

# CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

**Responsible Department:** Corporate and Community Services  
**Responsible Section:** Corporate and Community Services  
**Responsible Officer:** Director Corporate and Community Services

## Objective

- To create a standard approach to managing customer service;
- Ensure all customers are treated fairly with respect and courtesy;
- Accurately respond to customers in a professional, consistent and honest manner;
- To provide answers to customer enquiries in an efficient and timely manner;
- Consistently apply these standards across all contact points with Council;
- Continuously improve customer service by proactively seeking feedback from the community and actively measuring performance against these commitments.

## Introduction

Narrabri Shire Council values its customers. Council’s role is to provide services to the community. Standards contained in this policy are minimum standards for customer service. All Council staff are committed to the consistent delivery of these standards.

## Policy

### 1. Responsibilities

Position	Directorate	Responsibility
Mayor	Council	To lead Councillors in their understanding of and compliance with this Policy.
Councillors	Council	To comply with this Policy, Guidelines and related procedures.
General Manager	Governance	To lead staff (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of, and compliance with this Policy and Guidelines. To ensure (directly or through delegated authority) the distribution and communication of the Policy and

		Guidelines are available in hard copy and electronically on Council's website.
Directors	All Directorates	To communicate, implement and comply with this Policy and related Guidelines.
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.
Council Staff	Council	To comply with this Policy, Guidelines and related procedures.

## 2. Customer Service Standards

Servicing the needs of our customers is Council's priority and Council officials aim to project a professional image at all times. The Council commits to:

- Display 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 group across all contact points within Council;
- Identify customer needs and expectations;
- Accurately respond to customers promptly and efficiently, within the allocated timeframes, in a professional, consistent and honest manner;
- 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 the Council's Code of Conduct;
- Provide all documents on Public Exhibition for inspection in customer service areas;
- Continuously improve customer service by proactively seeking feedback from the community and actively measuring performance against these commitments, using means such as the Customer Feedback Form (Appendix 1).

### 2.1. Telephone

Council understands the importance of telephone calls and will answer all calls promptly and efficiently, refer calls to the appropriate officer quickly and provide clear concise information in response to enquiries. The Council commits to:

- Advising all callers of the name of the section and person answering the call, or making the call where it is outgoing from Council;

- Answering telephone calls quickly and where practicable within four rings. If demand for service is high, calls may be diverted to another member of staff;
- Answering phone calls personally prior to diverting to another member of staff;
- Answer unattended telephones in the absence of colleagues when practical;
- Where a direct line is not answered, callers will be given the option to divert to another operator;
- Where a call is unable to be answered phone calls may divert to voicemail;
- Staff will respond to phone calls with courtesy and respect;
- Staff will speak clearly, deal with customers calmly, courteously and patiently, even when the callers are angry, aggressive or distressed;
- Staff making outgoing calls shall identify themselves by organisation, section and name and shall clearly outline the purpose of the call;
- Where a call needs to be placed on hold, the caller's permission must be gained in the first instance;
- Phone calls will be placed on hold for the minimum amount of time possible and to a maximum of three (3) minutes;
- Unanswered phone calls will be returned call by the close of business on the next working day;
- Ensuring that you are put in contact with the most appropriate person for an accurate response to your enquiry;
- Maintaining contact with you pending satisfactory resolution of your enquiry;
- Phone messages will 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. A customer Service request (CSR) will be issued to the officer to which responsibility falls to respond;
- Staff who are absent for an extended period of time will forward their phone to an appropriate extension within the relevant section (not the main switch).

## **2.2. In person**

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

- Attending to your enquiry as quickly as possible and preferably within five (5) minutes of arrival at reception;
- Our staff wearing names badges where possible, so that you can more easily identify with whom you are speaking;
- Greeting you with respect, courtesy and in a helpful manner;
- Promptly advise staff if there is a member of the public in the reception area for an appointment;
- Ensuring that you are placed in contact with the most appropriate person to assist you, where the initial Customer Service Officer is unable to respond adequately;
- Endeavouring to effectively attend to your enquiry on your first visit. On occasions where this is not possible, follow up contact will be made with you within twenty-four (24) hours to refer you to an appropriate person;
- Speak clearly and deal with customers honestly, calmly, courteously and patiently, even when they are angry, aggressive or distressed.

### **2.3. Correspondence – Letters/Fax/Email**

Council recognised the importance of correspondence (letters/fax/email) and will provide clear and concise responses promptly. Council commits to:

- Acknowledging correspondence received from individuals and community groups by letter on the day of receipt;
- Responding to incoming correspondence within fourteen (14) days of receipt;
- Providing an interim response to you if your enquiry cannot be fully addressed within fourteen (14) days;
- Writing to you in clear, concise language that is easily understood;
- All outward correspondence includes the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter and Council's reference.

## **3. Council's Expectations of Customers**

To make our job easier in providing our services we ask our customers to:

- Treat Council officers with courtesy and respect;
- Respect the privacy, safety and needs of other community members;
- Provide accurate and complete information;
- Telephone to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or to see a specific officer;
- Telephone the officer nominated on any correspondence sent to you and quote the file number on the letter;
- Written correspondence addressed to the General Manager sent via post, email or fax to request a response on more formal matters.

## **4. 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;
- Continued receipt, of 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.

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 the Council about the proposed action. The General Manager will advise Councillors of any correspondence issued in relation to such a decision.

The General Manager will monitor any future contact with the customer in relation to the issue.

#### **4.1. 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 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 relevant Director the correspondence raises specific, substantial and serious issues; or
  - (ii) Only respond to a certain number of requests in a given period;

The General Manager shall advise Councillors of any correspondence issued in accordance with this clause.

The customer shall be given one 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 may make to the NSW Ombudsman, Department of Local Government or ICAC.

#### **4.2. 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 action may be taken:

- a) The Director may notify the customer that:
  - (i) only a nominated staff member will deal with them in the future;
  - (ii) they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter;

- (iii) all future contact with Council must be in writing.

The General Manager shall advise Councillors of any notification issued.

The customer shall be given one 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 may make to the NSW Ombudsman, Department of Local Government or ICAC.

#### **4.3. 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;
- c) Call upon a supervisor or Police as appropriate if there is a perceived threat.

Where a conversation or interview is terminated, the staff member must notify their Manager or Director of the details as soon as possible, along with noting the incident in a file note.

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 acted upon.

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

#### **4.4. Complaints against staff**

Reference to Council's Complaints Management Policy and Procedure should be made.

#### **4.5. Vexatious complainants**

If in the opinion of the General Manager a person continues to make representation by way of correspondence, telephone, email or personal representation, that has no basis in fact and/or is considered to be undertaken 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 Clause 5;

## **5. Timeframes**

- Council staff shall strive to respond to correspondence received from customers (written, faxed or emailed) within fourteen (14) working days of receipt. An acknowledgement letter may be sent

where investigations are such that more than 14 working days are required for a response to be formulated. Response should be via the most appropriate method for the customer;

- Initial acknowledgement letters will be sent for all incoming correspondence within three working days of receipt of the correspondence;
- Any outward correspondence (including emails) is to be registered in Magiq documents. If the response is via phone call, notes should be placed on the inwards correspondence registered in Magiq documents;
- Customer Service/counter customers are to be attended to as quickly as possible, preferably with a wait time of less than five (5) minutes;
- If wait time is expected to be more than 5 minutes, the Customer Service Officer will acknowledge the customer if possible and offer them to wait within the foyer lounge;
- 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.

### **5.1. Planning and Development**

- Council will endeavour to determine Development Applications within forty (40) days where there is no requirement to refer to Council;
- Council will endeavour to determine Complying Development Applications within ten (10) days;
- Council will endeavour to carry out building inspections within forty-eight (48) hours of a request;
- Building Certificates will be issued within seven (7) days of receipt;
- 149 Planning Certificates will be issued within five (5) days of receipt;
- Council will provide information on land within two (2) weeks of receipt of request;
- Provisions relating to land will be investigated within four (4) weeks of identification of the site;
- Planning and Development staff will provide a pre or post DA Meeting for applicants on request to make such appointment.

### **5.2. Compliance**

- Action on major pollution incidents will be initiated within one (1) hour of notification;
- Complaints regarding stray dogs will be responded to within one (1) hour of reporting;
- Report of health incidents will be responded to within two (2) hours of reporting;
- Council will initiate action for overgrown allotments within three (3) days of notification.

### **5.3. Community Facilities**

- Council will endeavour to provide clean and safe environments for recreation use;
- Council will maintain sporting ovals to meet playing standards;
- Bookings for the use of ovals, parks, open space and pools will be confirmed within seven (7) days;

- Fields will be prepared before use.

#### **5.4. Roads**

- Enquiries regarding potholes, signs and gravel roads will be responded to within fourteen (14) days either by rectifying the problem or advising the customer of an expected timeframe for the completion of works.

#### **5.5. Water, Sewerage and Waste**

- Council will respond to reports regarding blockages in street stormwater drain within forty-eight (48) hours of reporting;
- Spills with possible environmental or health impact problems will be responded to within one (1) hours of reporting;
- Council will respond to system failures within two (2) hours of reporting.

### **6. Privacy and Access to Information**

Requests for access to Council documents are dealt with in accordance with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* and Council's Privacy Management Policy. In addition, the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act sets requirements in relation to disclosure of personal information.

Further information is available by viewing Council's Privacy Management Policy located on Council's website or by contacting the Public Officer.

### **7. General**

In all of the situations referred to in this policy, adequate documentary records must be made and maintained on the appropriate Council file within the Magiq documents system.

Where the General Manager determines to limit a customer's access to the Council in any of the ways specified in this Policy, the General Manager must advise the Council as soon as practicable of the relevant circumstances and the action taken and forward such advice, where appropriate, to the ICAC, Department of Local Government and the NSW Ombudsman for information.

### **8. Definitions**

**Customers:** Includes 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 Narrabri Shire local government area. Internal customers include 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.

## References

- *Government Information (Public Access) Act, 2009;*
- Council's Privacy Management Policy;
- Council's Code of Conduct;
- Complaints Management Policy and Procedure;
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.*

## History

Minute Number	Meeting Date	Description of Change
358/2013	June 4, 2013	Adopted
164/2017	August 15, 2017	Reviewed
	June 23, 2020	Rebranded