

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10:00am, Tuesday, 30 November 2021

Policy Assurance Statement – Customer Services

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Routine
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note that Council policies detailed in this report have been reviewed and are considered to reflect current legislative requirements and best practice and therefore remain fit for purpose.

Stephen S. Moir

Executive Director of Corporate Services

Contact: Nicola Harvey, Service Director

Customer and Digital Services, Corporate Services Directorate

Email nicola.harvey@edinburgh.gov.uk



Policy Assurance Statement – Customer Services

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 To ensure that Council policies reflect current legislation, best practice and remain fit for purpose, they are required to be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 2.2 This report provides an assurance update on the key policies managed within Customer Services part of the Customer and Digital Services Division in the Corporate Services Directorate. The report encompasses: Corporate Debt Policy, Discretionary Housing Payments Policy, Council Tax Policies (second homes and empty properties) and Non-Domestic Rates Policy (Discretionary Relief).

3. Background

- 3.1 Council policies are key governance tools. They help realise the Council's vision, values, pledges and outcomes, and are critical to the Council's operations, ensuring the statutory and regulatory obligations are met in an efficient and accountable manner.
- 3.2 To strengthen governance arrangements in this area, a policy framework has been developed to ensure that all current Council policies are easily accessible, and are created, revised and renewed in a consistent manner and to an agreed standard. This included the development of a comprehensive register of Council policies and introduction of a policy template to provide the Council with a standardised format in terms of content and style.

4. Main report

- 4.1 A critical element of the policy framework is to ensure that all Council policies are fit for purpose. This requires each directorate to review, on an annual basis, all policies relevant to their services, and to provide the necessary level of assurance.
- 4.2 This report confirms that the policies listed in the appendix have been reviewed by senior management and are considered fit for purpose. No material changes have been made to the policies detailed in this report, however, some minor adjustments

have been made to ensure on-going accuracy (for example changes in legislation). These changes are noted and detailed in the following section.

- 4.3 Consistent with all Council policies, the latest versions of the Customer Services policies are available through an interactive directory on the Council's website.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 These policies will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis with a formal annual review to ensure they remain fit for purpose.
- 5.2 Policies must be current to ensure the efficient administration of relevant income and benefits activities. This action is detailed in the Customer Services risk register.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no direct financial impacts as a result of this report.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Consultation was undertaken with directorates and divisions as part of the development of a policy framework for the Council.
- 7.2 A review of the Corporate Debt Policy was undertaken by officers and members of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission Group. This review resulted in some minor changes regarding language and tone and clarified the support channels in place for citizens who face indebtedness.
- 7.3 Policies will be moved on to the Council template, which includes a requirement to undertake an integrated impact assessment, where necessary.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee Report 22 May 2014 – Review of Council Policy: up-date.](#)
- 8.2 [Policy and Sustainability Committee Report 6 August 2019 – Policy Assurance Statement – Customer.](#)
- 8.3 [Policy and Sustainability Committee Report 10 November 2020 – Policy Assurance Statement – Customer](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – Policies

Appendix 1 – Policies

Policy title:	Corporate Debt Policy
Approval date:	3 September 2013 (with several subsequent amendments)
Approval body:	Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee
Review process:	Annual review by Head of Service taking account of changes in legislation, regulations and wider policy initiatives.
Change details:	No material changes in last 12 months, however minor updates relating to current Court costs and fees and administration process for Parking debt. The current policy was reviewed by officers and members of the Poverty Commission and remains fit for purpose.

Policy title:	Discretionary Housing Payments Policy
Approval date:	6 December 2016 (Date of original approval)
Approval body:	Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee
Review process:	Annual review by Head of Service taking account of changes in legislation, regulations and wider policy initiatives.,
Change details:	No changes in last 12 months, policy remains fit for purpose.

Procedure title:	Council Tax Empty Properties Procedure
Approval date:	29 October 2015 (Date of original approval)
Approval body:	Finance and Resources Committee
Review process:	Annual review by Head of Service taking account of changes in legislation.
Change details:	No material changes in last 12 months, with minor temporary updates relating to Covid19 activities - Exemptions continuing in 2021/22 for properties occupied solely by students and became unoccupied on or after 17 March 2020 for a reason relating to Covid19. From (and including) the 27 May 2020 such a property will be exempt from paying Council Tax until it is occupied, or the provisions in the Act comes to an end. The policy remains fit for purpose.

Procedure title:	Council Tax Procedure for Second Homes
Approval date:	9 February 2017
Approval body:	City of Edinburgh Council
Review process:	Annual review by Head of Service taking account of changes in legislation, regulations and wider policy initiatives.
Change details:	This procedure is reviewed in line with legislative changes with latest update in 2016 giving local authorities discretion to remove second home discounts. No change in last 12 months and policy remains fit for purpose.

Procedure title:	NDR Discretionary Rating Relief
Approval date:	22 January 2013
Approval body:	Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee
Review process:	Annual review by Head of Service taking account of changes in legislation, regulations and wider policy initiatives.
Change details:	The power to grant DRR is governed by the provision of the Local Government (Financial Provisions etc) (Scotland) Act 1962. This procedure is reviewed in line with legislative changes and is operating effectively. No change in last 12 months. The current policy remains fit for purpose and will be extended before an anticipated material revision linked to the Barclay Review in April 2023. The material change is moving away from the 5-year revaluation cycle to a 3-year cycle. This policy will be updated at the appropriate time.