



Customer Service Policy

Policy Statement:

To establish a standard approach to managing contact with customers, ensuring all customers are treated in a professional and ethical manner, with courteous and efficient service.

Related Legislation, Department of Local Government Circulars or Guideline:

N/A

Does this document replace an existing policy, procedure, or plan? **No**

This is the initial procedure.

Other Related Council Policy or Procedure:

Complaints and Other Feedback Policy - Adopted 18 December 2008

Director or Manager Responsible for Communication, Implementation and Review:

Director, Corporate Business.

Application:

It is mandatory for all staff, councillors and delegates of council to comply with this policy.

Distribution:

This document will be provided to all staff and be published on the Council website.

Approved by:

Corporate Development Team
Meeting date: 25/03/2010

Council [Meeting date & Resolution No.]

Signature:

General Manager

Date of Effect:

Date of next Review: March 2013

Date of Distribution:

Registration Number:

2459904

RESPONSIBILITIES

<i>Position</i>	<i>Directorate</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>
Mayor	Council	To lead Councillors in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy and Guidelines.
General Manager	Executive	To lead staff (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy and Guidelines. To approve resources to develop, implement and review this Policy and Guidelines.
Directors	All Directorates	To communicate, implement and comply with this Policy and related Guidelines.
Director of Corporate Business	Corporate Business	To ensure (directly or through delegation) the distribution and communication of the Policy and Guidelines to specified persons and to ensure (directly or through delegation) the approved Policy and Guidelines are available in hard copy and electronically on Council's website.
Executive and Managers	All Directorates	To implement this Policy, Guidelines and related procedures. To lead staff in their understanding of, and compliance with, this Policy and Guidelines
All Council officials	Council	To comply with this Policy, Guidelines and related procedures.

1. BACKGROUND

This policy has been developed to ensure:

- All customer enquiries are handled in a professional, ethical and consistent manner and;
- Customer enquiries are answered in an efficient and timely manner.

2. OBJECTIVES

Servicing the needs of our customers is our priority. All Council staff provide service to Council's customers either directly or indirectly.

Council staff shall strive to meet the needs of our customers in a professional and ethical manner with courteous and efficient service. Staff shall:

- Treat all customers with respect and courtesy
- Listen attentively to what customers have to say
- Respond to customer enquiries promptly and efficiently
- Act with integrity and honesty when liaising with customers
- Consult customers about their needs

3. APPLICATION

It is mandatory for all staff to comply with this procedure.

4. DEFINITIONS

Customers – these include both individuals and organisations to which Council provides service. Customers include ratepayers, residents, asset users, consultants, developers, government departments, as well as people passing through the Coffs Harbour local government area. Internal customers include other Council departments and members of staff.

Customer Service – Interactions between a customer and a provider at the time of a sale or provision of a service and thereafter. Customer service adds value to a product or service and builds an enduring relationship.

5. STANDARDS OF SERVICE

Council officials aim to project a professional image at all times. Council endeavours to:

- Demonstrate respect, courtesy, patience, attentiveness, consideration and sensitivity to the customer at all times that is appropriate to the age, culture and linguistic background of the individual or group
- Identify customer needs and expectations
- Provide the local community and others, with advice and other information that is clear and concise
- Take appropriate action to respond in accordance with organisational policies and procedures with minimal inconvenience to the customer
- Make decisions using processes that are consultative, impartial and otherwise ethical
- Be sensitive to any languages or other communication difficulties experienced by members of the local community when providing advice and other information.
- Present a positive image of Council to the public
- Demonstrate professionalism when dealing with difficult customers
- Act in accordance with the law and Council's Code of Conduct
- Respond to customer enquiries promptly and efficiently, within allocated timeframes

6. Timeframes:

- Council staff shall strive to respond to correspondence received from customers (written, faxed or emailed) within seven (7) working days of receipt. An acknowledgement letter may be sent where investigations are such that more than 7 days is required for a response to be formulated. Response should be via the most appropriate method for the individual customer.
- Any outward correspondence (including emails) is to be registered in Dataworks. If the response is via phone call, notes should be placed on the inward correspondence registered in Dataworks.
- Customer Service/Counter customers are to be attended to as quickly as possible, preferably with a wait time of less than five (5) minutes.
- Telephone and counter request/enquiries will be handled promptly and where information is not readily available, verbal enquiries will be answered within one (1) business day (COB next day if the call is received in the late afternoon)
- All staff responses shall be in line with relevant delegations.

6.1 Telephone Calls:

Council recognises the importance of telephone calls and will answer all calls promptly and efficiently, referring calls to the appropriate officer quickly and providing clear and concise information in response to caller enquiries. Council endeavours to:

- Advise all callers of the name of the person answering the call, or making the call where it is outgoing from Council (see customer service call procedures)
- Deal with the call, redirect the call or take a clear message from the caller as required
- Ensure all messages include details of the caller's name, contact number and message as well as details of who took the message and when calls cannot be fully responded to immediately, give clear advice to the caller about when the caller can expect a response
- Put calls on hold for the minimum amount of time possible
- Speak clearly, deal with customers calmly, courteously and patiently, even when the callers are angry, aggressive or distressed
- Answer unattended telephones in the absence of colleagues whenever practical
- Respond to telephone messages within one business day
- Staff that are absent for an extended period are to 'forward' their phone to a suitable extension.

6.2 Face to Face:

Council recognises the need to promptly serve members of the public who come to Council to seek information or to transact business. Council endeavours to:

- Attend to members of the public at the customer service help desks in a professional and helpful manner and preferably within 5 minutes of arrival at reception
- Promptly advise staff if there is a member of the public in the reception area for an appointment
- Provide all documents on Public Exhibition for inspection in customer service areas
- Speak clearly and deal with customers honestly, calmly, courteously and patiently, even when they are angry, aggressive or distressed

6.3 Written:

Council recognised the importance of correspondence (letter, facsimiles, and e-mail messages) and will provide clear and concise responses promptly. Council endeavours to:

- Provide a written response to any email, fax, or letter within seven (7) working days of receipt.
- Ensure that all outward correspondence includes the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter and Council's reference.
- Use clear and concise language

7. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

Council staff are expected to treat customers with courtesy and respect at all times and to make every reasonable effort to address the customer's needs even when this proves difficult due to the customer's responses. .

Whatever standard of professional and positive customer service Council achieves; there will always be a small percentage of customers whose issues cannot be dealt with to their satisfaction. This may be due to refusal by the customer to accept a Council decision, demands placed on Council which are not within our scope or resources to meet, or a level of rudeness or aggression shown to staff by the customer that makes it unsafe or unreasonable to proceed.

Where the General Manager is satisfied that every effort has been made by staff to address a customer's needs, he may make a decision that there is not reasonable prospect of reaching a position where a particular customer is satisfied with Council's actions and service. In such a case the General Manager may decide to stop or limit responses to the customer in relation to the issue in question. This may include:

- Refusal to accept telephone calls or make appointments with the customer
- Requesting that all future communication be in writing
- Identification of a single staff member as contact person through whom all communication must occur

Where the General Manager has made such a decision, he will ensure that this is communicated in writing to the customer and that the customer is given the opportunity to make representation to Council about the proposed course of action. In addition the General Manager will advise Councillors of any correspondence issued in relation to such a decision.

The General Manager will continue to monitor any further contact with the customer over the issue.

7.1 Customers who make unreasonable demands

Customers who make unreasonable demands include members of the public whose demands on Council significantly and unreasonably divert Council's resources away from other functions or create an inequitable allocation of resources from 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 on the same matter.

If in the opinion of the relevant Director, 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:

The Director 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:

- a) Not respond to any future correspondence and only take action where, in the opinion of the relevant Director the correspondence raises specific, substantial and serious issues; or
- b) Only respond to a certain number of requests in a given period
- c) The General Manager shall advise councillors of any correspondence issued in accordance with this clause

- d) The customer shall be given one opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action

7.2 Customers who constantly raise the same issue with different staff

If in the opinion of the General Manager in consultation with the relevant Director a customer is constantly raising the same issues with different staff the following actions may be taken:

- a) The Director may notify the customer that:
 - 1. only a nominated staff member will deal with them in future
 - 2. they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter; or
 - 3. all future contact with Council must be in writing
- b) The General Manager shall advise councillors of any notification issued.
- c) The customer shall be given one opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action.

7.3 Customers who are rude, abusive or aggressive

Rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour may include rude or otherwise vulgar noises, expressions or gestures, verbal abuse of a personal or general nature, threatening or offensive behaviour, physical violence against property or physical violence against a person.

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. (see customer service procedures)

Where a conversation or interview is terminated the staff member must notify the relevant Director or Manager of the details as soon as possible.

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.

Reference to Council's 'Complaints and Other Feedback Policy' should also be made.