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Date October 10, 2023 **Report No.** 2023-577

To Chair and Members
COW – Planning and Administration

From Brian Hutchings
Chief Administrative Officer

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item	[]
Item For Consideration	[]

2.0 Topic Updates to the City of Brantford Customer Service Standard and Customer Complaints Handling Policy [Financial Impact – None]

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report No. 2023-577 entitled “Updates to the City of Brantford Customer Service Standard and Customer Complaints Handling Policy” BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT the City of Brantford “Customer Service Standard Update” as amended outlined in Appendices “A & B” BE ADOPTED; and that the necessary bylaw BE PRESENTED to City Council for adoption; and
- C. THAT the City of Brantford “Customer Complaints Handling Policy Update” BE ADOPTED; and that the necessary bylaw BE PRESENTED to City Council for adoption; and
- D. THAT the City Clerk BE REQUESTED to update the Corporate Policy Manual to include the amended City of Brantford Customer Service

Standard Update Corporate-018 and Complaints Handling Policy Corporate-043.

4.0 Executive Summary

Consistent with the Council approved [Customer Experience Strategy](#), updates to the City's Customer Service Standard and Complaints Handling Policy (Appendices A,B & C) set defined expectations for both employees and citizens. They establish clear guidelines for how customer inquiries, complaints, and service requests are to be handled, promoting transparency and accountability in the City's customer service operations. They also streamline the service delivery process and provide a structured framework for handling various public interactions, making it easier for municipal employees to address requests and resolve customer issues promptly and efficiently.

Updates to the City's Customer Service Standard and Complaints Handling Policy aim to ensure that all individuals are treated equally and fairly by the municipality and that everyone has access to the same level of quality service.

The structured approach to handling inquiries, service requests, complaints and conflicts, will help ensure the City can address issues in a fair and timely manner, reducing the potential for dissatisfaction of our customers with City services and programs.

Engaging with the community and gathering feedback is a fundamental aspect of local governance. Customer service standards and policies facilitate this engagement and trust, by providing clear channels for citizen input and fostering more of a sense of partnership between the municipality and our constituents.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this report is to propose the implementation of amended versions of the City of Brantford Customer Service Standard and Customer Complaints Handling Policy. The updated policies aim to enhance the quality of services provided to our residents, businesses, and visitors, ensuring a consistent, efficient, and customer-centric approach to meet residents' needs and expectations. The policies are accompanied by clear guidelines and standards that all City departments and staff must adhere to when interacting with customers.

6.0 Background

Effective customer service is a critical aspect of maintaining a positive image of the City and fostering a strong relationship with the community. While the City has historically placed importance on customer satisfaction, there is room for improvement to ensure a more seamless experience for all individuals interacting with our programming and services. An updated and more comprehensive Customer Service Standard and corresponding updated Customer Complaints Handling Policy will help standardize procedures and instill a culture of customer service excellence throughout the organization.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

7.1 2023-2026 Council Priorities

The recommendations outlined in this report are supported by:

- Strategic Theme #1: Develop strategies to build trust amongst Council, while evolving the corporate culture.
- Strategic Theme #2: Focus on productive and collaborative partnerships.
- Strategic Theme #6: Effectively and consistently engage with the community.

7.2 Corporate Policy 053 – Customer Code of Conduct (2022)

The City of Brantford is dedicated to providing an accessible, welcoming and comfortable environment that respects all customers, visitors and staff. In order to clearly communicate the expectations of members of the public when interacting or engaging with City staff/representatives, in September 2022, Council approved the [Customer Code of Conduct Policy](#) to help ensure that interactions with customers are respectful and align with [our corporate values](#).

8.0 Input From Other Sources

To inform updates to the City's Customer Service Standard and Customer Complaints Handling Policy, input was received from members of the Senior Leadership Team, Directors and staff of Operational Services, Environmental Services, Parks and Recreation, Housing and Homelessness, Family and Income Stability, Legal Services, as well as the Customer Service Supervisor, Business Analyst and the City's team of Customer Service Representatives

(CSRs). Input was also received by Blackline Consulting Ltd. during development of the Customer Experience Strategy approved by Council in April, 2023.

9.0 Analysis

9.1 Objectives

Proposed updates to the Customer Service Standard and Customer Complaints Handling Policy (Appendices A, B & C) aim to achieve the following objectives:

- **Improve Customer Satisfaction:** By setting clear standards and expectations, the Standard and Complaints Policy seek to improve customer satisfaction with City services.
- **Enhance Communication:** The Standard and Policy emphasize effective and transparent communication, ensuring customers are informed promptly and accurately.
- **Streamline Processes:** Standardizing customer service procedures will lead to more efficient processes and reduced response times.
- **Foster Empathy and Respect:** The updated Standard and Policy emphasize the importance of empathy and respect in all customer interactions, ensuring all individuals are treated with courtesy and dignity.
- **Encourage Continuous Improvement and Ongoing Feedback:** Regular assessments of customer feedback and service performance will provide valuable insights to drive continuous improvement in our services.

9.2 Key Components of Updates

Consistent with the recently Council approved [Customer Experience Strategy](#), updates to the Customer Service Standard and Customer Complaints Policy (Appendices A, B & C) outline the City of Brantford's commitment to providing exceptional customer service to residents, businesses, and visitors and encompass the following key components:

- **Objectives:** The primary objectives include customer satisfaction, accessibility, transparent communication, empathy, respect, and continuous improvement.

- **Scope:** The updated Standard and Policy apply to all interactions between City staff and external customers, defining expected service standards for in-person, telephone, email, and written correspondence interactions. Furthermore, it clarifies that social media is not an official channel for service requests to the City, but will provide relevant information when and where possible.
- **Responsibilities:** The City Council, CAO, City Commissioners, Directors, Managers, Supervisors, and all City employees have specific responsibilities to ensure compliance with this Standard and the execution of exceptional customer service.
- **Customer Service Principles:** These principles include response times, service quality, multi-channel support, accessibility, empathy, and respect, guiding City and customer expectations for how the City provides services.
- **Frontline Customer Service:** Describes how customers can contact frontline staff for various services, including information, inquiries, service requests, bookings, and payments.
- **Customer Service Requests:** Explains the process for handling service requests, including acknowledgment, investigation, response, tracking, estimated timelines, follow-up, and case closure.
- **Complaints and Feedback:** Outlining the various channels through which customers can provide feedback or make complaints.
- **Accommodations for Customers with Disabilities:** Addresses the provision of accommodations for customers who require alternate forms of communication to facilitate service, such as alternate formats, sign language interpretation, or facility modifications.
- **Customer Requests that are Unreasonable or Abusive:** States that all customers are expected to follow the City's Customer Code of Conduct Policy, with provisions for dealing with unreasonable customers and frivolous/vexatious complaints.

- **Customer Service Availability:** Provides information regarding in-person, telephone, and email customer service availability, including operating hours and locations.

Overall, the Customer Service Standard and Customer Complaint Policy emphasize the City's commitment to providing high-quality customer service, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity, and addressing customer inquiries and requests promptly and professionally.

10.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

11.0 Climate and Environmental Implications

There are no climate and/or environmental implications associated with the content of this report.

12.0 Conclusion

Municipalities exist to serve their communities. Implementing updated customer service standards and policies ensures that residents, businesses, and visitors receive consistent, high-quality services. This, in turn, leads to increased citizen satisfaction and more trust in local government.

The City of Brantford is growing rapidly, and so too are expectations of residents to deliver a higher quality customer service experience. Updates to the City's Customer Service Standard and Complaints Handling Policy demonstrate the City of Brantford's commitment to providing exceptional customer service, addressing complaints transparently, and continuously improving its operations to enhance public satisfaction and well-being.

Brian Hutchings, CAO

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Attachments (if applicable)

Appendix A: Amended Customer Service Standard

Appendix B: Customer Service Guidelines and Service Standards

Appendix C: Amended Customer Complaints Handling Policy

Copy to:

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required ☒ yes ☐ no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk ☐ yes ☐ no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? ☐ yes ☐ no