

CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

Responsible Department: Corporate and Commercial Services
Responsible Section: Customer and Information Services
Responsible Officer: Manager Customer and Information Services

Objective

The objective of this policy is to outline Council's commitment to customer service and provide a framework for its interactions with customers.

Introduction

Council provides various services to many customers across all of its operations year-round. This policy sets out Council's commitment to good customer service, while providing a framework for how Council will handle situations if things do not go well with customers.

Policy

1. Definitions

Term	Meaning
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.

2. Customer Service Standards

- 2.1. Council commits to provide service to customers in accordance with its customer service charter. Council will display a copy of this charter in all of its facilities and provide a copy to people on request.

3. Council's Expectations of Customers

- 3.1. To assist Council in providing our services, and as a sign of mutual respect, we ask our customers to:
- (a) Treat Council officers with courtesy and respect;
 - (a) Respect the privacy, safety and needs of other community members;
 - (b) Provide accurate and complete information;
 - (c) Telephone to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or to see a specific officer;

- (d) Telephone the officer nominated on any correspondence sent to you and quote the reference number on the letter;
- (e) Address written correspondence to the General Manager, sent via post, email or fax to request a response on more formal matters.

4. Dealing with Difficult Customers

- 4.1. Council will 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.
- 4.2. Council acknowledges that there will always be a small percentage of customers whose issues cannot be dealt with to their satisfaction.

Unreasonable Customers

- 4.3. The General Manager may declare a customer an Unreasonable Customer where they are satisfied that:
 - (a) Every effort has been made by staff to address a customer's needs; and
 - (b) there is not a reasonable likelihood of reaching a position where a particular customer is satisfied with Council's actions and service.
- 4.4. Where a person has been declared to be an unreasonable complainant, the General Manager or their delegate must bring a report to Council explaining the circumstances of that declaration.
- 4.5. Where a person is declared an unreasonable customer by the General Manager or their delegate, that person may request that the General Manager submit the matter to Council for review at an Ordinary Council Meeting.
- 4.6. Where the General Manager receives a request under clause 4.5, they or their delegate must bring a confidential report to the next Ordinary Council Meeting, so far as is reasonably practicable. The report must:
 - (a) Identify the person;
 - (b) Identify the basis of the declaration; and
 - (c) Provide any response by the person to the declaration (if known).
 - (d) Council will review the report and either:
 - (e) Uphold the declaration;
 - (f) Revoke the declaration; or
 - (g) Revoke the declaration in part and direct the General Manager to impose limits on the person's interactions with Council.
- 4.7. The decision of Council will be final.
- 4.8. Where a person is declared an Unreasonable Customer, it will result in one or more of the following:
 - (a) Refusal to accept telephone calls or make appointments with the customer;
 - (b) Requesting that all future communication be in writing;
 - (c) Identification of a single staff member as contact person through whom all communication must occur;
 - (d) Continue to receive correspondence but only acknowledge or otherwise respond to it if:
 - (i) The customer provides significant new information relating to their complaint or concern;
 - or

- (ii) The customer raises new issues which in the General Manager's opinion, warrant fresh action.

4.9. The General Manager may also decide to stop or limit responses to the customer in relation to the issue in question.

4.10. Where the General Manager has made such a decision, they 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.

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

Customers who make unreasonable demands

4.12. 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.

4.13. 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 Council the General Manager may direct that Council:

- (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;

4.14. Before making such a direction, the General Manager must write to the customer:

- (a) advising them of Council's concern;
- (b) requesting that they limit and focus their requests; and
- (c) warning the customer that if they continue to place unreasonable demands on the organisation the General Manager will make such a direction.

4.15. The customer shall be given one opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action.

Customers who constantly raise the same issue with different staff

4.16. If in the opinion of the General Manager a customer is constantly raising the same issues with different staff, the following action may be taken:

- (a) The General Manager 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.
- (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 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, Office of Local Government, or ICAC.

Customers who are rude, abusive or aggressive

4.17. If rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements are made in telephone conversations or in-person interaction, Council may:

- (a) Warn the caller that if the behaviour continues the conversation or interaction will be terminated;
- (b) Terminate the conversation or interaction if the rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour continues after a warning has been given;
- (c) Call Police as appropriate if there is a perceived threat.

4.18. Where a conversation or interview is terminated, Council will record the termination and reason for it in its incidents log.

4.19. 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.

4.20. The General Manager may declare a customer who is rude, abusive, or aggressive an unreasonable customer under this policy.

Vexatious customers

4.21. 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 this policy for unreasonable customers.

5. Timeframes

- 5.1. General customer service will be delivered in accordance with Council's Customer Service Charter.
- 5.2. Council will not set unrealistic or arbitrary timeframes for action on requests from customers. However, Council will acknowledge, respond to, and action all requests and contacts from customers as soon as reasonably practicable in the circumstances.

6. Privacy and Access to Information

- 6.1. Requests for access to Council documents are dealt with in accordance with the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW) and Council's Privacy Management Policy. In addition, the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW) sets requirements in relation to disclosure of personal information.
- 6.2. Further information is available by viewing Council's Privacy Management Policy located on Council's website or by contacting the Public Officer.

7. General

- 7.1. In all of the situations referred to in this policy, adequate documentary records must be made and maintained on the appropriate Council file within Council's document management system.
- 7.2. 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, Office of Local Government and the NSW Ombudsman for information.

References

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

History

Minute Number	Meeting Date	Description of Change
358/2013	June 4, 2013	Adopted
164/2017	August 15, 2017	Reviewed
	June 23, 2020	Rebranded
336/2022	October 18, 2022	Endorsed for Public Exhibition
362/2022	November 22, 2022	Adopted