues arising and to set customers expectations when arriving at West Offices or interfacing with the telephone teams or electronically, a set of Customer Service Standards have been developed. These are in line with both customer and staff views and set out how we should treat customers whenever we have contact with them. These are detailed in Annex A and can be found at:

[http://www.york.gov.uk/info/200167/customer\\_services/698/customer\\_service\\_standards](http://www.york.gov.uk/info/200167/customer_services/698/customer_service_standards)

4. These standards are designed to provide a framework for our interactions with customers/residents . This is supported by the proposed policy for responding to those customers whose behaviour is persistent and potentially vexatious.
5. The council is committed to providing an excellent customer service regardless of how customers choose to contact us. To help us achieve this, our staff will:
  - always wear a name badge or tell customers who they are speaking to;

- provide their service in a courteous, responsive and timely manner irrespective of age, gender, cultural/religious background, disability, sexual orientation or need;
  - inform customers of how long they can expect to wait if they have requested the use of a council service;
  - where applicable, tell the customer of any associated costs with the council service they have requested;
  - have the right skills and behaviours to deal with the customer's enquiry;
  - provide a timely response to enquiries when the customer contacts us. We will always provide an apology if responses are not provided within these times.
6. We will constantly review and refresh our approach set down in the Customer Strategy to make sure that we continue to meet our customers' needs and expectations and ultimately remove unnecessary frustration for our customers when contacting us.
7. We also feel it is important to let customers know what they can do to help us to achieve this. We ask that customers:
- are courteous to all staff at all time;
  - treat everyone with respect regardless of how they contact us;
  - when they visit us, help us to ensure we have a safe and welcoming environment;
  - tell us in a timely manner when things go wrong;
  - provide additional information in a timely manner if asked for by a member of staff .
8. It is important that we deliver services right first time, and most of the time we do. Sometimes, however, things can go wrong or we fail to meet expectations. We want customers to tell us when this happens. Feedback in the form of comments and/or complaints are important to us.
9. All complaints are handled within the council's three stage complaints policy and procedures. These can be viewed when accessing the web site or by asking for this information when visiting West Offices. Any matters which contribute to the failure of our standards, including staff competency and behaviour will be managed through the appropriate performance management arrangements.
10. Very occasionally, some customer contact is considered to be inappropriate. On occasions council staff and councillors have found themselves subject to

abuse or threats. As a responsible employer the council has a duty to respond to such behaviour.

11. In the event of the above the council may need to restrict the way we allow individual customers to communicate with us. It must be stressed that the attached policy 'Dealing with abusive or vexatious customers' (Annex B) is intended for the very few occasional times where behaviour is wholly inappropriate, aggressive, and over a long period of time.

### **Consultation**

12. The Audit and Governance Committee was consulted on a draft of these procedures on 19 March 2013, and its comments have been incorporated into the proposed policy.

### **Options**

13. Cabinet may express support for the current proposals or suggest amendments or additions.

### **Analysis**

14. Not relevant for the purpose of the report.

### **Council Plan**

15. This report contributes to the achievement of the Customer Strategy within the Core Capabilities and deliver across all priorities within the Council Plan.

### **Implications**

16. **Legal** – the council has a legal obligation to protect the health and welfare of its staff. Taking the steps described in this report may be necessary in a limited number of cases to comply with that duty.
17. **Equalities** – the proposed procedures recognise that some groups of customers have particular difficulties which may contribute to their behaviour being inappropriate and ensure that such issues are considered in decision making.

### **Recommendation**

18. Cabinet is asked to approve the adoption of the procedures set out in Annex B to this report.

### Reason

To ensure that the Council has clear arrangements in place to deal with abusive or vexatious customers.

<b>Author:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member and Chief Officer Responsible for the report:</b>		
Andy Docherty Assistant Director, Governance and ICT Telephone: 01904 551004  Pauline Stuchfield Assistant Director HR & Customers Telephone: 01904 551706	<b>Clr Dafydd Williams,</b> Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Customer Service  Ian Floyd Director of Customer and Business Support Services Telephone: 01904 551100		
	<b>Report Approved</b>	√	<b>Date</b> 17 <sup>th</sup> May 2013
<b>Specialist Implications Officer(s)</b> <i>List information for all</i>			
<b>Wards Affected:</b> <i>List wards or tick box to indicate all</i>		<b>All</b>	√
<b>For further information please contact the author of the report</b>			

### Background Papers

None

### Annexes:

Customer Service Standards - Annex A

Vexatious or Abusive Contact Policy and Procedures - Annex B