

## **Appendix 1 – Corporate Telephone Answering Guidance**

As an Authority our purpose is to provide a service to our customers. The impression you give when you answer the telephone is of paramount importance and how you deal with a customer's enquiry will affect their perception of the whole authority.

**The image of the whole authority is in your hands,  
create that image through professional call handling**

**People form 90% of their lasting impression in the first 90 seconds**

**You never get a second chance to create a first impression**

**You need to anticipate and manage the first few moments of any call**

The corporate telephone answering policy has been introduced to ensure that the Council delivers a high standard of customer service that is professional and consistent.

In order to achieve this, when dealing with telephone calls:

- Be prepared to deal with telephone calls
- Answer calls within three rings
- Greet the caller courteously and bilingually
- Find out what the customer wants
- Use appropriate listening and questioning techniques
- Take ownership of a call
  - Don't transfer a call to another member of staff or department more than once
  - Announce calls to another member of staff or department when you transfer them
  - Tell the customer what will happen next and when
- Close a call courteously
- On receiving a message that someone wishes you to return their call, ensure it is done by the end of the following working day.

### **Be prepared to deal with telephone calls**

- Have a pen and paper to hand to make notes.
- Make sure you know the name and number of someone in your department who can speak Welsh so that any callers wanting to conduct their business in Welsh can do so.
- Ensure you know how to send an electronic telephone message on Lotus notes (In Lotus notes click on 'Create' and select 'Special' which will give you access to the 'Phone Message' template).

## **Greet the customer courteously and bilingually**

The greeting is:

- 1 Depending on the time of day - Bore da – Good morning  
Prynhawn da – Good afternoon  
Noswaith dda – Good evening
- 2 Name of Council - **Denbighshire County Council**  
(Optional) – “Name of section” e.g. Customer Care Service
- 3 “Your name” **speaking**
- 4 **How can I help you?**

e.g. Bore da, good morning, Denbighshire County Council, Joe Bloggs speaking, how can I help you?

## **Find out what the customer wants**

Use appropriate questioning and listening techniques:

Listen actively and don't interrupt;

Develop rapport.

## **Take ownership of the call**

Take notes during the call and summarise to check understanding.

If possible deal with the enquiry yourself.

If not, advise the customer what you will do next.

## **Transfer and announce calls**

A call should not be transferred to a colleague more than once. If the caller has previously been transferred take ownership of the call. Find out what the customer wants and take their name, contact details and relevant information about the enquiry. Advise the customer that you will arrange for someone who can help to call them back. Send an electronic telephone message from Lotus notes to the relevant colleague.

If for some reason a call has to be put on hold, ask the caller if this is acceptable or if they would prefer someone to call them back.

If you do transfer a call, announce it to the colleague it is being transferred to, by giving the caller's name and reason for calling. This information should be obtained in the first few seconds of receiving the call by asking appropriate questions.

## **Close the call**

Tell the customer what is going to happen next and when.

Thank the customer for calling.

Ask if there is anything else you can help them with.

## **Complaint calls**

If a caller is unhappy, in addition to the above you should also allow them to voice their issue before interrupting or attempting to deal with their problem. Remain calm, do not take the complaint personally and do not become defensive.

## **Dealing with abusive, threatening language on the telephone (The Three-Strike Rule)**

Terminating a call should always be a last resort and an alternative acceptable solution should be sought. However where a caller becomes abusive or uses threatening and/or inappropriate language, advise that the call will be terminated. The following approach should be used:

1. 'Mr/Mrs .... I find your language uncomfortable could you please moderate it. I am trying to help you'. If the caller then fails to moderate their language a second warning should be given.
2. 'Mr/Mrs ..... I have asked you before, please moderate your language or I will have no alternative but to terminate this call'. If this also results in a failure to continue a constructive discussion the call should be terminated in a calm manner.
3. 'Mr/Mrs ..... You have not moderated your language as I've asked, so I am terminating this call, goodbye.'

If you have to terminate a call in this way please advise your line manager immediately to ensure they are aware that the caller may call back.

## **Telephone Cover**

If colleagues are unavailable to respond to a call, answer their telephone and either answer the customer's enquiry or take a message as detailed above.

### Pick-up Group

A pick-up group will enable you to answer a call ringing at another telephone. If you are not in a pick up group speak to your line manager or refer to the Telephone System Manual for more information.

### Diversions

If there is no-one available to pick up your calls divert them to someone else in your section. Their agreement must be obtained first.

### Voicemail

Using the voicemail system is a last resort, only to be used when there is no-one in your Service available to take calls. If you have to use voicemail the following applies:

- Personalise voicemail messages; they should be clear and bilingual, giving name, department and extension number;
- Check your voicemail daily and telephone customers to acknowledge any messages by the end of the following working day;

- Delete messages when they have been actioned;
- Give colleagues in your team access to your voicemail to enable messages to be dealt with on a daily basis when you are absent.

For further information or advice on any of the above please contact the Customer Care Service on 01824 712683.