



4. COMMUNITY LIAISON

Policy 4.6

Customer Service Policy

Version 3

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4.6 CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

OBJECTIVES:

- To provide guidance for staff and councillors in dealing with customers
- To ensure that Council resources are used efficiently and effectively when dealing with customers
- To ensure that all customers are treated fairly and reasonably
- To provide a mechanism for dealing with difficult customers having regard to staff wellbeing and safety

POLICY:

SERVICE COMMITMENT

1. Council staff and councillors shall strive to meet the needs of our customers in a professional and ethical manner with courteous and efficient service.
2. Staff and councillors shall:
 - a) Customers can ensure that they will be treated equally whether by gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability and race
 - b) Customers can expect service at a clean, accessible public area that ensures privacy, while complying with occupational and safety standards
 - c) Customers with disabilities and special needs will be specifically catered for
 - d) Council will take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate
 - e) Complaints will be dealt with in a prompt, timely and private manner
 - f) Council will provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation as a result of the evaluation process
 - g) Council will provide a choice of service delivery for Customer Service enquiries including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and technology to ensure maximum access, choice and quality of service
 - h) Provide quality service informing customers of their right to access and use an interpreter at all times
3. Council staff shall strive to respond to correspondence received from customers (written, faxed or emailed) within fourteen (14) days. An acknowledgement letter may be sent where investigations are such that more than 14 days is required to enact a response.
4. Telephone calls to Council's switchboard shall be answered as quickly and efficiently as possible.
5. Council staff shall answer incoming calls by clearly stating their name, department and/or position. Unanswered calls shall divert to another member of staff or to voice mail.
6. Staff making outgoing calls shall identify themselves by name and department and/or position, and shall clearly outline the purpose of the call.

7. Reception area and customer service centre staff shall greet customers as quickly as possible and in a professional and helpful manner.
8. Staff required to visit a customer external to Council facilities shall attempt to contact the customer first and make an appointment. At the beginning of a council visit, staff shall clearly identify themselves and the purpose of the visit.
9. Staff shall comply with Council's Code of Conduct in their dealings with customers and in particular conduct their exchanges with regard to the key principles in the Code of integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and respect. Decisions and advice should be premised on relevant legislation and Council's administrative procedures.

CUSTOMERS WHO CANNOT BE SATISFIED

1. Customers who cannot be satisfied include members of the public or groups who do not accept that Council is unable to assist them, provide any further assistance or level of service than has been provided already and/or disagree with the action Council has taken in relation to their complaint or concern.
2. If in the opinion of the General Manager a customer cannot be satisfied and all appropriate avenues of internal review or appeal have been exhausted and the customer continues to write, telephone and/or visit Council the following actions may be taken:
 - a) the General Manager may write to the customer restating Council's position on the matter if necessary and advising that if the customer continues to contact Council regarding the matter Council may:
 - i) not accept any further phone calls from the customer
 - ii) not grant any further interviews
 - iii) require all further communication to be put in writing
 - iv) continue to receive, read and file correspondence but only acknowledge or otherwise respond to it if:
 - the customer provides significant new information relating to their complaint or concern; or
 - the customer raises new issues which in the General Manager's opinion, warrant fresh action.
 - b) the customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action and customers may be provided with copies of relevant policies which may assist in determining future actions. These policies may include the Council's Code of Conduct, Complaints – Disclosures of Identity – General Information Public Access Act (GIPA Act 2009), Complaints and Procedures Policy or Protected Disclosures Policy as relevant.
 - d) if the customer continues to contact Council after being advised of Council's proposed course of action, the General Manager may, after considering any representations from the customer, advise the customer that any or all of points i) - iv) above will now apply.

CUSTOMERS WHO MAKE UNREASONABLE DEMANDS

1. Customers who make unreasonable demands include members of the public whose demands on Council start to significantly and unreasonably divert Council's resources away from other functions or create an inequitable allocation of resources to other customers. Such demands may result from the amount of information requested, the nature or scale of services sought or the number of approaches seeking information, assistance or service.
2. If in the opinion of the General Manager a customer is making unreasonable demands on Council and the customer continues to write, telephone and/or visit the agency the following actions may be taken:
 - a) the General Manager may write to the customer advising them of Council's concern and requesting that they limit and focus their requests and that if the customer continues to place unreasonable demands on the organisation Council may:
 - i) not respond to any future correspondence and only take action where, in the opinion of the General Manager the correspondence raises specific, substantial and serious issues
 - ii) only respond to a certain number of requests in a given period.
 - b) the customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action and will be referred to Council's Code of Conduct for options available to them by way of formal complaint about particular staff or via submissions they might make to the NSW Ombudsman, Department of Local Government or ICAC.
 - c) if the customer continues to contact Council after being advised of Council's proposed course of action, the General Manager may, after considering any representations from the customer, advise the customer that either or both of points i) - ii) above will now apply.

CUSTOMERS WHO CONSTANTLY RAISE THE SAME ISSUE WITH DIFFERENT STAFF

1. If in the opinion of the General Manager a customer is constantly raising the same issues with different staff the following actions may be taken:
 - a) The General Manager may notify the customer that:
 - i) only a nominated staff member will deal with them in future
 - ii) they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter; or
 - iii) all future contact with Council must be in writing.
 - b) The customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action

CUSTOMERS WHO ARE RUDE, ABUSIVE OR AGGRESSIVE

1. Rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour may include rude or otherwise vulgar noises, expressions or gestures, verbal abuse of either a personal or general nature, sarcastic remarks directed personally to officers, threatening or offensive behaviour, physical violence against property or physical violence against a person.
2. If in the opinion of any staff member rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements are made in telephone conversations or interviews, the staff member may:
 - a) Warn the caller that if the behaviour continues the conversation or interview will be terminated.
 - b) Terminate the conversation or interview if the rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour continues after a warning has been given.
 - c) Call upon a supervisor, security staff or Police as appropriate if there is a perceived threat.
3. Where a conversation or interview is terminated in accordance with clause 3, the staff member must notify the General Manager or the relevant Group Manager of the details as soon as possible.
4. If in the opinion of the General Manager any correspondence to Council contains personal abuse, inflammatory statements or material clearly intended to intimidate, it will be returned to the sender and not otherwise acted upon.

VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

1. If in the opinion of the General Manager a person continues to make representation by way of correspondence, telephone, e-mail or personal representation, that has no basis in fact and/or is considered to be undertaken in with frivolous or mischievous motives then the General Manager may declare such person to be a vexatious complainant. The General Manager may then take the same action as outlined in 'Customers who make unreasonable demands' clause 2.

GENERAL

1. In all of the situations referred to in this policy, adequate documentary records must be made and maintained on the appropriate Council file.
2. Where the General Manager determines to limit a customer's access to Council in any of the ways specified in this policy, the General Manager must advise the Council, ICAC, the Division of Local Government and the NSW Ombudsman for their information.

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