SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL

HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

A study of reception services at
council offices in Scotland

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Chairman's Preface

One of the best ways of finding out what a firm or organisation thinks of its customers is to watch how it receives them at the front door! Local authorities, no less than any other providers of goods and services, have an interest in ensuring that callers to the council offices are made to feel welcome there and given the advice, help or information they need - politely and promptly.

Findings from a consumer concerns survey conducted by the National Consumer Council in 1991 showed that over two out of every five adults were likely to have contacted their council about some matter in the previous two years. While most appeared satisfied with the reception they got, some reported difficulties in knowing whom to contact there or in getting through to the council by telephone. A lot would have liked more information about the council's services and a number felt that the council was rather "remote".

We decided to follow this up by collecting our own first-hand observations of how well councils handle simple requests for information from callers and how "visitor friendly" their reception areas are. While we recognised that these observations would cover but a small part of councils' dealings with the public, they would nevertheless relate to a crucial form of contact - at initial reception.

We also wanted to put our observations into a wider context by asking councils for their own statements of policy and practice concerning contact with the general public by "front-line" staff. For example, what steps had been taken by councils to provide training in "public contact" for staff? Do councils monitor enquiries from the public? Do they publish their own public directories or guides to their services?
Our report indicates that many councils have already started to take active steps to develop or improve the quality of their contact with the public. A large number now provide staff training in "customer care", for example, and many publish their own public directories of services. The experience of our volunteers visiting council offices and our own telephone check also suggest that most councils have made progress in providing prompt and friendly reception services.

The report should be regarded as offering a picture which reflected the situation at the time of our investigation and, therefore, the examples of good practice that we have chosen may not include some recent changes. Our hope is that in a year or two's time all councils in Scotland will have moved towards their own good practices and performance standards in public contact. This report will have achieved its purpose if it accelerates that movement. It deserves to be read by elected representatives, council officials and all with an interest in giving local government a friendly face.

[Signature]

Deirdre Hutton

CHAIRMAN

DECEMBER 1992
Acknowledgements

The SCC is grateful to the councils which filled in the questionnaires sent to them and which arranged for members of staff to be interviewed. Particular thanks go to the several council officials who agreed to be interviewed, often at length.

The SCC is also grateful to volunteers from its Consumer Network and local advice centres and to other individuals for carrying out visits to council offices. Their observations form a valuable part of this report.

Members of the SCC’s Public Services and Public Utilities Committee: Winnie Sherry (Chairman), Peter Edmondson, Ken Gilbert, Yvonne Osman, Mark Steiner, Deirdre Hutton (ex officio).

The text was edited by Katie Carr. Research assistance was provided by Gillian Kellock. Typescript: Muriel Adam.
CHAPTER 1: CONTACTING THE COUNCIL: MAIN ISSUES

1.1 The context

Nearly all people at some point find themselves having to contact their local council about some matter - for information or advice, to get something done, or to make a complaint. The first person they will deal with will invariably be the receptionist at the council offices. The sort of reception people get when they phone, visit or write to the council with an enquiry, problem or complaint may be regarded as an important litmus test of how the council views members of the general public - as well as how the public view the council!

The traditional view of the council is of a rather remote, paternalistic bureaucracy which prefers to keep the public at arms length. The "enclosed" model of the council on which this view is based is rapidly becoming obsolete as more councils attempt to open themselves up and become more approachable. Clearly one way in which they can do this is to make members of the public feel welcome and wanted on making initial contact with the council at reception. Reception of the public at the council offices may unwittingly play a key role in the success or failure of the rest of the public's transactions with the council.

Many local authorities have now started to employ specialised staff to develop, manage and monitor their whole range of contacts with the general public. The government's "Citizen's Charter", with its emphasis on a user-led approach to service provision, has prompted some councils to introduce their own "charters", in which relations between front-line staff and the public are expected to form an important component. Bodies such as the Local Government Management Board (formerly Local Government Training Board) have issued their own publications for promoting greater awareness among council staff of the value of good relations with the general public. More recently, here in Glasgow, the Scottish Local Authorities Management Centre and Capita Training organised a joint seminar, "Citizens and Services", on the changing relationship between the public and local authority services.

A consumer concerns survey carried out in 1991 by the Scottish Consumer Council, in conjunction with the National Consumer Council, indicated that most people in Scotland are fairly satisfied with their local council. Around two-thirds of people surveyed thought that their council was doing a good job in providing various services, although satisfaction with some services (e.g. water) was better than others (e.g. street cleansing). There was less satisfaction when it came to dealings with the council directly, however. Over two-fifths (44 per cent) of people said that they had contacted the council in the previous two years about some matter. Although most of them were satisfied with the way in which the council had dealt with their enquiry and found staff friendly and helpful, significant proportions reported:
* difficulties in contacting the council by telephone - 25%
* difficulties in getting hold of the right person - 35%
* the council being too remote or impersonal - 51%
* the council giving only limited information about services - 56%

These developments and research findings suggest that local authorities have started to move forward in opening up contact between themselves and the public but that their doors could perhaps still be opened up wider. This report is concerned with a particular aspect of this process: the council's handling of initial contacts by members of the public through its reception services.

1.2 Key elements

A person's impression of the council will, to a considerable degree, be formed by the council's arrangements for receiving personal visits or telephone calls by members of the general public and answering their letters. Councils will want to consider a number of ways in which they can go about these tasks if they are concerned about projecting an image of a "caring council." In this respect, the following aspects comprise the key elements:

1.2.1 Personal visits

Are the council's offices convenient to reach/strategically positioned in the town centre/clearly signposted?

Are the entrances and reception areas of the council's offices easy to find? Are they accessible to people with disabilities?

Have reception staff been well briefed about handling of enquiries from visitors?

Is the reception area a pleasant and welcoming place to be in? Is it adequately furnished with chairs and tables for visitors to use? Is there access to a telephone that members of the public can use?

Are leaflets and posters on display?

1.2.2 Telephone calls

Are calls answered promptly and politely?

Are they routed to the appropriate person within the council?

Do council staff answering calls identify themselves properly (name, position)?
1.2.3 Letters

Are letters answered within a reasonable period of time?

Does the council distinguish between "urgent" and "non-urgent" letters?

Can the originator (name, department) of the letter be identified?

Do replies give the name/extension of a contact person for further information?

Are replies friendly and helpful in tone?

Positive actions on each of these elements constitute important building blocks in a strategy for bringing about closer contact between the council and its public.

1.3 The SCC investigation

Following on from the findings of the consumer concerns survey mentioned above, the SCC decided to investigate how the council "receives" members of the public making contact by personal visit, telephone or letter. One objective was to obtain first-hand observations of councils' handling of visits, phone calls and letters from the public. The other was to analyse councils' statements of current or proposed policies and practices in this area, with a view to identifying good practices and putting our observations into context. In the course of its investigation, the SCC was made aware from several councils' replies to its enquiries that this aspect of a council's work was in the midst of a process of change and review, as exemplified in this reply:

"Completion of the questionnaire was as accurate as the current situation allows. Although we are required to answer 'No' to some of the questions, if asked again in 12 months' time, the answers would be quite different."

This report should, therefore, be regarded very much as offering a picture which reflected the situation at the time of our investigation but which is likely to be a moving scene for a year or two to come.

The SCC used volunteers from its Consumer Network and from advice centres to carry out spot checks of reception services of council offices in their locality, using an observation schedule prepared by the SCC (see appendix 1). Volunteers were asked to visit the council office for their area, make some standard observations about the reception area, and report on how their request for an item of information (date of next council meeting) was handled at reception. This exercise was meant to provide no more than a passing snapshot of service provision; repeated observations over time covering less straightforward forms of contact would be necessary to give a more complete picture - but the SCC believed it would offer some general pointers. The task
of volunteers was also kept deliberately simple to avoid drawing an exaggerated picture of any difficulties encountered and to minimise demands on the time of council staff. Single visits were made to 51 of the 65 headquarters offices of councils in Scotland in July 1992, including all nine regional council offices and one islands council office.

All 65 district, islands and regional councils in Scotland were also invited early in 1992 to complete a questionnaire about their dealings with the general public, including reception services. Replies were received from all nine regions, all three islands councils and 49 of the 53 district councils (see appendix 2).

Around 45 per cent of the questionnaires were completed by public relations or publicity officers, another 25 per cent by the chief executive, 15 per cent by performance review officers, customer and quality managers and officers with similar job titles, and the remaining 15 per cent by other chief officers.

Follow-up interviews were carried out with one or two key members of staff in six authorities which appeared to have taken new initiatives in this area.
CHAPTER 2: CONTACTING THE COUNCIL IN PRACTICE

2.1 Visiting the council offices

How local authorities project themselves to the public will first be made apparent to anybody who visits the council headquarters in person. In the consumer concerns survey, some 45 per cent of people in Scotland who had contacted the council said that they had done so through a personal visit (compared with only 26 per cent in England and Wales.) The traditional image of the council offices used to be one of imposing Victorian buildings, perhaps with grand entrance doors, uniformed doorkinders, and polished marble or mahogany interiors. Much has since changed, and although a legacy of old buildings remains, councils have over the years made their offices more "open" to the public by upgrading or modernising old buildings or moving into new offices altogether. Councils which after local government reorganisation in 1975 inherited a scattered stock of offices belonging to former councils have sometimes developed a new corporate identity by relocating departments at a central site (e.g. Midlothian district council) - creating a sort of council campus and leaving the public in no doubt whatsoever where the main point of contact with the council is. At the same time, other councils have decentralised their operations, creating new all-purpose one-stop area offices, saving long trips to the council chambers.

The prerequisites of a successful strategy to "open up" council offices to the public could be said to comprise the following elements:

* clear signposting of the offices;

* convenient location near to bus stops, shopping centres, etc;

* clearly marked entrances;

* access for visitors with disabilities (with a clear notice saying where they can get access);

* signs, notices and staff inside the offices giving visitors clear directions for finding their way round the building;

* furnishings and facilities which make visitors feel welcome and at ease there, such as chairs to sit on, leaflet and poster displays, drink vending machines;

* access to a telephone for public use, toilet and other facilities;

* approachable friendly reception staff to deal with enquiries from the public promptly and politely.
In our investigation, we asked volunteers to make observations about a number of these aspects. Their responses may be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear entry signs to the offices</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear direction signs for visitors inside the offices</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff on hand at entrance to receive/direct visitors</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairs for visitors</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table/desk for visitors</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone for visitors' use</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaflets on display</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters/notices on display</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of visits</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(missing data in one or two cases).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general impression gained is that most council offices are reasonably well geared up for receiving visitors, although with some variation in the provision of such facilities as tables and telephones for visitors to use - and a surprisingly high number (16) without any clearly marked "entrance" signs. Several volunteers commented on how attractive and comfortable the reception area was, with only one volunteer finding a reception area which was "small and cramped". Although volunteers were not asked to observe access for people with disabilities, one reported having to climb 21 steps to reach the reception desk and a further flight of stairs to reach a public phone. There is also anecdotal evidence of one council regularly directing visitors wanting the toilet to the nearest railway station!

One volunteer visiting the council offices had the following - untypical - experience:
"I went to the council offices, a place I know the location of. This is just as well, as from the outside, there is little to identify it. The general impression is that this is not somewhere that members of the public are expected to call to make enquiries. It seems to be the entrance to the council chamber and is rather grand, the stairs having plush red carpeting. It is only when you get to the first floor, where the council chamber is, that there is any signposting.

"I decided to look around elsewhere, where there are a number of other council offices, in case there was somewhere else more appropriate. There was no obvious place. I tried a building next to the council chamber. From the outside, it is not clear which offices it houses. Only when you get inside the door are there any signs saying which offices are there, including a sign to the enquiry office on the second floor."

2.2 Reception staff

Local authorities replying to our enquiries showed increasing recognition of the importance of reception staff in projecting the council's public image. Research in other contexts, such as the doctor's surgery, shows how receptionists perform a "gatekeeper" role in controlling public access to service providers. Carried out courteously and efficiently, this can contribute greatly to good user-provider relations and to the smooth functioning of the organisation. But it can sometimes create barriers between the public and service providers. The range of knowledge and skills reception staff may have to exercise in their day to day dealings with the public is also often a demanding and extensive one: from giving simple directions to dealing with a "difficult customer." Receptionists, moreover, occupy a key role in the council's monitoring of its performance: they are likely to be the members of the council's staff most in contact with users of the council's services and in the best position to feel the public pulse.

As if in recognition of these considerations, a number of councils reported that they had upgraded the training and sometimes the salaries of reception staff. Traditionally, reception posts were viewed as low status appointments, with little responsibility, and consequently little training and low salary. This situation has now started to change, although it does raise issues about preserving or narrowing status and salary differentials vis-a-vis other members of staff.

Our volunteers' observations confirmed the finding of the consumer concern survey that council staff were prompt and polite in dealing with enquiries from the general public. Asked to provide the date of the next council meeting, reception staff at 39 of the 49 council offices visited were able to give an immediate reply, with some making a quick double check with a colleague (in most of the remaining ten cases, volunteers were quickly referred to another member of staff for information, or, occasionally, to the notice board). In 19 cases, staff volunteered, without being prompted, additional information about the council meeting, such as the time and exact whereabouts of the meeting and
what items were on the agenda. One offered to put the volunteer in touch with his local councillor for further information and another made available a copy of the minutes of the previous council meeting. Many volunteers remarked on how friendly, prompt and helpful reception staff had been. In only isolated cases did volunteers report negative experiences, such as:

"I had to speak through a closed panel of frosted glass to get attention. Although the receptionist turned out to be helpful, I felt somehow my visit had been an intrusion."

One problem some councils drew attention to was poor or limited communication between the "front counter" and the "back office." Dunfermline district council is attempting to get round this problem by inviting reception staff to suggest ways in which improvements could be made in this respect.

2.3 Telephoning the council

The consumer concerns survey showed that 45 per cent of those who had been in contact with their council did so by telephone (a somewhat smaller proportion than for England and Wales - 60 per cent). Another study carried out for East Kilbride district council showed that 62 per cent of people had contacted the council by telephone and just under a quarter by personal visit. A study by Fife regional council indicated that telephone usage varied by type of enquiry: 75 per cent for enquiries about water supply, compared with 11 per cent for enquiries about concessionary travel, for example.

The telephone has obvious advantages over a personal visit such as speed and convenience, but it also has drawbacks, such as phones not being answered promptly, engaged lines, or being put through to the wrong person. It is also a rather impersonal form of communication compared with a visit to the council offices, and households on low incomes are less likely to have access to a telephone. However, it is often the only option for people living a long distance away from the council offices.

Key elements in the provision of successful telephone contact with the council include:

* clear and well-designed entries in the telephone directory and council publications, routing people to the right departments, and a clear display of emergency contact numbers;

* commitment to answering calls within a certain length of time and routing them to the right department;

* courteous, friendly and helpful telephone manners by receptionists, and staff to whom calls are transferred properly identifying themselves (by position and name);

* use of "helplines", new technology and other methods for facilitating public contact with the council.
2.3.1 Entries in telephone directories

A good entry in the telephone directory should be like a well designed building, leaving you in no doubt about finding your way in. Our own examination of phone directories showed that many of the entries for councils followed the standard alphabetical format of the directory, with large councils taking up several columns of small print. They assume some knowledge by callers of how the council is organised to find the number they require. For example, in one entry, callers would need to know which of several area housing offices to telephone about a repair: no indication is given of the areas covered by each office. An increasing number of authorities, as in the examples shown in appendix 4a, have now started to put special displays in the phone directory. Instead of having to work through an alphabetical list in small print, readers are clearly signposted, through good graphics and layout to the key departments. In the best examples, functions and services of different departments are clearly spelt out and emergency numbers are displayed prominently.

2.3.2 Telephone reception

To find out how easy it was to telephone the council, the SCC telephoned all 65 district, islands, and regional councils, requesting a simple item of information, the date of the next council meeting.

Our enquiries indicated that most councils handled calls promptly and efficiently, but few volunteered the sort of additional information, such as meeting times and agenda items, that was offered when people visited council offices in person. The main findings are summarised below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone answered without having to re-dial</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time taken to answer telephone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 secs</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 secs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-30 secs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-60 secs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 secs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer to enquiry given straightaway</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caller passed onto somebody else</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons answering enquiry identified themselves</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional information volunteered</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time taken to answer enquiry:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 2 mins</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 3 mins</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 + mins</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of councils called</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In only a few cases (4) was it necessary to dial more than once because lines were engaged. In two cases the call was received by an answering machine which referred callers to another number in case of emergencies. In only one case was there no reply after waiting for 5 minutes (all calls were made during normal office hours). In over 80 per cent of cases, the council answered in less than 20 seconds, and only one of those answering took longer than a minute.

Receptionists in most cases referred the caller to somebody else, who in all but one case was able to answer the enquiry. In two councils, two members of staff (besides the receptionist) were spoken to, and in one council, transfers were made to four other people before an answer could be given. Sometimes receptionists would transfer calls without appearing to have acknowledged the caller's question and without identifying the department to which the call was transferred. In only three cases did those identifying the name of their department also give their own name. Staff often gave a standard answer to the enquiry ("council meets last Thursday in the month", for example) without saying whether this applied to the summer recess - only a few explained this. If staff to whom calls were transferred were unaware of the answer, they would usually make further enquiries themselves rather than pass the calls on to yet another person.

In rural areas, telephoning the council may involve a "trunk" call, which can be costly as well as being discriminatory. At least two councils, Highland regional council and Ross and Cromarty district council, at the time of investigation, were known to be operating a system whereby callers are automatically linked to a local number. Other councils are exploring similar systems. Some councils such as Clackmannan district council are also operating "helplines" for callers who are not sure whom to ask for when phoning the council. A concern of telephone reception staff at one council was staff leaving departmental phones unattended or not leaving messages saying where they could be contacted, with the result that more time was spent having to re-route calls. One small council reported that calls to the housing department are taken by the director of housing working occasionally at the reception desk!

2.4 Writing to the council

Although only a small number of contacts with the council are typically made by letter (only 8 per cent of respondents in the consumer concerns survey had last contacted the council in this way), correspondence with the council invariably relates to more complex matters than those dealt with through personal visits or by telephone: for example, planning applications, information or advice about legal matters, and disputes or appeals relating to some council decision.

Key elements in this respect could be expected to include:

* acknowledgement of all letters within, say, two or three working days;

* replies (other than acknowledgements) within agreed times for various sorts of correspondence - such as requests for information, applications, and written complaints;
* replies written in plain language, explaining any technical or unfamiliar terms;

* mention of contact name and telephone number of a member of staff who can provide further information, deal with queries, etc. (This need not be the person answering the letter).

It may not be possible to establish strict standards covering all of the above aspects: what is important, however, is councils reassuring people that their correspondence is being dealt with and has not been forgotten about.

Twelve of the 61 councils replying to our enquiries indicated that they had agreed standard response times in which to answer letters, although in most councils discretion is given to heads of departments in deciding upon the appropriate response times. Another nine councils said they are developing such standards. For example, in one large district council response times were as follows:

- **Environmental health:** reply within three weeks.
- **Planning:** reply within two weeks.
- **Housing:** reply within ten days.

**Edinburgh** district council has publicly committed itself to paying financial compensation if it has not replied to certain sorts of correspondence within a stated time.

Our own enquiries indicated that most councils respond to straightforward written requests for information within a matter of days, although with variations between them in the amount of information volunteered. When asked to give the date of the next council meeting, councils replied within the following times:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Number of Councils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two working days</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three &quot;    &quot;</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four &quot;      &quot;</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five &quot;      &quot;</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six to ten &quot;  &quot;</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleven &quot;     &quot;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply after 1 month</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As these figures show, over half of the councils replied within two or three working days and over two-thirds within five days. Just over a quarter (18) replied by first class mail.

Most replies took the form of a letter volunteering the time and venue of the council meeting and not just the date, but seven did not say when the meeting would start. Seven enclosed the council's full schedule or cycle of council and committee meetings. Letters were invariably signed on behalf of the chief executive, director of administration or other similar title. Some were answered by "divisional managers" or "divisional secretaries." One was signed by the "public relations officer." Most (50) gave the name of a person who could be
contacted for further information and 28 gave a telephone extension or direct line number as well. Ten councils did not give a contact name other than the person signing the letter.

A few replies contained supplementary advice or information, such as advising the recipient to check the meeting time by phone nearer the date. One explained:

"Should you wish to attend, the members of the public are granted access to such meetings unless the items have been specifically excluded in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973."

One or two letters went out of their way to encourage attendance at the council meeting, as in this example:

"Should you wish to attend the council meeting, you will be very welcome. If you could contact the office beforehand, we could arrange for the agenda to be made available to you."

And one letter was written at considerable length by the depute chief executive to explain the committee structure of the council, with the helpful point made that:

"Given the fact that all members (of the council) have been party to decisions reached in committee, approval of the committee minutes, which forms the main item of business at full council meetings, is really just a procedural matter taking only a few minutes to deal with. Full council meetings are completed in only five to ten minutes in contrast to the committee meetings, which may last anything from one to three hours normally."

2.5 Summary

Our observations indicated that reception staff at council offices are prompt and often friendly in handling enquiries, in this case requests for straightforward information. In several cases they also volunteered additional information, without being prompted, although this was less likely to happen by telephone. Letters were usually answered promptly, within one week, and usually gave the name of a contact person for further information. Seating and other facilities, such as leaflet displays for visitors to council offices appeared to be adequate at most council offices, but many were without a public telephone visitors could use. Public entrance to buildings were not always clearly marked.
CHAPTER 3: CONTACTING THE COUNCIL: WIDER ASPECTS

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, this report suggested what could be done and what is being done by local authorities to make themselves readily contactable by the public. Our own observations indicated that reception and other staff are on the whole efficient at handling enquiries from the general public and in many cases do so in a friendly and helpful manner, though possibly with some room for improvement in the amount of supplementary information volunteered in answering enquiries and in the provision of facilities such as telephones visitors could use. Attention was also drawn to initiatives taken by councils to improve their reception services, such as the siting or design of offices. This part of the report considers some wider aspects of facilitating contact between the public and the council. The consumer concerns survey highlighted the fact that while most people who contacted the council were satisfied with the way in which their enquiry was handled many still felt that the council was too "remote" and would like more information about the council, in particular about whom to contact about various services.

3.2 Policy development

Contact between the council and users of its services is an important aspect of the council's development. It is a vehicle for monitoring satisfaction with services, identifying shortcomings, initiating improvements and setting service standards. Feedback from users of services can be secured in a variety of ways - for example, through surveys, public meetings and consultations, and group discussions. Publications such as Getting Closer to the Public (Local Government Management Board) already offer valuable guidance to local authorities in carrying out these sorts of tasks. A theme emerging from the SCC's investigation is the way in which local authorities can encourage members of the public to come forward with their enquiries, problems or difficulties by projecting a friendly, approachable image at the reception end of their services - the first line of public contact with the council. Reception and other front-line staff, in turn, can be seen as playing a crucial role in the council's monitoring and development of its services. With this perspective in mind, local authorities will want to:

* draw up statements of policy concerned with promoting contact between the public and the council;

* designate a senior member of staff with responsibility for implementing, co-ordinating and monitoring a strategy for promoting closer contact between the public and the council;

* plan specific initiatives to promote contact between the public and the council - such as "open days", features in the local press, mobile exhibitions, videos etc. describing the role and work of the council and how the public can help the council do its job well;
* provide appropriate training for both "front-line" staff dealing directly with the public and "back-room" staff dealing with referrals from front-line staff - for example, through workshops, staff development programmes, etc.

* monitor the nature and range of contact between the public and the council and feed information into the policy development process.

As Richard Kerley, of the Scottish Local Authorities Management Centre, has written:

"The critical task for local authorities who wish 'to get closer to the customer' is to review their strategic policies and management systems, rather than merely to act upon their operational and front-counter interface with users."

The rest of this chapter reports on how far councils have progressed with regard to these aspects. It is based on the replies of the 61 councils who responded to our questionnaire (reproduced in the appendix 3).

3.3 **Policy statements**

Our investigations revealed that about a third of councils had issued some kind of policy statement or report that dealt with contact between the public and the council (with some others reporting that they were considering doing so). In some cases, their policy statements formed part of a broad strategy, as in this statement from one of the Management Objectives of Dumfries and Galloway regional council:

"To ensure that members of the public are treated in an understanding, helpful and constructive manner at all times."

Such a strategic approach has involved councils reviewing their arrangements for dealing with visits, telephone calls and correspondence from members of the public. But it also offers a clear statement of values committing the council to putting relationships with the users of its services at the forefront of its activities.

3.4 **Staff appointments**

Over thirty local authorities in Scotland reported that they had designated a senior officer responsible for promoting and monitoring relations with the public, usually with the job title of "public relations officer". Some councils had appointed a "customer care" officer or a "marketing manager", suggesting that they saw themselves taking on a pro-active role in this area. But the tenor of responses indicated that many other councils were also moving in this direction.
3.5 Specific initiatives

Twenty six councils reported that they published their own public newspaper with a few others saying that this was actively under consideration. Most of these newspapers were tabloid size and about four to eight pages long. Various surveys carried out in Edinburgh, Fife and East Kilbride indicated, however, that most people continue to rely on the local press as their main source of information about the council. The relative infrequency of council newspapers makes them a limited source of information.

Twenty one councils said that they published their own directories of services, with five others saying that such a publication was planned. For example, Edinburgh and Stirling district councils publish their very own comprehensive A-Z directories of council services, with contact names and numbers. (See appendix 4b for extracts from the latter.) Bearsden and Milngavie district council also lists in its directory local community councils, JPs, etc. Some of these directories, however, comprise commercially-produced "town guides", aimed more at tourists, so the figure of 21 above is an overstatement. One council sent a copy of its Terms of Reference for Committees in response to this part of our enquiries.

Some councils have also started to explore the use of new technology for getting information across to the public. For example, Highland regional council is setting up a "viewdata" system into which people at remote terminals can key into information about council and other community services.

3.6 Staff training

Forty four councils said that they provided their staff with some sort of training in "customer care" or contact with the public. These were more likely to be the larger authorities with enough staff to mount a formal training programme. (An example of one such course is shown in appendix 4c). Most of this training is directed at front-line staff. Rather less of this training appears to be directed at those in senior or middle management positions, whose functions may nonetheless affect the council's dealings with the public - perhaps inadvertently reinforcing a "politeness at the counter" syndrome.

3.7 Monitoring

Nine councils mentioned having some procedure for monitoring enquiries and complaints from the public, and another nine said that they were planning to do so. For example, Clydesdale district council has published its own procedure and code of practice for staff in complaints handling. Some have common procedures across all departments, while others give departments some discretion to vary or develop their own procedures. In a number of the smaller councils, complaints are usually referred in the first instance to the chief executive. Stirling district council issues pre-printed "freepost" cards for sending in comments or complaints about particular services, and a booklet on handling
"customer complaints" is issued to staff. The education department of Strathclyde regional council invites people to comment on "good" and "bad" aspects of the education service on pre-printed cards. Dunfermline district council has been consulting reception and other front-line staff about the monitoring of their work with the public.

3.8 Summary

An increasing number of local authorities are taking steps to bring about closer contact between the council and the public. This is most manifest in public statements of policy to this effect, the appointment of "customer care" staff, the publication of council newspapers and directories of services, staff training in contact with the public, and the establishment of procedures for monitoring enquiries and complaints.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND ACTION CHECKLIST

4.1 Conclusions

Contact between the council and members of the public constitutes an important cornerstone in the efficient and effective delivery of local authority services. This report has drawn attention to one particular aspect of this process - contact between the public and front-line staff at the reception desk. Our investigations have indicated that councils deal with enquiries from the public promptly, politely and efficiently, though possibly with some scope for improvement in the amount of information volunteered and in the provision of facilities for visitors, such as telephones they can use. Our enquiries also revealed that local authorities, no doubt spurred on by the idea of a "citizen's charter", have become increasingly aware of the need to promote and develop good relationships with the users of their services; they are starting to build "customer care" and related concepts into their management strategies.

The impression from our research is that the scene presented in this report is a shifting one and that in a year or two's time local authority policies and practices in this area could have moved on considerably further.

The methodology of our research also covered only limited aspects of a local authority's functioning in this area: at the reception desk, and even then, only with regard to simple enquiries. Contact between the public and councils takes place at various other levels - through, for example, councillors' surgeries, public meetings arranged by council staff, and private interviews with officials. Little is still known about public satisfaction with these sorts of contact. Local authorities, in reviewing their strategies for promoting contact with the public, will clearly want to extend their horizons beyond the reception desk.

The recommendations and checklist for action which follow may be viewed as reflecting and furthering the good practices which many local authorities have already started to take on board rather than as an attempt to take local authorities to task. They should be read with this consideration in mind.

4.2 Recommendations

1. Local authorities should formulate and publish a statement of policy on promoting and developing closer contact between the public and the council.

This statement should relate to contact between the public and the council in general and also with regard to different service departments and activities of the council. This statement should be kept under regular review. Our investigations have shown that a third of councils in Scotland have already issued a statement of some form or another in this connection, albeit of varying quality or scope. These councils should review and, if necessary, revise their statements in the light of the findings and recommendations of this report.
2. Local authorities should designate a member of senior management staff with special responsibility for implementing and developing the council's strategy for bringing about closer contact between the public and the council.

The remit of this official should extend beyond improving operations at the "front-line", in reception areas, and apply to "backstage" operations which have ramifications for staff directly dealing with the public. Our enquiries show that about half of local authorities in Scotland have officials responsible for "customer care" and "public relations". The role and functions of these officials should be brought under review, if necessary, with a view to broadening their scope. In particular, the "customer care" aspects of their work should be developed, as distinct from "public relations" work with the press and outside organisations.

3. Local authorities should draw up their own development plans for promoting contact between the public and the council.

The development plan should propose a range of initiatives for facilitating public understanding of and contact with the council, involving, for example, the use of the local media, information booklets/guides to services, mobile exhibitions and videos. Many local authorities have already taken on these sorts of initiatives or are about to do so. They should carry out their own assessments of public satisfaction with different types of initiative. Their development plans should be drawn up in consultation with bodies or individuals representing users of local services, such as tenants' groups and community councils.

4. Local authorities should initiate or review their staff training or staff development programmes concerned with contact between the public and council staff.

Training programmes, building on existing good practices and training initiatives elsewhere, would aim to build up greater awareness among staff at all levels of the importance of such aspects as good oral and written communication with the public, projecting a "caring" or other appropriate image in dealings with the public, and efficient and effective handling of enquiries and complaints. Similar training should be made available for staff with strategic management responsibilities. Smaller local authorities could consider combining efforts with other authorities to provide such training. Not all of this training need involve attendance at formal "courses": a lot of it could be acquired "on the job", through staff development and appraisal.
5. Local authorities should appoint someone in a senior position to be responsible for developing systems for monitoring enquiries and complaints they receive from members of the public.

Enquiries and complaints received by reception or other front-line staff should be fed into the local authority's policy development processes and help inform and further the authority's strategy for improving contact between the council and the public. Some local authorities have already set up monitoring systems of their own. Authorities could consider pooling expertise and experience in the initiation and development of such systems.

6. Local authorities should draw up their own checklists for action on developing or maintaining good contact between the public and the council, having regard to the exemplar presented below.

These checklists would give councils specific targets to work towards or standards to maintain in front-line and other dealings with the public. They could also form a basis for published standards of service in "customer care", albeit with some in-built flexibility factor to take account of the different circumstances of various service departments. The checklist below deals specifically with contact with the public at "reception" level but could usefully be extended to other forms of public contact, for example in dealings with council officials or elected representatives.

4.3 A checklist for action: reception services

General

Does the council have a statement of principles and "good practice" guidelines for use by reception and other front-line staff in dealings with the public?

Does the council have a citizens' charter or similar published document setting out the standards of service the public can expect when contacting the council by personal visit, telephone or letter?

Are all council staff - senior and non-senior - through training and support, committed to customer care in their dealings, directly or indirectly, with the public?

Does the council have a well-developed system for channelling enquiries from front-line to "backroom" staff?

Is the council committed to taking remedial action when these standards are not met, for example review of staffing, payment of compensation, etc?
Visits to council offices

Are council offices and departments clearly signposted? Are the names of different offices properly marked? Is the reception area/desk easy to find?

Are there arrangements for giving people with disabilities access to council offices?

Are there visible "welcoming" signs in council offices, such as strategic location of notices, seating, light refreshment, toilet, and other facilities for visitors? Is there a payphone visitors can use?

Are doorkeeping, reception and other front-line staff briefed or trained in projecting a "welcoming" and "customer care" image? Are reception staff easily identifiable through badges or nameplates?

Telephoning the council

Does the council have a well designed entry in the telephone directory, clearly signposting callers to the right department? Are emergency contact numbers prominently displayed?

Does the council have published standards for answering and routing telephone calls? Does the council have a "helpline" service?

Are telephone reception staff briefed or trained in projecting a helpful "customer care" image? Do staff identify themselves properly by name and position when dealing with calls from the general public?

Could the council make more use of new technology to facilitate telephone contact, for example automatic re-routing of long distance calls within the authority's area to local destinations?

Could the council provide a "freephone" enquiry service for people who could not otherwise afford to contact their council by phone?

Writing to the council?

Is the council committed to answering letters within published target times?

Can the person or department signing the letter be identified?

Are letters to the general public answered in plain language?

Do letters include the name and telephone number of a contact person who can provide further advice or information?
REFERENCES


2. Local Government Training Board, *Learning from the Public* (1987) and *Getting Closer to the Public* (undated). Both publications offer stimulating and practical suggestions for councils about moving from an "enclosed" to an open approach to their role and functioning.

3. National Consumer Council (NCC), *Consumer Concerns 1991: a consumer view of public and local authority services*, 1991. Findings were based on an interview survey of 2,286 people in Great Britain, including 476 in Scotland. Figures quoted in the text refer to Scottish data, for which separate cross-tabulations were compiled.

4. Members of SCC's Consumer Network are ordinary members of the public recruited to carry out observations and other tasks connected with the SCC's work. For further details, see the SCC's current *Annual Report*.


VISITING THE COUNCIL OFFICES:

Name of volunteer: ________________________________

Name of council: ________________________________

Address of council: ________________________________

Study this questionnaire carefully before you go into the council offices but do not fill it in until after you have left.

Call at the council offices at any time between 9.30 am and 12 noon or between 2.30 pm and 4.30 pm (avoid lunch-times). Ask for street directions if necessary.

1. **NOTE:** time (to nearest minute) at which you entered council offices ______ am/pm

2. Is the building marked with ENTRY, VISITORS, or similar sign?[ ] [ ]

3. Is there a member of staff at hand in the entrance hall to receive and direct visitors?[ ] [ ]

4. Is there a sign or notice in the entrance hall marked or pointing to RECEPTION, ENQUIRIES or similar place for visitors to report to?[ ] [ ]

5. **ASK** the member of staff you first approach:

"Could you please tell me when the next meeting of the full council is due to take place?"

**REPEAT** if passed on to somebody else.
6. Did this person:  
   - give you the date straightaway? [ ] [ ]  
   - pass you on to somebody else? [ ] [ ]  
   - make enquiries for you? [ ] [ ]  
   - refer you to a noticeboard, etc? [ ] [ ]  
   - direct you to another building? [ ] [ ]  
   - do something else? (give details below) [ ] [ ]

7.1 How many members of staff did you speak to? _____ persons

7.2 Were any of them identifiable by name badges or nameplates on door or desk? [ ] [ ]

8. Were you offered (without prompting) any additional information about the council meeting?
   If YES, was this given - verbally (eg, whereabouts of meeting) [ ] [ ]  
   in writing (eg, agenda for meeting) [ ] [ ]

   Give brief details below/enclose written materials.

9. In the entrance or reception area did you see:  
   - chairs for visitors? [ ] [ ]  
   - table/desk visitors could use? [ ] [ ]  
   - public payphone? [ ] [ ]  
   - public notices/posters? [ ] [ ]  
   - leaflet display? [ ] [ ]
10. Enter below any comments about your visit, such as helpfulness of staff, promptness in attending to your enquiry, etc.

11. NOTE: time (to nearest minute) at which you left the building

___ am/pm

PLEASE RETURN TO SCC BY __________________________

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP
LIST OF COUNCILS THAT REPLIED TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Borders Regional Council
Central Regional Council
Dumfries & Galloway Regional Council
Fife Regional Council
Grampian Regional Council
Highland Regional Council
Lothian Regional Council
Strathclyde Regional Council
Tayside Regional Council
Orkney Islands Council
Shetland Islands Council
Western Isles Council
Aberdeen District Council
Angus District Council
Annandale & Eskdale District Council
Argyll & Bute District Council
Badenoch & Strathspey District Council
Banff & Buchan District Council
Bearsden & Milngavie District Council
Berwickshire District Council
Caithness District Council
Clackmannan District Council
Claybank District Council
Clydesdale District Council
Cumbernauld & Kilsyth District Council
Cumnock & Doon Valley District Council
Cunninghame District Council
Dundee District Council
Dunfermline District Council
East Kilbride District Council
East Lothian District Council
Eastwood District Council
Edinburgh District Council
Ettrick & Lauderdale District Council
Falkirk District Council
Glasgow District Council
Gordon District Council
Hamilton District Council
Inverclyde District Council
Inverness District Council
Kilmarnock & Loudoun District Council
Kincardine & Deeside District Council
Kirkcaldy District Council
Kyle & Carrick District Council
Midlothian District Council
Moray District Council
Motherwell District Council
Nairn District Council
Nithsdale District Council
Northeast Fife District Council
Perth & Kinross District Council
Renfrew District Council
Ross & Cromarty District Council
Roxburgh District Council
Skye & Lochalsh District Council
Stewartry District Council
Stirling District Council
Sutherland District Council
Tweeddale District Council
West Lothian District Council
SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES MANAGEMENT CENTRE/
SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL
QUESTIONNAIRE

LOCAL AUTHORITY RECEPTION SERVICES

1. Name of Council ..........................................................

2. Name and Telephone No. of Officer completing this questionnaire
   ..................................................................................
   ..................................................................................

3. Does your Council have a senior officer designated with responsibility for
   monitoring the effectiveness of relations with the public?
   Yes ........
   No ........

4. 'If yes, who is it? ..........................................................

5. Has your Council approved any committee reports or policy statements
   that deal with contact with the public in council facilities and by
   council staff?
   Yes ........
   No ........

   If 'yes', can you please enclose a copy.

6. Does the Council, or do individual departments, provide 'Customer Care',
   'Public Contact' or similar training courses for staff?
   Yes ........
   No ........

   If 'yes', can you please enclose details.
7. Does the Council publish a newspaper or newsletter of any kind?

Yes ........

No ........

If 'yes', can you please enclose a recent copy.

8. Does the Council publish a directory of council services or similar information?

Yes ........

No ........

If 'yes', can you please enclose a recent copy.

9. Is there an officer responsible for telephone and data transmission systems within the Council?

Yes ........

No ........

If so, who is it? ........................................................................

10. Does this person create and supervise the Council entry in the Telephone Directory?

Yes ........

No ........

11. Does the Council have a central complaint & enquiry monitoring system in place?

Yes ........

No ........

If so, what form does this take?
12. If 'yes', who supervises this? ..........................................

13. If 'no', how are complaints dealt with? ..................................

14. Does the Council have agreed standards for response to public contact; for example, is there an expectation that letters will be answered within a given period of time?

If so, what form does this take?

15. Are there any general comments or information you would wish to add to your response?

Thank you for your help.
Richard Kerley.
LOTHIAN REGIONAL COUNCIL

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS, GEORGE IV BRIDGE, EDINBURGH EH1 1UQ
031-229 9292

REGIONAL COUNCIL SERVICES

Advice Shop
Assessor
Car Parking
Children's Hearings
Community Centres—see Education
Community Charge
Consumer Protection—see Trading Standards
Education—Bursaries
—Careers Service
—Community Education
—Community Centres
—Further Education
—Nursery Schools
—Primary Schools
—Resource Centres
—Secondary Schools
—School Meals
—Special Schools
—Playing Fields
Electoral Registration—see Assessor
Fire—see under Fire Highways
—Lighting
—Maintenance
—Projects

Industrial Development
Medical Adviser
Planning
Police—see under Police
Property Services
Rates Collection (Non Domestic)
Regional Analyst
Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages
Roads—see Highways
Schools—see Education
Sewerage—see Water and Drainage
Sheltered Housing—see Social Work
Social Work—Day Care
—Home Help
—Residential
—Sheltered Housing
Street Lighting—see Highways
Trading Standards
Water and Drainage
Weights and Measures—see Trading Standards

DISTRICT COUNCILS' SERVICES

Building Control
Burial Grounds
Cleansing
District Courts
Environmental Health
Food Hygiene
Halls and Theatres
Housing
Industrial Development
Libraries
Licensing
Markets and Slaughterhouses
Mortuary
Museums and Art Galleries
Parks
Planning
Recreation and Leisure
Refuse Collection
Swimming Pools
Tourism

AFTER HOURS EMERGENCIES

REGIONAL COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK..........................031-554 4301
WATER..................................031-661 2622
ALL OTHER EMERGENCIES..............031-229 9292
(Repair, Highways, Lighting, etc.)

DISTRICT COUNCILS

Housing Repairs, etc.—Ring appropriate District Emergency No.

TO HELP YOU GET THE RIGHT NUMBER

• Check the lists to confirm whether you seek a REGIONAL or DISTRICT service.
• If you require a REGIONAL service, you will find the number listed under the appropriate Department.
• If you require a DISTRICT service, look under the appropriate alphabetical listing for:——East Lothian, Edinburgh, Midlothian, West Lothian (or Livingston Development Corporation).
• The services shown are given as a guide. All departments and services are listed in the directory.
## Cumbernauld & Kilsyth District Council

**Address:**
- **Chief Executive** Bron Way Cumbernauld G67 1DZ
- **Administration** Bron Way Cumbernauld G67 1DZ
- **Architectural Services** Bron Way Cumbernauld G67 1DZ
- **Cemeteries** Cumbernauld & Eastfield Cumbernauld G72 138
  - Kirklands Kilsyth 822144
- **Cleaning Services** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 3524
  - Bumsdie Kilsyth 824406
  - Wardpark Depot Cumbernauld 737631
- **Contract Monitoring** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
- **Direct Works** Bumsdie Kilsyth 822333
- **District Solicitor** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
- **Environmental Health** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
- **Financial Services** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
- **Golf Course** Palacerigg Starter's Box Cumbernauld G72 1461
- **Hall Letting Enquiries** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
  - Abonhill Sheltered Hall Cumbernauld G72 3412
  - Bogside Pavilion Kilsyth 824326
  - Burgh Hall, Bumgreen Kilsyth 823130
  - Burngreen Hall Kilsyth 821849
  - Colzium House Kilsyth 823281
  - Forge Community Hall Cumbernauld G73 1279
  - MacAuley Centre, Condorrat Cumbernauld G72 802
  - Pollock Hall, Condorrat Cumbernauld G73 6789
  - Roadside Sheltered Hall, Cumbernauld G72 518
  - Village Hall, The Wynd Cumbernauld G73 199
  - Westfield Community Hall Cumbernauld G72 5683
- **Housing - General Enquiries** Kilsyth 823290
- **Emergency Repairs** Kilsyth 824003

**Contact Numbers:**
- **Libraries HQ** Allander Walk, Town Centre Cumbernauld 725664
  - 17 Pine Road, Abonhill Cumbernauld 731503
  - North Road, Condorrat Cumbernauld 736615
  - Village, The Wynd Cumbernauld 723925
  - Bumgreen, Kilsyth Kilsyth 823147
- **Municipal Bank** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
  - Parkfoot Street Kilsyth 823290
- **Museum Services** Palacerigg, Cumbernauld 735077
- **Parks Department** Bumsdie Kilsyth 825070
- **Palacerigg Country Park** Cumbernauld G72 0047
- **Planning & Building Control** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
- **Recreation & Leisure Services** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
- **Technical Services** Bron Way Cumbernauld G72 131
- **Transport Maintenance** Wardpark Depot Cumbernauld G72 2692
- **Tryst Sports Centro - Bookings** Cumbernauld G73 143
  - Enquiries Cumbernauld 728138

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The Council's "LITTER BUSTERS" project is an on-going campaign to encourage the creation of a litter-free District. We will remove almost all household rubbish free of charge - special uplift can be arranged. We have regular runs to collect garden rubbish in season. Additional supplies of litter-sacks can be obtained as necessary. For details of any of these services, or to report any litter nuisances in your neighbourhood, phone Cumbernauld 73524.

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The District lies in the very heart of Scotland, midway between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Communications to the rest of the country are superb, and have helped establish the District as a major industrial and commercial centre. Distribution and service industry and high-technology companies have found themselves particularly at home in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. The District offers a wide choice of town and country housing, excellent shopping and a growing choice of modern hotels and restaurants. Our leisure facilities are of the highest quality and variety with almost every indoor and outdoor activity catered for. To first class golf courses are added an international indoor Sports Centre and Swimming Pool, a nationally renowned Country and Wildlife Park, an Ice Rink, Bowling Alley and much more. The scenic Kilsyth hills are the backdrop to the Forth & Clyde Canal and the Antonine Wall, both of which traverse the District. Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Council welcomes day-or-stay visitors, year round, whether on business or holiday. Any enquiries about the District and its amenities should be addressed to the Chief Executive at the Council Offices, Bron Way, Cumbernauld.
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<th>Service</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
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<td><strong>Landowners</strong></td>
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<td>(District Council Properties)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harry Johnstone</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 2160</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rudi Walter</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 2154</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Landscape Design</strong></td>
<td>Planning Services</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 2156</td>
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<td><strong>Languages</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Legal Services</strong></td>
<td>Elaine Paterson</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 2005</td>
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<td><strong>Leisure</strong></td>
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<td>General Enquiries Reception</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 72129 or ext 72155</td>
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<td>Parks General Enquiries</td>
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<td>Lettings, Council Housing</td>
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<td>see Housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lettings Council Shops &amp; Factories</td>
<td>Estates Section</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 2146</td>
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<td><strong>Library Headquarters</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Audio Visual Service</td>
<td>Steve Dolman</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73140</td>
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<tr>
<td>cassettes, CDs and videos</td>
<td>or contact local library</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Book Order Point</strong></td>
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<td>Order books to buy through your local library</td>
<td>contact local library</td>
<td>see Libraries</td>
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<td><strong>Books, large print</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>contact local library</td>
<td>see Libraries</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Books, on audio tape</strong></td>
<td>Roslyn Johnston</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73134</td>
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<td>or contact local library</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community Information</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Find out about local groups, organisations &amp; council information</td>
<td>Marjory Blyth</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73136</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Exhibitions</strong></td>
<td>Steve Dolman</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73140</td>
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<td><strong>Ex-Library Book Sales</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Family Book Service</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual collections of books delivered monthly to people living in remote areas</td>
<td>Marjory Blyth</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73136</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rena Frederick</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73135</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Housebound Services</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Books, tapes, music and information delivered to the housebound and disabled every fortnight</td>
<td>Roslyn Johnston</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73134</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inter-Library Loans</strong></td>
<td>Borrow books from other library authorities</td>
<td>contact local library</td>
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<td><strong>Local History</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jayne Stephenson</td>
<td>(0786) 71917</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allan Jeffrey</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 2106</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fiona Fraser</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73133</td>
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<td>Margaret Wallace</td>
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<td><strong>Mobile Libraries</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mother &amp; Toddler Groups</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Book collections delivery service</td>
<td>Young Peoples Librarian</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73137</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Playgroups</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Book collections delivery service</td>
<td>Young Peoples Librarian</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73137</td>
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<td><strong>Prison Service</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Book collections delivery service</td>
<td>Rena Frederick</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 73135</td>
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<td><strong>Publications For Sale</strong></td>
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<td>contact local library</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reference Service</strong></td>
<td>Allan Jeffrey</td>
<td>(0786) 79000 ext 2106</td>
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<td><strong>Libraries</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Balfour Library, Buchanan Street, Balfour G63 OTW</td>
<td>Carol Murphy</td>
<td>(0360) 40407</td>
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<td>additional services: videos, photocopying</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bannockburn Library, Greenacre Place, Bannockburn FK7 8HY</td>
<td>Sheila Miller</td>
<td>(0786) 812286</td>
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<td>additional services: cassettes, CDs, videos, fax</td>
<td>Marion Seamens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridge of Allan, Fountain Road, Bridge of Allan FK9 4AT</td>
<td>Elizabeth Farr</td>
<td>(0786) 833680</td>
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<td>additional services: cassettes, CDs, videos, fax, photocopying</td>
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CARING FOR YOUR CUSTOMER

Course Objectives
The course aims to inform participants of the principles of good customer care. It demonstrates the skills required to identify customer needs and to deal with ‘difficult’ customers. Finally, it provides the learner with a step by step approach for dealing effectively with complaints.

Target Group
Everyone in the organisation from new recruits to experienced managers.

Purpose of the Course
Customer Care is a critical issue for any organisation trying to meet the increasingly demanding requirements of customers in the 1990s. Customer Care is the responsibility of staff at all levels. Each employee must be aware of his or her particular role in assuring that the organisation provides its customers with excellent care, thereby ensuring their loyalty.

Course Structure and Content
The course consists of three modules:

Module 1 - Customer Care - What’s that?
Module 1 focuses on the importance of the trainees’ role in providing good customer care and shows how their behaviour is the key. It also introduces trainees to some very important customers, their colleagues.

What is customer care?
Customer care is about making the customer feel well looked after. You can make customers feel well looked after, even if you can’t provide the goods or services they want, or badly looked after, even when you can.

Why bother?
Providing good customer care will give your business a competitive edge and what’s good for business is good for you! Besides, you should find providing good customer care makes your job more satisfying.
Your behaviour is the key

Your customers respond to your behaviour. But your behaviour doesn't just 'happen' - you have a choice. It's up to you to choose behaviour to make each customer feel good, and each transaction go well. This section sets out six basic rules to help you.

And who is the customer anyway?

As well as external customers you have internal ones - your colleagues. They too deserve customer care.

Module 2 - Satisfying the Customer's Needs

Module 2 covers a range of skills that will help trainees identify customers' needs, and provides a little practice with some rather 'difficult' customers.

Be prepared!

Three ways to prepare yourself for providing good customer care.

Find out what the customer wants.

This section covers four skills you'll need:

- listening,
- asking the right questions,
- observing body language, and
- providing information.

Using your behaviour to help the transaction along

You'll come across difficult customers of course. This section gives you a little practice with three types:

- a rude customer
- a talkative customer
- a pompous know-all
Module 3 - Dealing with Customer Complaints

Module 3 presents a step-by-step procedure for handling customer complaints. It also shows how easily a complaint can stem from a failure to treat colleagues as customers.

Complaints count!

This section sets out all the reasons why you should be positive about complaints.

How to handle a complaint

The six basic steps to follow:

- LISTEN
- SYMPATHISE
- PROBE - PROPOSE ACTION
- TAKE ACTION
- FOLLOW UP

A Little Practice

A little practice with three different customers leads to some ‘don’ts’ in handling complaints.

And whose fault was it anyway?

In this section we go behind the scenes on the trail of a complaint, to see whose fault it was, and discover how easily a complaint can arise through a failure within the organisation to treat colleagues as customers.

Course duration: about 5 hours