

**ANGUS COUNCIL**  
**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**  
**24 APRIL 2001**  
**CUSTOMER CARE: GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS**  
**REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

**ABSTRACT**

**The purpose of this report is to bring to the attention of the Education Committee the draft guidelines document which has been produced for schools on the subject of Customer Care.**

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- a) notes and endorses the work undertaken by the staff teams involved in preparing draft Customer Care Guidelines (a copy of which is available for perusal in the Members' Lounge);
- b) confirms the proposals to finalise and issue the materials to all schools following the incorporation of comments received from Head Teachers.

**2. INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The expression "customer care" has gained widespread use and acceptability in recent years. Originally, the term was used almost exclusively to describe the extent of consumers' rights in relation to the purchase of goods or the delivery of services and to highlight their legal entitlements and routes to obtain redress if dissatisfied. Increasingly, however, the concept of "customer care" has widened, through common usage, to include all aspects of service provision irrespective of whether the goods or services are delivered by public, private or voluntary sector bodies.
- 2.2 This development corresponds with the growing recognition and acceptance of the accountability of all public organisations to deliver the highest quality of service to users in an efficient, transparent, cost-effective and responsive manner.
- 2.3 Since the early 1980s the consumer's increasing rights of access to information about the quality of goods and services they can expect have also been reflected in developments within the education service. Public reports on individual schools, written by HM Inspectors of Schools, have become commonplace and this process of public reporting with follow-up inspections has now been extended to include the inspection of education authorities.
- 2.4 Other such "customer-friendly" developments have included the right of parents to choose the school their child attends.
- 2.5 Most recently, the implementation of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 extended the notion of the customer's rights with a specific requirement to provide pupils with an opportunity to make their views known on the school's development plan.
- 2.6 In order to assist schools with the process of auditing and developing customer-friendly services the draft guidelines document, which contains a number of examples of successful approaches, has been produced.

### 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Angus Council has a defined policy for customer care and schools and headquarters staff are well placed to respond effectively to the targets defined in terms of:-

<b>response rates for communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (whether written, faxed, e-mailed or telephoned) and all other written correspondence - 10 working days (maximum)*</li> </ul>
<b>appropriateness &amp; sensitivity of communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether in writing, on the telephone or in person.</li> <li>• use of Plain English.</li> <li>• all letters to have a contact name and telephone number.</li> </ul>
<b>positive environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for staff and visitors</li> <li>• appropriate training for staff (eg "Dealing with Difficult Customers").</li> <li>• provision of opportunities for staff to update and acquire new skills.</li> </ul>
<b>visual identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all HQ staff wear name badges so that they can be easily identified.</li> <li>• all other staff have been photographed and issued with name badges</li> </ul>
<b>telephone calls</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all calls are answered in a positive and business-like manner. Staff give their name and seek to deal with the caller's business.</li> <li>• staff cover for each other when required.</li> <li>• standard message pads are used by all HQ staff.</li> <li>• support is available if staff have an 'awkward' caller.</li> </ul>
<b>complaints procedure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the procedures detailed provide a sound basis for the monitoring and resolution of complaints.</li> </ul>

\* correspondence from MSPs, MEPs, MPs, Elected Members should be referred to the Director of Education.

3.2 These targets, which apply to all the Council's service departments, are seen as the minimum standards of performance with the concept of customer care being considered as much broader and related to all aspects of service delivery.

3.3 It is anticipated that schools will wish to use the exemplar materials to develop aims and realistic targets specific to their own circumstances. In setting aims it will be helpful if staff consider their own expectations of other services and the responses they would consider appropriate to requests for information, stated concerns or complaints.

### 4. HUMAN RIGHTS

4.1 By endorsing this report it is anticipated that the Education Committee will be supporting a model of good practice in relation to all aspects of customer care.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. When the draft package has been amended any costs associated with the production and distribution of materials to schools will be met from within the Education Department's revenue budget allocation for 2001/02.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 In accordance with the standing orders of the Council, this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Law & Administration and the Director of Finance.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 I am convinced that the appropriate involvement of all stakeholders - staff, pupils and parents - can only be of benefit to schools and the communities which they serve. By listening to the users of services as part of the process of self-evaluation I believe that we can make our services even better and I hope that these guidelines will help to further strengthen the existing healthy partnership arrangements evident across Angus.

**Jim Anderson**  
**Director of Education**

**NOTE:** No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.