



POLICY TITLE: CUSTOMER SERVICE

FOLDER NUMBER: F2007/00307

POLICY OWNER / DIVISION: Strategy Division

POLICY OWNER / BRANCH: Corporate Strategy

FUNCTION: Customer Service

RELEVANT LEGISLATION: Local Government Act 1993

POLICY ADOPTION/AMENDMENT DATE: 11 October 2006 **REPORT NUMBER:** ST8/06

REVIEW YEAR: 2009

AMENDMENT HISTORY: 16 June 1999 (Report GM13/99)
8 March 2000 (Report GM2/00)
9 June 2004 (Report GM6/04)
16 February 2006 (Amended TRIM Doc No D00352818)
11 October 2006 (Report ST8/06)

RELATED POLICIES: Complaints Handling

POLICY PURPOSE / OBJECTIVES:

1. To determine minimum customer service standards which provide guidance for staff when dealing with customers, and guide our customers on the service standards they can expect when dealing with Council.

POLICY STATEMENT:

1. Hornsby Shire Council values its customers and is committed to providing quality services that appropriately meet the needs and expectations of its range of customers by focussing on both the customer and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Definitions

1. Customer service is the provision of relevant and responsive service by providing all necessary and appropriate assistance to fulfil the customer's request within Council's service performance standards. The assistance should be as clear and simple as the situation permits and should be provided in a professional and friendly manner.
 2. Customer needs are the requirements a customer wishes to fulfil when they interact with Council.
 3. Customer expectations are the assumptions a customer makes about what will happen as part of the service delivery process. In dealing with Council all customers can expect to be dealt with honestly, ethically and respectfully.
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4. Council has customer service standards and systems against which performance is measured. The standards are documented in the "Your Council Our Commitment" brochure.
5. A complaint is "An expression of dissatisfaction with Council's processes, procedures, charges, employees, agents, quality of service or goods provided." (NSW Ombudsman, Complaints Handling Toolkit, 2004: 8)

(Council has a complaints handling policy to record and respond to service complaints and identify opportunities for improvement.)

POLICY PROTOCOLS:

1. To provide guidance to staff, Councillors and the community on expectations for customer service.
2. To define customer service standards and record keeping requirements.

Expectations for customer service

Council will:

1. Use plain language where possible and take reasonable steps to communicate in a suitable manner
2. Be easy to contact by telephone, email, web and in person during normal business hours
3. Operate within the customer service standards documented in the "Your Council Our Commitment" brochure
4. Comply with obligations to customers under laws such as Freedom of Information and Privacy

Customer service standards and recordkeeping

1. Council staff and Councillors will strive to meet the needs of customers in a friendly, professional and ethical manner with courteous and efficient service.
2. Council will maintain a Customer Request Management System (CRM) designed to deal with service requests that relate to the services Council provides.
3. Customers may lodge their requests either in writing by letter, email or web, or verbally by telephone or in person at the appropriate customer service counter. (N.B. There will be some cases where service requests may need to be in writing).
4. Action to respond to the service request will be undertaken within the timeframe detailed in the relevant Problem Code within the Customer Service Request System. Such action will be in accordance with a procedure developed by the responsible Branch/Team of Council for handling the particular type of service request.
5. Where a service request relates to a shortcoming in a specific Council process it will be recorded in both the open area of the Document Management System and also the Customer Service Request System and will be forwarded to the relevant Manager/Team Leader for action.
6. Council will respond to all correspondence within 14 days. An acknowledgement will be sent where more than 14 days is required to complete a response. Any correspondence from Council shall include a contact name and contact information.
7. Telephone calls shall be answered as quickly and efficiently as possible, generally within 5 rings.
8. Council staff will answer incoming calls by clearly stating their name and branch/division. Unanswered calls shall divert to another member of staff or to voice mail.
9. All telephone messages should be answered by a return call within one working day unless the matter is clearly more urgent.

10. Staff should keep the customer reasonably informed of progress on matters that require lengthy action or investigation.
11. Staff making outgoing calls shall identify themselves by name and council/division/branch, as appropriate, and shall clearly outline the purpose of the call.
12. All staff shall greet customers promptly and courteously.
13. Staff required to visit a customer external to Council facilities shall, where appropriate, 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.

Lodging a complaint

1. Where a customer contacting Council is not satisfied with the outcome of their request they may lodge a complaint either verbally or in writing.
2. When a complaint is received it will be dealt with in accordance with Council's Complaints Handling Policy.