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ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

POLICY

Oxford County is committed to providing exceptional customer service and to making programs, services, and facilities accessible, including access to printed and electronic materials for all residents of the County, including people with disabilities. These policy components are consistent with the core principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.

This policy will be made available to the public through printed pamphlets and on the Oxford County website. Other formats, such as large print, will be made available on request.

DEFINITIONS

- Assistive Devices* Assistive devices are used by people with disabilities to help with daily living and may include but are not limited to a broad range of products such as wheelchairs, walkers, lifts, canes, oxygen tanks, portable chalk boards, utensils with modified handles, as well as electronic communication devices, real time captioning services, assistive listening systems or services such as the use of sign language interpreters.
- Barrier* Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.
- Customer* A customer is an individual or group of people who have a business relationship with the organization; those who receive and use or are directly affected by the products and services of the organization. Customers include direct recipients of products and services, internal customers who produce services and products for final recipients, and other organizations and entities that interact with an organization to produce products and services.

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Customer Service Customer or client service refers to efficiently satisfying a customer's needs by providing and delivering professional, helpful, high quality service and assistance before, during and after the customer's requirements are met. A customer can be internal or external to the organization.

Customer Feedback Comments from customers about services, employees or policies, whether an expression of satisfaction, dissatisfaction or a suggestion on how the delivery of a service can be improved.

Disability Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal;

a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device;

a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;

a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;

a mental disorder; or

an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*; ("handicap").

Service Animal A service animal is an animal trained to assist a person with disabilities in the activities of Independent living.

Support Person A support person accompanies a person with a disability to assist with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services.

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BACKGROUND

- 1.0 Businesses and organizations that provide goods or services to the public or to other businesses in Ontario are required to establish policies, practices and procedures on providing goods and services to people with disabilities by January 1, 2010 in accordance with the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation 429/07)* which became effective January 1, 2008.

PROCEDURES

- 2.0 The following procedures have been implemented to enable Oxford County to meet its policy objective of ensuring that people with disabilities who require the services provided by the County are provided the services. Services will be provided within the constraints of available resources.
- 2.1 Oxford County shall:
- 2.1.1 inform people with disabilities that there is accessible information and communication available;
 - 2.1.2 charge no more for alternate accessible formats than the regular cost paid by other consumers;
 - 2.1.3 ensure that individuals with disabilities are not disadvantaged in terms of the timeliness, quality and availability of communication, given or received;
 - 2.1.4 establish a user request, feedback and complaints process that allows persons with disabilities (whether they are consumers or employees) to identify communication needs and to communicate with the organization;
 - 2.1.5 provide emergency and public safety information required under existing law (e.g. evacuation procedures) to the public and employees in formats and communication methods that can be used and understood by people with disabilities;
 - 2.1.6 develop, implement and maintain policies, procedures and practices to comply with the standard for accessible information and communication and write a statement of commitment to accessibility;

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2.1.7 ensure that employees, volunteers and others who are responsible for designing or providing and receiving information and communication on behalf of the organization receive accessibility training.

2.2 Procedures and practices shall strive to reflect or achieve the following:

2.2.1 communication will be considered in a manner that takes into consideration a person's disability;

2.2.2 people with disabilities will be allowed to use their own personal assistive devices to obtain, use or benefit from the services offered by Oxford County;

2.2.3 people with disabilities accompanied by a guide dog or service animal shall be permitted in those areas of the premises owned or operated by Oxford County that are open to the public;

2.2.4 people with disabilities accompanied by a support person will be permitted to be accompanied by that support person in premises open to the public;

2.2.5 admission fees will be waived for a support person who accompanies a person with a disability;

2.2.6 notice will be provided when facilities or services that people with disabilities rely on to access Oxford County services are temporarily disrupted;

2.2.7 staff, including third party contractors shall receive appropriate training on Accessibility Standards for Customer Service and the Policies and Practices regarding this issue;

2.2.8 Oxford County shall allow people to provide feedback on how services are provided to persons with disabilities.

2.3 Should a person with a disability be unable to access the County's services through the use of their own personal assistive device, Oxford County will ensure the following measures:

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- 2.3.1 determine if service is inaccessible based upon individual requirements, assess service delivery and potential service options to meet the needs of the individual;
- 2.3.2 notify the person with a disability of alternative service and how they can access the service temporarily or on a permanent basis.

SERVICE ANIMALS

- 3.0 The County shall allow a person with a service animal into all Oxford County owned and operated public facilities and will ensure that the person is permitted to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law.
 - 3.1 If a service animal is excluded by law from the premises, Oxford County shall ensure that other measures are available to enable the person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the County's goods or services.
 - 3.2 The service animal's owner shall be solely responsible for the service animal which includes, but is not limited to, the care, control and discipline of the service animal at all times.

SERVICE DISRUPTION

- 4.0 Oxford County will provide customers with notice in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption in the facilities or services usually used by people with disabilities. The notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, anticipated duration and description of alternative facilities or services, if available.
 - 4.1 Responsibilities of County employees:
 - 4.1.1 report any disruption of service or facility immediately to the supervisor;
 - 4.1.2 report a disruption of service or facility to the Customer Service Centre at customerservice@oxfordcounty.ca providing as much notice as possible.

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4.2 Responsibilities of Customer Service Centre employees:

4.2.1 the Customer Service Centre will prepare notices and communicate the service disruption;

4.2.2 notification may be provided by any of the following means as determined appropriate:

4.2.2.1 posted on the County digital signs, located in the main foyer of the County Administration building;

4.2.2.2 posted at applicable County buildings/facilities;

4.2.2.3 posted on the Oxford County web-site
www.oxfordcounty.ca;

4.2.2.4 posted on the Oxford County intranet;

4.2.2.5 arrange radio announcements/local paper advertisements (if necessary).

4.2.2.6 posted in departmental/divisional newsletters

TRAINING

5.0 Oxford County shall ensure that every person who deals with members of the public on behalf of the County, whether the person does so as an employee, agent, volunteer, third party contractor or otherwise shall receive training about the provision of its goods or services to people with disabilities. All newly hired employees shall receive required training in accordance with the legislation at the level determined appropriate by the employee's supervisor/manager. Staff will also be trained on an as needed basis when significant changes are made to these policies, practices and procedures.

5.1 Training will include the following:

5.1.1 the purposes of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the requirements of the Customer Service Standard;

5.1.2 how to interact and communicate with persons with various types of disabilities;

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- 5.1.3 how to interact with persons with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person;
- 5.1.4 how to use equipment or assistive devices available in Oxford County premises that may help with the provision of goods or services to people with disabilities;
- 5.1.5 what to do if a person with a disability is having difficulty accessing Oxford County's goods or services;
- 5.1.6 Oxford County Human Resources will log and retain employee records which will record the details of the training provided, as well as the name of the person, location, and date the training was completed.
- 5.2 A training manual, outlining the purpose and responsibilities of Oxford County staff, volunteers, and third party contractors, will be provided to all third party contractors/agents providing services on behalf of Oxford County.
 - 5.2.1 Contractors/agents will be required to sign and return an acknowledgment that they have received a copy of the training manual and will comply with all measures included;
 - 5.2.2. Training files of all third party contractors, agents, volunteers, will be maintained by the department responsible for the service.

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

- 6.0 The ultimate goal of Oxford County is to meet and surpass customer expectations while serving customers with disabilities. Comments and feedback regarding the way Oxford County provides goods and services to people with disabilities are welcomed and appreciated.
- 6.1 Feedback regarding the way Oxford County provides goods and services to people with disabilities can be made verbally, by email, through a suggestion box, written correspondence or on a feedback form. All feedback will be directed to the Customer Service Centre. Customers can expect to hear a response in accordance with Oxford County's Customer Service Communication Guidelines, indicating an explanation how Oxford County is able or unable to implement the suggestion or if further investigation is necessary.

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- 6.2 Notices in public areas of all Oxford County buildings shall inform customers that feedback and suggestions are welcomed and valued for the continual improvement of services and to avoid inadvertently excluding persons with disabilities from activities or services.
- 6.3 Should a member of the public wish to provide feedback regarding the service they have received they may have a discussion with a Customer Service Clerk or fill out an Oxford County Feedback Form.
- 6.4 The Oxford County Feedback Form is available through the customer service desk, the County website and all Oxford County buildings with public access. The Feedback Form shall contain personal contact information, date, who completed the form, a description of the feedback being given, and a suggestion for follow-up. Customer Service Clerks shall provide assistance in filling out the feedback form if needed. Customer Service Clerks will make note of feedback given in person verbally or in writing, on-line, by telephone, or another means.

COMMUNICATION

- 7.0 Oxford County shall provide any document produced by the County in an alternative format upon request, unless it is not technically feasible to do so and subject to the provisions of the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Alternative formats can include, but are not limited to Web access, large print versions of the document, or a text-only electronic file which can then be read by a computer or printed in Braille.
- 7.1 Requests for information in alternate formats are to be forwarded to the department most responsible for the document. Staff will consult with the requester to determine the most appropriate format, and will make every effort to provide the information in the preferred format as soon as possible.
- 7.2 If a service, information or document is required from Oxford County by a person with a disability, the employee(s) shall provide the service, document, or information contained in the document, in a format that takes into account the person's disability. Oxford County personnel and the person with the disability will try to agree upon the format to be used for the document or information, subject to feasibility requirements of this policy.

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7.3 Alternative formats shall be considered and may include, but are not limited to:

7.3.1 Print requests;

7.3.2 American Sign Language/Signed Exact English interpreter request.

7.4 Feasibility will be determined based upon cost in relation to the format of the document and time associated with processing document requests.

7.5 Documents will be provided in electronic format if possible.

7.6 The time frame attached to the conversion process varies depending on the media chosen, the size, complexity, quality of source documents and number of documents to be converted. Documents shall be returned in a timely manner depending on the factors previously noted.

7.7 Conversion shall be processed in-house wherever possible. If a member of the public requests a piece of County documentation in multiple formats, the County shall be responsible for the cost of the conversion, materials and distribution, not the public requestor.

7.8 In-house printing, where possible, should adhere to the: *Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Print Clarity Standards June 2006.*