

**POLICY TITLE: STANDARDS FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE**

**POLICY NO: S 5010**

**Adopted: 15 November 2005**

**POLICY OBJECTIVE/S**

1. To provide guidance for staff and councillors in dealing with customers;
2. To ensure that Council resources are used efficiently and effectively when dealing with customers;
3. To ensure that all customers are treated fairly and reasonably.

**POLICY PROTOCOL**

**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. Staff and councillors shall:
  - a) treat all customers with respect and courtesy;
  - b) listen to what customers have to say;
  - c) respond to customer enquiries promptly and efficiently;
  - d) act with integrity and honesty when liaising with customers;
  - e) consult customers about service needs.

**Standards of Service**

2. Council staff shall strive to respond to correspondence received from customers (written, faxed or emailed) within seven (7) days. An acknowledgement letter may be sent where investigations are such that more than 7 days is required to enact a response.
3. Telephone calls to Council's Reception shall be answered as quickly, politely and efficiently as possible.
4. Council staff shall answer incoming calls by clearly stating their name and position or Department/section. Unanswered calls shall divert to another member of staff. Voice mail will not be utilised on the direct lines to each Department of Council.

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

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

7. 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.

8. On rare occasions it is recognised that some customers cannot be satisfied and or may become abusive or constantly raise the same issue which has already been the subject of a sufficient response. Internal procedures have been established to provide guidelines for such circumstances.

# **CUSTOMER SERVICE PROCEDURES**

## **Procedure for dealing with Customer Enquiries that are not Satisfied**

Council's policy establishing standards for customer service recognises that on rare occasions some customers cannot be satisfied and the following procedures shall apply under such circumstances:

### **1.0 Customers Who Cannot Be Satisfied**

1.1 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.

1.2 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 General Manager shall advise councillors of any correspondence issued in accordance with clause 1.2(a);

c) the customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action;

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**

1.3 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.

1.4 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; or

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

b) the General Manager shall advise councillors of any correspondence issued in accordance with clause 1.4(a);

c) the customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action;

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 either or both of points i) - ii) above will now apply.

## **2.0 Customers Who Constantly Raise the Same Issue with Different Staff**

2.1 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 General Manager shall advise councillors of any notification issued in accordance with clause 2.1(a);
- c) the customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action.

### **3.0 Customers Who Are Rude, Abusive or Aggressive**

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

3.2 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.

3.3 Where a conversation or interview is terminated in accordance with clause 3.2, the staff member must notify the General Manager or the relevant Executive Manager of the details as soon as possible.

3.4 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 and in extreme situations the Police will be contacted.

### **4.0 General**

4.1 In all of the situations referred to in this policy, adequate documentary records must be made and maintained on the appropriate Council records.

4.2 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 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 their noting and information.