

ADOPTED BY COUNCIL: 24 NOVEMBER 2014

REVIEWED BY MANAGER CUSTOMER AND BUSINESS INTEGRITY AND APPROVED FOR PUBLICATION: MAY 2024

PURPOSE

Wollongong City Council strives to deliver standards of customer service at the highest level and this is reflected in our Community Strategic Plan and our Organisational Values. This policy details how Council delivers on the commitment to customer service and how we measure our performance. This policy and the Customer Service Charter form the Customer Service Framework.

Council's commitment to Customer Service includes an effective complaint handling system. It is recognised that this is one method of measuring customer and client satisfaction to provide a useful source of information and feedback for continual improvement of our service.

POLICY INTENT

The main objectives of this policy are to:

- ensure we deliver the service as outlined in the Wollongong City Council Customer Service Charter and to outline customer rights and responsibilities;
- provide customers with a choice as to how they provide feedback to Council about service provision;
- provide a structure around responding to, recording, reporting and using feedback to improve service to customers; and
- outline customer rights and responsibilities.

Council's Customer Service Framework includes an effective complaint handling system which aims to benefit both our customers and Council in a number of ways including:

- responding to feedback/complaints equitably, objectively and in an unbiased manner, ensuring there is no loss of service to the customer;
- creating a second chance to provide service and satisfaction to dissatisfied customers;
- identifying areas of service delivery that need improving;
- providing an opportunity to strengthen relationships between the community and Council; and
- assist in the planning of and allocation of resources.

WOLLONGONG 2032 OBJECTIVES

This policy contributes to the Wollongong 2032 Objective 'our local Council has the trust of the community' under the Community Goal 'we are a connected and engaged community'.

POLICY STATEMENT

Commitment to Customer Service

Wollongong City Council is committed to delivering a quality customer service that is equitable for all customers. We understand that customers have an expectation that they receive the best possible service that can be practically achieved. Our service is reflective of our organisational values.

We aim to deliver service in a friendly, knowledgeable and professional manner by:

- Being respectful, courteous and impartial in all dealings;
- Identifying ourselves when we talk to customers;
- Listening carefully to customers;

- Ensuring that personal information is kept confidential at all times; and
- Having trained and professional staff who will uphold Wollongong City Council's Values and Code of Conduct.

POLICY

In order to meet our Customer Service commitment, Council will ensure that all staff have access to a range of training and materials to support their Service Delivery.

We acknowledge the diversity of our communities and understand that all members of the public have individual rights and needs and we will act with proper regard and sensitivity. We aim to offer quality service by recognising this diversity and ensuring individual needs are met. We will provide clear and logical means for customers to access services, facilities and information including assistance where necessary to lodge requests or provide feedback.

Wollongong City Council is committed to accessible contact. Where required, customers can contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS 131 450 or www.tisnational.gov.au) who can assist with the following:

- Phone interpreting
- Automated Telephone Interpreting Service
- On-site interpreting
- Video remote interpreting

Customers who experience hearing difficulties or loss can contact Council via the National Relay Service (1800 555 660 or www.accesshub.gov.au). Additionally, Council has access to multilingual staff. Customers may also appoint an advocate to deal with Council on their behalf, where practicable Council requires a written authority to provide information to an advocate.

Wollongong City Council recognises that our customers may wish to contact Council in a variety of ways and we are committed to providing choice about how customers can access Council Services. Customers can contact Wollongong City Council in a variety of ways:

- Via the Council Website – lodging a request online or making an enquiry via webchat;
- Telephone;
- Email;
- In our Customer Service Centre;
- Mail; and
- In our Libraries and Community Centres.

Commitment to Service

Council is committed to better understanding the needs and expectations of the local community. Council will enhance its understanding of the needs and expectations of the local community by:

- Carrying out periodic community surveys to learn about what the local community thinks about the areas where Council is performing well and the areas where Council needs to improve service;
- Maintaining opportunities for feedback by encouraging the public to complete feedback forms that Council will record and analyse;
- Maintaining a complaint handling system to respond to service failures and unsatisfied expectations and to enable Council to identify and rectify service failures;

- Establishing guarantees of service in a number of areas and regularly measure the performance of Council against these guarantees;
- Continuing to deliver information on the activities of Council through a variety of means including publishing regular community updates, publishing community information in local newspapers and on the Council website, placing on exhibition at Council offices and libraries plans and other documents relating to Council activities and, using public meetings and other open forms of consultation and dialogue where appropriate;
- Provision of access to Council information under GIPA; and
- Continuing to encourage input from the community on Council's activities through a variety of means including encouraging the local community to attend and speak at Council meetings, encouraging the local community to contact Councillors to discuss concerns, publicising Council's complaint handling and feedback systems and encouraging submissions on plans and other documents relating to Council activities.

Standards

The importance of measuring how well we deliver customer service is recognised. Council has established a feedback handling process to ensure that customers are able to provide feedback and to enable improvement in Service Delivery. We will also measure how well we deliver our customer service through measurement against a number of standards.

In relation to our Customer Service Centre, we aim to:

- Answer 80% of telephone calls within 30 seconds; and
- Attend to 80% of enquiries made in person within five (5) minutes.

As an organisation, we aim to:

- Respond to 85% of written correspondence within 10 working days; and
- Achieve resolution* of customer feedback within five (5) working days.

* Resolution is defined as providing the customer with all relevant information and/or outline of action required and timeframe for completion and/or completed all action required.

Our performance is measured against the key performance indicators and reported in the Quarterly Management Report and the Annual Report.

Records of Customer Service requests

Council has an obligation to properly record and consider all Customer reports and complaints.

The Customer Request Management System (CRMS) is utilised to enable the logging, allocating, tracking and reporting of all Customer Service Requests. The CRMS is utilised to measure Council's performance in the completion of service requests. It is recognised that at times, anonymous complaints/service requests may be made. For many service requests contact names, addresses or phone numbers are required to confirm information or if necessary to obtain additional information. Council may therefore determine not to accept or investigate anonymous requests for service; however it is dependent on the substance of the information provided, the severity of the situation or the service requested.

In some cases, Customers may contact Council with an expectation that specific action will be undertaken by Council. For example, according to Council's Enforcement Policy there are some categories where Council has determined no action will be taken. In these circumstances Customer Service staff may record the complaint and provide information to the customer if it is clear the complaint is a 'no action' matter. Customer service staff will advise the customer of any means available through other agencies which may assist the customer to resolve the matter.

Customer Feedback

Quality customer service consists of providing an efficient, fair, impartial and responsive service. It is also about delivering the most appropriate and complete service at the outset. However, things can and do go wrong and can only be put right and a quality service delivered where Council becomes aware of the issue.

Council's feedback handling system provides an opportunity for service recovery.

Customer feedback encompasses complaints, compliments and suggestions.

Specifically, a 'complaint' is an expression of dissatisfaction with Council's policies, procedures, charges, employees, contractors, quality of service or goods sold or provided.

Feedback does not include:

- A request for service
- A request for information or explanation of policies or procedures
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure (ie potholes)
- Reports of hazards (eg fallen trees)
- Disputes concerning neighbours
- The lodging of an appeal or request to review a decision
- Complaints where Council has no jurisdiction

Lodgement of Feedback

Customer feedback can be provided:

- Via Council's Website
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- By telephone
- In person at Council's Customer Service Centre
- By email
- By letter

Council has trained staff dedicated to dealing with, and responding to customer feedback.

Customer Feedback Review Process

In cases where the customer is dissatisfied with the resolution of Customer Feedback, the customer should advise Council in writing, the reasons for dissatisfaction within 28 days of the initial verbal or written advice. The Customer Experience Manager will liaise with the relevant Senior Manager to investigate the matter. Further resolution processes may be implemented such as mediation or conciliation. In general a written response will be provided to the customer within 28 days.

It is important to note that throughout the feedback handling process, Council expects that the customer will provide all relevant information. Additional reviews will not be undertaken.

Members of the local community who do not believe that Council has fulfilled any of its commitments should complain to Council in the first instance. If the complaint, and any subsequent review, does not resolve the matter, they can complain to:

- The NSW Ombudsman (if the matter concerns maladministration or is related to child abuse);

- The Office of Local Government (if the matter concerns a serious breakdown in Council operations, if Council as a whole, is not operating satisfactorily or the matter relates to pecuniary interest matters); or
- The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) (if the matter concerns corrupt conduct).

Each agency has a separate role in relation to the oversight of the conduct of councils. The NSW Ombudsman is responsible for complaints about a broad range of matters generally described as maladministration. The Office of Local Government is responsible for investigating pecuniary interest matters and will intervene if councils are operating in an unsatisfactory manner or if council operations have seriously broken down. The ICAC is responsible for investigating corrupt conduct. Councils should be able to explain to the public, on request, these different roles.

Customer Responsibilities

Council requires that customers assist Council staff in our service delivery by behaving in a fair and reasonable manner:

- Treating staff with courtesy and respect
- Respecting the rights of other customers
- Being honest and accurate in information sought and supplied to Wollongong City Council
- Working with us to resolve problems
- Providing Council with feedback
- Respecting our community

At times some members of the public may act inappropriately toward Council staff or may make onerous demands on Council resources. Staff Guidelines have been developed to enable staff to deal effectively with customers in such situations.

Guidance Notes

Councils Customer Service Charter is the overarching Statement of Commitment to the delivery of service to our community. Council delivers a range of services for which more specific service charters may be adopted. This is reflective of the varying Customer Service delivery models dependant on the type of service provided. All Service delivery charters comply with the overarching charter.

This policy is applicable to the following persons:

- All Council employees, including all contractors and volunteers
- Customers defined as any person or organisation that engages with Council, or seeks product, service or information offered by Council

A Customer Service Request is defined as a request for action to be taken in relation to a service or product of Council.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Council is committed to providing a fair and equitable service and this Policy has been developed particularly in accordance with the following legislation, regulations, policies and standards:

- Local Government Act
- State Records Act
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act
- Government Information (Public Access) Act

- NSW Ombudsman Better Service and Communication – Guidelines for Local Government
- NSW Ombudsman Good Conduct and Administrative Practice Guidelines (2nd edition)
- NSW Ombudsman Enforcement Guidelines for Councils

REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed a minimum of once every term of Council, or more frequently as required.

RELATED STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Customer Feedback + Complaints Management Policy
- Unreasonable Conduct of Customers Framework

APPROVAL AND REVIEW

Responsible Division	Customer and Business Integrity
Date adopted by Council	24 November 2014
Date/s of previous adoptions	August 2012, October 2010, September 2008
Date of next review	October 2024
Management Reviews <i>Manager Customer and Business Integrity</i>	May 2024 – Reviewed and approved for publication with administrative changes only November 2020 - Reviewed and approved for publication with no changes