



Holroyd City
Built Around People

CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY/GUIDELINE

FOR

HOLROYD CITY COUNCIL

Adopted: 11 June 2003

Reviewed: March 2009

PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Holroyd City Council's service philosophy is to provide the highest quality Customer Service at all times

POLICY OBJECTIVES

1. To ensure that when dealing with customers all staff respond in a courteous, consistent, timely and fair manner and satisfy all reasonable requests from customers.
2. To ensure that Council resources are used efficiently and effectively when dealing with customers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Overview

The aim of the Policy/Guideline is to establish a standard approach to managing contact with customers.

2. Service Commitment

This Policy/Guideline applies to Councillors as well as staff to treat customers in a professional and ethical manner with courteous and efficient service.

3. Service Undertakings

Service undertakings gives examples of situations that can occur in Council and describes how to give customers consistent service.

4. Types of Customers

Explains how staff provide efficient customer service by telephone, written or face to face communication.

5. Dealing with Difficult Customers

Recognises that difficult situations can be encountered and must be dealt with discreetly and with decorum. It also provides for the General Manager to exclude dealings with particularly difficult customers.

6. Customers who are Rude, Abusive or Aggressive

Recognises the types of behaviour which is not just verbal it can be physical against property or a person. This situation must be dealt with discreetly and with decorum. It also provides for the General Manager to exclude dealings with particularly difficult customers.

7. Managing Anonymous Customer Action Requests

Explains that anonymous requests from customers will not normally be actioned unless the issue places the public safety at risk or raises a serious matter.

8. Confidentiality and Privacy

Acknowledges the existence of Council's policy of adopted Privacy Management Plan.

9. General

Covers adequate documentation and any further action required.

10. Date of Review

Specifies how often the Policy/Guidelines should be reviewed and by whom.

1. OVERVIEW

The purpose of this Policy/Guideline is to outline Council's 'can do' approach to customer service and establish a standardised approach to managing contact with customers.

For the purpose of this Policy/Guideline, customers can be defined to include individuals, and organisations to whom Council provides service. Customers include ratepayers, residents, asset users, daily visitors as well as people passing through the Holroyd City Council local government area en route to another destination. Internal customers include other Council departments and members of staff.

Council's dual role as a service provider and a regulatory body can create situations where not all customer requests can be met. However, Council has an obligation to provide customers with an accessible, fair and equitable mechanism to access services, make service requests and obtain assistance. The establishment of a standardised, courteous and professional approach to the management of customer contact, in conjunction with clear policies and procedures, will facilitate the achievement of Council's obligation to its customers. This will enhance Council's image and provide customers with a positive experience of Council.

2. SERVICE COMMITMENT

All Council staff and Councillors provide service to Council's customers either directly or indirectly.

All Council staff and Councillors must strive to meet the needs of our customers in a professional and ethical manner with courteous and efficient service. Staff and Councillors will:

- a) treat all customers with respect and courtesy
- b) listen to what customers have to say and determine the exact nature of the request
- c) respond to customer enquiries promptly and efficiently
- d) act with integrity and honesty when dealing with customers
- e) provide relevant and timely feedback to the customer

3. SERVICE UNDERTAKINGS

Council staff and Councillors aim to project a professional image at all times. To give customers consistent service experience, Council endeavours to:

- ◆ Demonstrate 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 or group
- ◆ Identify customer needs and expectations
- ◆ Provide the local community 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
- ◆ Adopt fair, lawful and appropriate procedures when making decisions, carrying out activities and performing events
- ◆ Be sensitive to any languages or other communication difficulties experienced by members of the local community when providing advice and other information. If necessary, provide bilingual or other assistance as required
- ◆ Be sensitive to any members of the local community with disabilities 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 Council's Code of Conduct
- ◆ Respond to customer enquiries promptly and efficiently, within allocated timeframes

The above key elements of service are outlined in Appendix 'A' attached. These are in line with the National Training Framework competencies.

4. TYPES OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customers contact Council for a wide variety of issues ranging from enquiries and requests for information or advice to the provisions of direct services ie Development Applications, Dog Registrations etc.

(A) Telephone Calls

Council recognises the importance of telephone calls and will answer all calls promptly and efficiently, referring calls to the appropriate officer quickly and providing clear and concise information in response to caller enquiries. Council endeavours to:

- ◆ Advise all callers of the name of the person answering the call, or making the call where it is outgoing from Council
- ◆ Deal with the call, redirect the call or take a clear message from the caller as required
- ◆ Ensure all messages include details of the caller's name, contact number and message as well as details of who took the message and when
- ◆ When calls cannot be fully responded to immediately, give clear advice to the caller about when the caller can expect a response
- ◆ Put calls on hold for the minimum amount of time possible
- ◆ Speak clearly, deal with customers calmly, courteously and patiently, even when the callers are angry, aggressive or distressed
- ◆ Answer unattended telephones in the absence of colleagues whenever practical
- ◆ Respond to telephone messages within one business day
- ◆ Change voicemail message(s) when staff are absent on an extended period of leave

(B) *Written*

Council recognises the importance of correspondence (letters, facsimiles, and e-mail messages) and will provide clear and concise responses promptly. Council endeavours to:

- ◆ Provide a response to all matters within 10 working days of receiving the correspondence and within 1 day for e-mails if the requires a response
- ◆ Ensure that all outward correspondence includes the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter and Council's file reference
- ◆ Use language that is clear and concise

(C) *Face to Face*

Council recognises the need to promptly service members of the public who come to Council to seek information or transact business. Council will endeavour to have staff available to the public during office hours and at designated times. Council endeavours to:

- ◆ Make staff available for interviews by prior arrangement
- ◆ Attend to members of the public at the customer service help desks in a professional and helpful manner and within 5 minutes of arrival at reception
- ◆ Promptly advise staff if there is a member of the public in the reception area for an appointment
- ◆ Provide a full range of information for public inspection in customer service areas
- ◆ Speak clearly and deal with visitors calmly, courteously and patiently, even when visitors are angry, aggressive or distressed
- ◆ Make appointments to visit a customer external to Council facilities. At the beginning of any Council visit, staff or Councillors must clearly identify themselves and the purpose of the visit
- ◆ Ensure that all relevant staff are present to address each matter appropriately

5. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

As stated above, 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 s/he is rude, or difficult. It is certain however, that 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/she 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

- A request that all future communication be in writing
- Provision of responses to queries, information requests only where new issue has been presented
- Identification of a single staff member as contact person through whom all communication must occur

Where the General Manager has made such a decision, he/she will ensure that this is communicated in writing to the customer and that the customer is given the opportunity to make representation to Council about the proposed course of action. In addition the General Manager will advise Councillors of any correspondence issued in relation to such a decision. The General Manager will continue to monitor any further contact with the customer over the issue.

6. 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 either a personal or general nature, intimidating, 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 conversions 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 conversion or interview is terminated, the staff member must then inform his/her Supervisor of the incident and make a diary note of the event. Where appropriate the Supervisor will then discuss the matter with the Director to determine what action should be taken with respect to the customer's behaviour.

If in the opinion of the General Manager, any correspondence to the Council contains personal abuse, inflammatory statements or material clearly intended to intimidate, it will be placed on the relevant file and not otherwise acted upon.

7. MANAGING ANONYMOUS CUSTOMER ACTION REQUESTS

Customers can make anonymous action requests to council. These action requests, however, can be difficult to investigate (often staff need to obtain more information from the person making the complaint) and for obvious reasons it is impossible to contact the person making a complaint and communicate the findings of Council.

Council will not normally investigate anonymous action requests unless the issue places public safety at risk or raises a serious matter and there is sufficient information in the complaint to make out a prima facie case or to carry out an investigation.

8. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

All dealings with customers must abide by the Local Government Privacy and Person Information Protection Act 1998. Council has adopted a Privacy Management Plan in accordance with that Act and the plan is available on the intranet. Access to the information held by Council must be made in with Council's Freedom of Information Act.

9. GENERAL

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

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 a number of governing bodies. The General Manager must notify 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.

10. DATE OF REVIEW

This Policy/Guideline is to be reviewed by the General Manager, or as delegated thereby, within 12 months of the date on this document.

NATIONAL TRAINING FRAMEWORK COMPETENCIES

Standard Greetings

Telephone: *“Welcome (Department), this is (name)”*

Counter: *“Welcome, may I help you?”*

Transferring Calls All calls transferred to any other area within Council will be announced.

Taking Messages All messages are to contain all relevant information ie name and contact number of the caller, date and time of call, details of the enquiry and passed on to the relevant individual as soon as practical.

Dealing with Difficult Rude, Abusive or Aggressive Customers

Warn the customer that if the behaviour continues, the conversation/contact will be terminated.

“I can see that you are upset, however, if you continue to speak to me in this way I will have no other choice but to terminate this call/contact.”

Terminate the conversation/contact if the behaviour continues after the warning has been given.

“I can see that you are upset, however, I don't feel we can discuss this matter while you are speaking to me in this way. I'm sorry but I must terminate this call/contact.”

Where the contact is face to face, the Team Leader/Manager should be called and also for assistance the security officers should be contacted.