

**LISTENING TO OUR COMMUNITY**  
**Results of the Customer Charter Consultation**  
**October - December 2011**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT CUSTOMER**  
**CHARTER**

Prepared by:  
Consultation Unit  
Utlesford District Council  
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## 1. Executive summary

The Uttlesford Customer Charter Feedback survey concentrated on questions designed to gauge users' responses to a draft version of the tacit contract between the council and the community it serves.

At the core of this document is a commitment to “ensure equal access and opportunity to quality services to meet the needs of all those in the community without prejudice or discrimination”. The draft Charter proposes service standards for three communication channels with additional undertakings relating to “customer feedback” and “accessibility”. By way of reciprocity customers are supplied with six guidelines to help them to engage with the council in a responsible and understanding manner.

Members of the citizens panel, residents and defined user groups were asked whether the draft Charter adequately defined the levels of service they could expect when engaging with the authority. Further questions sought to ascertain how well the document communicated the corporate obligation to equality as well as any omissions or emendations that consultees might consider necessary.

For monitoring purposes, to assess impact and to inform the development of future policies, standard equalities questions were also included based on the protocols established by the Uttlesford / South Cambridgeshire Council equalities partnership. These underline the council's commitment to ongoing monitoring of how its services are performing.

Amongst respondents there was a marked agreement that the “Customer Charter tells you what service standard you can expect from Uttlesford District Council” with 92% indicating that they felt the draft document communicated the authority's commitment effectively.

On the equalities front, the headline view, held by 94% of respondents was that the Charter was successful in its aim to treat all users equally, although 4% strongly disagreed. Those who commented on omissions from the draft document generally noted that there was a “distinct lack of detail” citing the specific area of telephone waiting times as being in need of clarification. A number of suggestions were received where respondents felt there was a need to augment the coverage to include public interactions with elected members. The results are summarised below and fully detailed findings can be seen in Section 3.

## 2. Purpose methodology

Uttlesford District Council has always been committed to providing high standards of service to our customers. Prior to the creation of the present draft Customer Charter, a general list of customer care standards was drawn up and publicised through posters and leaflets which were displayed prominently in council buildings around the district. Many departments, particularly those with a public service function, also published their own Customer Service Standards. These were formulated from the generic customer care standards but were so aligned as to include specific information for the users of those services.

In 2009 a corporate decision was taken to revise the suite of Customer Care Standards with a view to initiating guidance which could provide a panopticist approach to customer service across the whole authority. A proposed new customer Charter embracing five areas of service provision and corresponding commitments to delivery was the result. With current moves across the council to promote a more dynamic architecture of customer service there is a recognised need to complete the work on this draft Charter document by running a public consultation exercise to ask those who use the council’s services whether they consider the proposed commitments to be fit for purpose. The results of this consultation will inform the decisions made by officers and councillors when setting the published version of the Uttlesford Customer Charter.

The consultation was run over the period 11 October to 2 December 2011. Respondents were asked to give their opinion on the scope and remit of the Charter document. They were also offered the opportunity to indicate a

preference for reducing or augmenting any area of coverage. Profiling and equalities monitoring questions, all of which are optional, are included as standard.

Questionnaires were available in a wide variety of formats - via online Snap 10 survey and pdf download on the council's website and as a printed paper survey returnable to the consultation office. An emailshot was distributed to every member of the Uttlesford Voices Citizens Panel who had agreed to online participation and to a diverse range of specialist interest and user groups on the UCVS register. Paper copies were also made available all of the council's offices and access points in the district and the public notified of the consultation through press releases to the local newspapers and as part of the winter issue of the council's in-house magazine *Uttlesford Life*. By the close of the consultation period 31 submissions had been received from members of the citizens panel; 3 submissions from other members of the public using the dedicated online Snap survey and 18 printed forms had been collected making a total return of 52 for the consultation.

### 3. Survey results, detailed findings

Key results from the survey are as follows:

**QUESTION 1: DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE THAT THE CUSTOMER CHARTER TELLS YOU WHAT STANDARD OF SERVICE YOU CAN EXPECT FROM UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

On delivering a guide to service delivery standards 43% considered that the five point geometric architecture of the draft Charter provided a very satisfactory starting point (i.e. "strongly" agreed with the statement). Some 49% considered that what was on offer made a satisfactory attempt ("tended to agree" with the statement) at codifying standards of service whilst 4% felt that the document was very unsatisfactory ("strongly" disagreed) in this respect. Just 4% had no opinion.

**QUESTION 2: DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE THAT THE CUSTOMER CHARTER AIMS TO TREAT ALL USERS EQUALLY**

The second question asked if respondents considered that the Charter treats all users equally. To this 46% agreed strongly whilst 48% mitigated their response to just 'tending to agree' with the proposition. None of the respondents chose to indicate that they considered the document had failed on this account. However, a total of 6% either "did not know" or had no opinion.

**QUESTION 3: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU THINK SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE CUSTOMER CHARTER?**

Consultees were also invited to submit further comments additional to the formalised questions with some 7.9% (22 in total) choosing to do so. These appended responses covered a wide range of subjects but generally show a preoccupation with omissions from the draft document generally noting that there was a “distinct lack of detail” and, in two instances, citing the specific area of telephone waiting times as being in need of clarification.

**QUESTION 4: ANY OTHER COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE CUSTOMER CHARTER?**

Additional comments for improving the Charter were also received including proposals that call handling be subject to more stringent controls with appropriate mention in the Charter, that the language be made more personal and that “a small but representative group of residents [might be engaged] to audit the Charter before it is distributed to the community“. A further general suggestion was received that “As music can be very soothing, I would suggest a background music to suit customers of all ages as this tends to calm the most irritable of customers”.

**QUESTION 5: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU THINK SHOULD BE CHANGED IN THE CUSTOMER CHARTER?**

Respondeees were generally happy with service levels though one comment was received noting that “On my regular visits to the council offices it is rarely possible for the staff to deal with me within your 5 minute rule”.

## 4. Appendices

### 4.1 Open text responses Questions 3 - 5

#### Is there anything else that you think should be included in the Customer Charter?

<b>Responses from Citizens Panellists</b>
No mention of interpreters - just as well. I think a statement should be included to the effect that non-English speakers should bring an interpreter with them as the UDC do not have the resources to provide multi-lingual support.
Perhaps a time or ring limit for answering telephone enquiries. Nothing more frustrating than holding on!
It's short on measures. how long to wait on the phone before leaving a number for you to ring back within a defined time. what about communications by e-mail, response times etc. What is the preferred method of communication to enhance the council's effectiveness, including cost
It is general enough to encompass most aspects that might be required.
Response times. Named person to respond. Response from first person contacted. Something about staff working across departments - rather than just handing on. Charter should build on much more useful information in the Comprehensive Equalities Policy and the Complaints and Comments section of the web site. There's little that's useful or tangible in it. Access statement in this is minimal. Access is about opening times, locations, choice of means of communications, not just building physical access and other languages.
It seems very general--its intentions positive but there is a distinct lack of detail: for example, it could give instances of actual situations where it has dealt well with inquiries and been of help to the public. There could also be a pledge to give more accurate feedback on Council meetings, especially those related to town planning.
Proactive approach when future actions affect specific locations. e.g planning permission, change of use etc. Notification in advance by e-mail would alert the residents concerned.
A telephone response time - i.e. number of rings or length of time to answer call.
perhaps not for the Charter but to keep your web site up to date.
possibly a monthly précis of council business in local newspapers
Yes, you say we have to treat your staff with courtesy and RESPECT at all times. However you only say we will be dealt with in a timely courteous and helpful manner, what about respect ????. Is this not a two way thing.
No, all aspects are excellently covered.
when visiting with an appointment a car parking space should be available
there is no mention of a standard for the quality of your website (including ease of searching and accessibility for the visually impaired)
I answered on a separate e-mail request.
The Draft is full of aspirations but there are no SMART targets that you can measure success against. How will demonstrate that you are meeting the aspirations/
Putting information onto the web-site in a timely and open manner (which the Council does well). I like to read about what the Council is doing though I rarely feel any need to comment on anything.
Defined telephone response time? - Ring back service? - Messaging service?
The Charter states that you welcome feedback about the service provided and that you use that feedback to improve. Do you currently/or plan in the future to publish what feedback you have received e.g. group similar comments together and how you

responded to it. if so, might be useful to state that in your Charter.
<b>Responses from Paper and Web surveys</b>
It is basic and that's sometimes better.
The Charter is very good as far as it goes, but it just seems to cover the staff in the main contact areas. How about the conduct of staff going about their duties in the community? eg. Bin men, recycling staff at Thaxted Road, Building Inspectors, dog wardens? I do not have a problem with them but they ought to be included.
All my dealings with Uttlesford Council have been as efficient and courteous as I could hope for
I think you have most things 'covered.'

### Any other comments or suggestions for improving the Customer Charter?

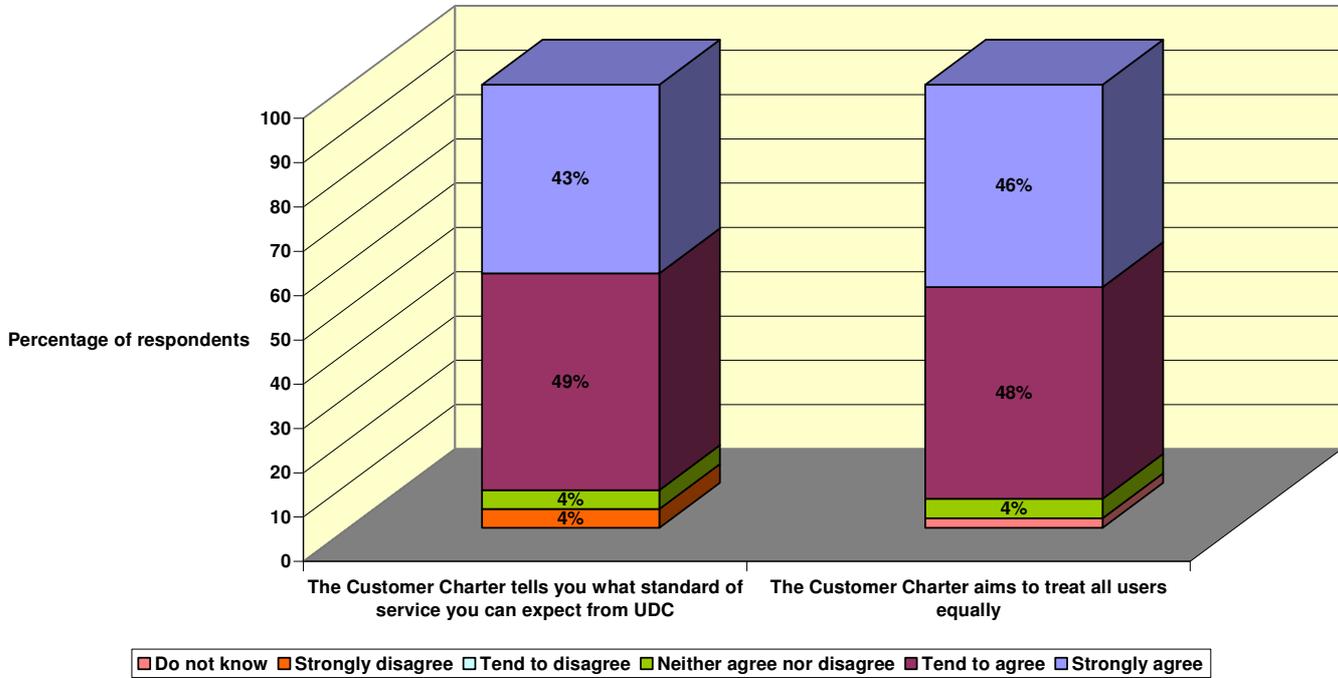
<b>Responses from Citizens Panellists</b>
Good job so far but will need to be reviewed biennially
Perhaps send a copy to ALL households in the District with Council Tax Bills or Electoral Information (saves on postage)
Feedback on ongoing individual matters
See previous.(Response times. Named person to respond. Response from first person contacted. Something about staff working across departments - rather than just handing on. Charter should build on much more useful information in the Comprehensive Equalities Policy and the Complaints and Comments section of the web site. There's little that's useful or tangible in it. Access statement in this is minimal. Access is about opening times, locations, choice of means of communications, not just building physical access and other languages.) It shouldn't be hard to get a few staff together, to discuss how they would wish to be treated as customers, and build from that. If this is about a statement of minimum service in the context of forthcoming cuts, be clear and honest.
To engage a small but representative group of residents to audit the Charter before it is distributed to the community.
see previous comment (perhaps not for the Charter but to keep your web site up to date)
as indicated in my previous reply, an offering of information before questions
Yes. For letters - 'We will reply within three working days of receipt. If a full response is not then possible we will tell you why and indicate when it can be provided.' For meetings - 'If you have to wait more than five minutes we will tell you why and state when we will be able to attend to you.' Feedback - 'We will listen to your criticisms and comments and will recognise them when making decisions.' GENERAL: Suggest the use of 'we' and 'you' to make the Charter more personal.
Add some targets and say when and where you will publish these otherwise it is meaningless
None, it all looks very sensible.
Answering of the phone should have a time limit rather than it being discretionary
<b>Responses from Paper and Web surveys</b>
Keep it simple. I don't tend to agree with putting time limits on such things e.g deal with you in 5 minutes. Sometimes staff levels and ongoing awkward enquiries could make that impossible and we set ourselves up to fail by including time limits.
In the final point where you may not be able to do what is asked due to legislative regulations etc. you should tell the enquirer exactly what law, rule or local by law is stopping the response/action.
As music can be very soothing, I would suggest a background music to suit customers of all ages as this tends to calm the most irritable of customers.
Online Service - I did not know, I just found out. (For applying Housing benefits or other service - proof of European passport, UK driving licence)
It doesn't appear to include our elected councillors especially regarding answering communications! I have always found your telephone receptionists very pleasant and efficient.
In these days of austerity I feel that any other things would be ruled out as too expensive.

**Is there anything else that you think should be changed in the Customer Charter?**

<b>Responses from Citizens Panellists</b>
The substance is good (but please put a comma between timely and courteous).
<b>Responses from Paper and Web surveys</b>
I am 45 and have never had to apply for any benefits but, am very surprised at how helpful all of the staff are.
I received very useful information and I am strongly happy. Thanks for your support.
On my regular visits to the council offices it is rarely possible for the staff to deal with me within your 5 minute rule

## 4.2 Response general analysis

Uttlesford Customer Charter Feedback Survey 2011

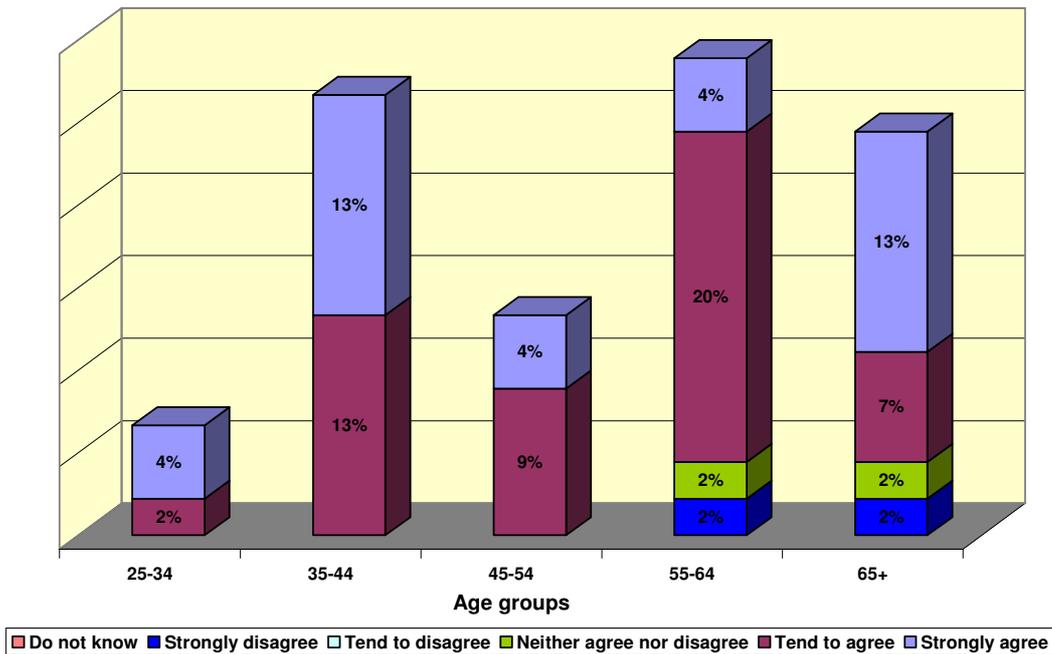


### 4.3 Response profile analysis

Profiling data was already available for respondents who are members of the Citizens Panel. Other members of the public who completed printed questionnaires or who participated using the dedicated online survey, were given the option to provide certain profiling information to help identify any variety of response according to age, gender, ward etc.

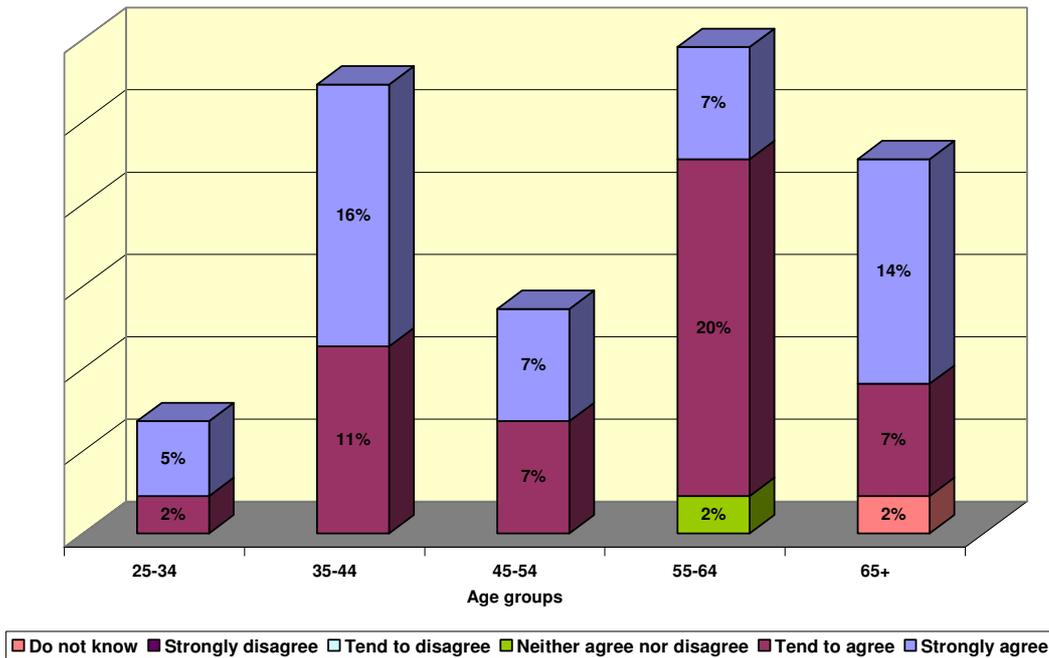
The charts below demonstrate the varying opinions across the age groups: all respondents in the 35-44 age bracket agreed that the Customer Charter was clear in its identification of the standard of service that residents can expect from UDC, whereas all the respondents who strongly disagreed (4%) came from the over 55 age bracket.

**The Customer Charter tells you what standard of service you can expect from UDC (Percentage of total respondents with profiling data)**



The statement that the “Customer Charter aims to treat all users equally” was equally supported by the 35-44 and 55-64 age groups. No respondents disagreed with the proposition but those that either did not know or did not have an opinion were all over 55.

**The Customer Charter aims to treat all users equally  
(Percentage of total respondents with profiling data)**



### Further information

Further profiling data relating to the detailed demographic of respondees for location, sex, age, work status, disability, sexual orientation, gender role, religion and ethnicity can be made available should it be required. This will contain NO personal details but can be utilized to plot general trends in responses.