Introduction

This procedure sets out to ensure that all customers are treated fairly and reasonably. It also facilitates the delivery of consistent and honest practices by both Council staff and Councillors when dealing with customers.

The procedure also enables staff to respond to customer enquiries in an efficient manner by providing guidance for how to deal with customers on a day-to-day basis.

Service commitment

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 service needs

Standards of service

Council staff shall respond to email correspondence received from customers within three days and written correspondence within 10 days. An acknowledgement letter may be sent where investigations are such that more than 10 days is required to enact a response.

Telephone calls to Council’s call centre shall be returned within one day.

Council staff shall answer incoming calls by clearly stating their name and position or branch/division. Unanswered calls shall divert to another member of staff or to voice mail.

Staff making outgoing calls shall identify themselves by name and council/division/branch, as appropriate, and shall clearly outline the purpose of the call.

Reception area and customer service centre staff shall greet customers as quickly as possible and in a professional and helpful manner.

Customers who cannot be satisfied

Customers who cannot be satisfied include members of the public or groups who by correspondence:

- do not accept that Council is unable to assist them,
- who make unreasonable demands upon Council
- persistently disagree with the action Council has taken in relation to their complaint or concern.
Counter enquiries and telephone calls are to be referred as follows:

- To the most senior available person in the Customer Services and Administration area
- To the professional staff member responsible for that work area
- To the manager responsible for that work area
- If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, the person is to submit their matter in writing.

If in the opinion of the relevant Group Manager, a customer cannot be satisfied – by this it means that all appropriate avenues of internal review or appeal have been exhausted and the customer continues to contact Council. In such situations the Group Manager may contact the customer restating Council’s position on the matter and advise that if the customer continues to contact Council regarding the matter we may determine:

- not to accept any further phone calls from the customer
- not to grant any further interviews
- require all further communication to be put in writing
- continue to receive, read and file correspondence but only acknowledge it

If the customer provides in the opinion of the Group Manager, significant new information relating to their complaint or concern; or the customer raises new issues which warrants further investigation the customer shall be given one opportunity to make representations on that/those issue(s) only.

**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 Group 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:

The Group 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 Group Manager the correspondence raises specific, substantial and serious issues; or

ii. only respond to a certain number of requests in a given period

iii. the General Manager shall advise councillors of any correspondence issued in accordance with this clause

iv. the customer shall be given one opportunity to make representations about Council’s proposed course of action

v. 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

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

1. the Group Manager may notify the customer that:
   a. only a nominated staff member will deal with them in future
   b. they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter; or
   c. all future contact with Council must be in writing

2. the General Manager shall advise councillors of any notification issued.
3. the customer shall be given one opportunity to make representations about Council’s proposed course of action.

Vexatious Complaints

If a complaint is found to be frivolous or vexatious, Council will take no further action on the correspondence. A decision to take no further action will be made by the responsible manager in conjunction with the Group Manager. In such a situation the person shall be advised in writing that Council will not enter into any further correspondence on the issues contained in the correspondence, and the reasons why the matter is considered frivolous or vexatious.

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.

Where a conversation or interview is terminated the staff member must notify the relevant Co-Ordinator or Group 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.

General

In all of the situations referred to in this procedure, adequate documentary records must be made and recorded on the appropriate Council file or document management system.

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 as soon as possible 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.