

Customer contact standards

West Berkshire Council will interact with its customers in a polite, friendly and respectful manner, whatever the method of contact or communication. The overall aim is that, having had contact with the council, customers feel they have been dealt with fairly, on an equal basis, and that they have been provided with the necessary information or level of service that they can reasonably expect.

The following specifies how the council will put these standards into practice. They apply to all council employees.

Treating everyone equally

All customers will be treated equally, according to the council's equality objectives which can be found on the council's website. This includes those whose first language is not English. If a customer needs information in an alternative format or translation in order for them to gain a full understanding, this can be provided on request to the information provider. Information will be provided according to the council's own guidance for producing accessible documents.

Face to face contact

Council staff meeting customers face to face will display or be able to produce a current identification badge confirming their status as a council employee and their job title, and including a photograph.

Customers calling at the council offices with an appointment will be seen within ten minutes of the appointment time or given the reason for any delay. Those calling at reception will be seen by the receptionist as soon as possible, and provided with the information or service asked for or advised how they may obtain it. Where conversations need to be kept confidential, a suitable location will be provided.

Written correspondence

All written contact with customers – either by letter, form, email, or social media – will be in plain English and free of council jargon so that it can be easily understood by the customer, whoever they are. In some correspondence there is a statutory requirement for particular phraseology.

Acknowledgement of written correspondence where required will be given within three working days.* A full response where needed will be given within ten working days* or an explanation provided as to why this will take longer. The correspondence will include contact details of the person dealing with the enquiry or request.

Contact by email

Emails received that need a response, will at least be acknowledged within three working days*. A full response to any enquiry will be given within ten working days. If the officer is not in the office, an auto-response will explain this and give an alternative officer for the customer to email, and it is a response to that email that will be given within three or ten working days.

Contact by phone

The aim is that phone calls to the council switchboard will be answered within 15 seconds, the staff will answer with a suitable greeting and the council's name.

Direct-dial phone calls direct to service areas should be answered within six rings, with the staff giving the service and their name (where appropriate).

If customers leave a voice message that needs a response, the response will be given within 24 hours.*

Council opening times

*All response times given are within normal working days or hours as defined by the council's opening times given below. They apply to emails and social media enquiries as well as letters and phone messages. They apply unless it is specifically an out of hours service or an emergency.

Council office hours are as follows.

Mondays to Thursdays 8.30am to 5.00pm.

Fridays 8.30am to 4.30pm.

The offices will be closed on public holidays.

March 2015