

# Customer Service Policy

## 1 Document Information

<b>Version Date</b> <i>(Draft or Council Meeting date)</i>	24 July 2018
<b>Author</b>	Administration Manager
<b>Owner</b> <i>(Relevant director)</i>	Director of Finance & Corporate Services
<b>Status –</b> <i>Draft, Approved, Adopted by Council, Superseded or Withdrawn</i>	Adopted by Council
<b>Next Review Date</b>	Within 12 months of Council being elected
<b>Minute number</b> <i>(once adopted by Council)</i>	18/07/14

## 2 Summary

This policy aims to set out:

1. A program for the continuous improvement of service and communication between Council and the community
2. The commitment of Council to the maintenance and further development of effective communication with, and the provision of a high standard of service for, the local community
3. The responsibilities of members of the community in their dealings with Council.

## 3 Approvals

Title	Date Approved	Signature
Director of Finance & Corporate Services		

## 4 History

Minute No.	Summary of Changes	New Version Date
14/10/24	First adopted – together with “ <i>Policy on limits on service and communication</i> ” and replaces “ <i>Customer Service Policy</i> ”	October 2014
18/07/14	Policy title changed to Customer Service Policy. Records Compliance Officer changed to Information Support Officer. Information Support Officer to report to Administration Manager instead of DFCS. Readopted as per s165(4)	24 July 2018

Version Date: **Error! Reference source not found.**

## 5 Reason

To set forth and outline the commitment of Council to quality service and effective communication

## 6 Scope

Council is committed to providing quality service to the local community in order to meet the needs of the local community using the available resources.

## 7 Associated Legislation

## 8 Definitions

ICAC – Independent Commission Against Corruption

Customer – refers to both external customers including residents, ratepayers, developers and visitors, and to internal customers e.g. members of Council staff, the Mayor and councillors.

## 9 Responsibilities

### 9.1 General Manager

The General Manager is responsible for the overall control and implementation of the policy.

### 9.2 Directors

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services is responsible for managing and overseeing Councils' customer service. The director is responsible for monitoring feedback provided as per (c) below; measuring performance against the guarantees of service as per the policy. Additionally, the director is to ensure:

1. Appropriate staff members receive training in alternative resolution methods.
2. A yearly community survey by way of a mail out is undertaken.
3. A "Suggestions / Compliments / Complaints" facility is made available on Council's website.

### 9.3 Information Support Officer

The Information Support Officer is responsible for weekly meetings with the Administration Manager relating to feedback and guarantees of service monitoring.

### 9.4 Members of the Public

Any member of the public who believes that Council has failed to honour its commitments set forth in Council's policy on service should raise the matter with Council in the form of a complaint.

Complaints will be investigated and if the complaint is justified, Council will try to explain the problem and outline what Council is doing to resolve the matter.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complainant can seek a review or complain to the third parties listed below.

## 10 Related Documents

Document Name	Document Location
Complaints Handling Policy	Policy Register

Version Date: **Error! Reference source not found.**

## 11 Policy Statement

This policy will:

1. set forth and outline the commitment of Council to quality service and effective communication,
2. outline a program for improving service and improving communication between Council and the local community,
3. specifically outline the commitments of Council regarding communication and standards of service, and
4. outline what are the responsibilities of members of the local community in their dealings with the Council.

### **Commitment to service and communication**

Council is committed to providing quality service to the local community in order to meet the needs of the local community using the available resources. To demonstrate this commitment, Council will build and maintain a relationship based on open and effective communication with the local community.

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:

- a) 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,
- b) utilising progress associations to create an ongoing dialogue between Council and the local community about service performance and improvement,
- c) maintaining opportunities for feedback by encouraging the public to complete feedback forms that Council will record and analyse,
- d) maintaining a complaint handling system to respond to service failures and unsatisfied expectations and to enable Council to identify and rectify service failures,
- e) establishing guarantees of service in a number of areas and regularly measure the performance of Council against these guarantees,
- f) 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,
- g) maintaining an open file policy whereby members of the public can inspect files by prior arrangement (subject to the fees and conditions detailed in the policy and subject to Council's duties of confidentiality and privacy), and

- h) 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.

### **General guarantee of service**

Council guarantees to:

1. take major decisions affecting the local community only after due consultation with the local community,
2. treat members of the local community with courtesy, patience, sensitivity and attentiveness,
3. provide the local community with advice and other information that is clear and concise,
4. be sensitive to any language or other communication difficulties experienced by members of the local community when providing advice and other information,
5. adopt fair, lawful and appropriate procedures when making decisions, carrying out activities and performing services,
6. make decisions using processes that are impartial and otherwise ethical,
7. use information and Council resources responsibly and efficiently, and
8. act in accordance with the law, Council's code of conduct and the code of meeting practice.

### **Specific guarantees of service**

#### Answering correspondence

Council recognises the importance of correspondence (including letters, facsimiles and email messages) and will try to provide a clear and concise response promptly.

Council guarantees to:

- a) acknowledge correspondence requiring a response or provide an interim reply within one week in the case of letters or facsimiles and two days in the case of email messages received at council@cabonne.nsw.gov.au,
- b) respond to correspondence by telephone where appropriate (such as simple requests and correspondence for information only) and record the response,
- c) provide a substantive response within two weeks in the case of simple inquiries and within four weeks in the case of more complex inquiries,
- d) keep the writer informed if a final reply cannot be provided within the time allowed,
- e) ensure all correspondence includes the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter and Council's file reference, and
- f) use language that is clear and concise.

Version Date: **Error! Reference source not found.**

## Telephone calls

Council recognises the importance of telephone calls and will try to answer them promptly, quickly refer calls to the appropriate officer and provide clear and concise information in response to caller inquiries.

Council guarantees to:

- a) answer calls within five rings either in person or by automatic telephone answering service,
- b) advise the caller on answering of the first name of the officer answering,
- c) deal with the call, redirect the call or take a clear message as appropriate,
- d) ensure messages include details of the caller's name and number, the caller's message and details of who took the message and when,
- e) if the call cannot be fully responded to, give clear advice on what has to be done to respond to the call fully and how long that will take,
- f) put calls on hold for no longer than one minute at a time (or such other time as is reasonable having regard to Council's resources),
- g) speak clearly and deal with callers calmly, courteously and patiently even where callers are angry,
- h) record all significant telephone calls in the form of a written file note,
- i) answer unattended telephones in the absence of the responsible officer, and
- j) return telephone messages within one business day when an officer is unavailable (unless voice mail is available).

## Availability of staff at counter and for interviews

Council recognises the need to promptly serve members of the public who come to Council to seek information and transact other business. Council will try to ensure the Council offices are accessible. Council will provide customer service help desks where the public can obtain information and transact business. Council guarantees to:

- a) make staff available for interviews by prior arrangement and otherwise during Council's hours of business (which Council will widely publicise),
- b) attend to members of the public at customer service help desks within five minutes,
- c) promptly advise staff if there is a member of the public in the reception area for an appointment,
- d) if staff cannot attend interviews on request, attempt to arrange a mutually convenient appointment in the future,
- e) provide a full range of information for public inspection in customer service areas including:
  - i. all documents required to be publicly available,

- ii. relevant Council policies and plans (including details of Council's complaints policy),
  - iii. community information brochures and newsletters,
  - iv. business papers,
  - v. information on the NSW Ombudsman and the ICAC, and
  - vi. development applications and other information on public exhibition; and
- f) speak clearly and deal with visitors calmly, courteously and patiently even where visitors are angry.

#### Addressing meetings of the Council

The Council meeting is the peak decision-making forum of Council. Council values the input of members of the public in the consideration of issues determined by Council.

Council guarantees to:

- a) publicise the time and date of meetings of Council and Council committees as per Council's obligations under the Local Government Act,
- b) make agendas and business papers available to interested persons prior to meetings as per Council's obligations under the Local Government Act,
- c) provide opportunities for members of the public to address meetings of Council and Council committees,
- d) provide members of the public wanting to address meetings with information on the conduct of meetings,
- e) take into account insofar as they are relevant the points of view expressed by members of the public on issues for decision,
- f) make available details of the address and telephone number (and, if relevant, the contact hours) of each Councillor to members of the public wanting to present their views to councillors directly, and
- g) endeavour to provide councillors in a timely fashion with submissions and other information provided by members of the public for the consideration of councillors.

#### Notification and consultation

Council recognises that a fundamental component of quality service and improved communication is effective notification and consultation with the local community. Council recognises that the local community is entitled to be notified of proposals that affect or might reasonably be seen as likely to affect their interests and to have their attitudes, concerns and needs acknowledged and taken into account.

Council guarantees to:

- a) comply with all legal requirements in relation to notification (including, where relevant, its obligations under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and/or the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act),
- b) comply with Development Control Plan and Local Orders Policy in relation to notification,

- c) publish details of all development applications on Council's web site (subject to obligations under the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act and the Government Information (Public Access) Act),
- d) provide persons notified with information on how to best frame submissions,
- e) meet Council's obligations under the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act, including informing persons notified that submissions may be obtained by members of the public under the Local Government Act and/or the Government Information (Public Access) Act,
- f) ensure letters of notification include the full name and the direct telephone number of the officer responsible for the application and information on how to obtain further information on the matter,
- g) in relation to issues of significant community or public interest or where the issue is likely to materially adversely affect the interests of a significant number of members of the community, to undertake consultation irrespective of any legal or policy requirement to do so,
- h) ensure that information is available for inspection and staff are available for consultation in relation to matters the subject of notification and consultation;
- i) ensure that consultation is timely and appropriate but does not unduly delay the decision making process, and
- j) provide access to Council files consistent with Council's legal obligations under the Local Government Act, the Government Information (Public Access) Act and the Privacy and Personal Information Act.

### **Complaint handling and reviewing decisions**

Council values the opportunity complaints give to identify areas of service that need improvement, to respond to individual dissatisfaction and to strengthen the relationship between Council and the local community.

Council guarantees to:

- a) deal with complaints in accordance with its complaint handling system,
- b) widely publicise the existence of Council's complaint handling system,
- c) encourage members of the public dissatisfied with Council's conduct to lodge complaints (and facilitate such action by making complaint and feedback forms freely available in public areas of Council's offices),
- d) ensure that complainants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and remain dissatisfied are offered a review by a more senior officer,
- e) advise complainants of their right to complain to the Ombudsman, (if the matter relates to pecuniary interest issues or alleges a serious breakdown in Council operations) the Office of Local Government or (if there are reasonable grounds to suspect corrupt conduct), the ICAC,
- f) deal with public interest disclosures in accordance with its internal reporting policy, and

- g) regularly report publicly on the outcome of complaints, using this information to identify and rectify deficiencies in Council services.

### **Using alternative dispute resolution methods**

Council is committed to the efficient use of its resources. Disputes involving Council are capable of draining substantial amounts of Council's human and financial resources. Council recognises the capacity of alternative dispute resolution methods to assist parties in dispute to identify their interests and resolve their disputes quickly and at a fraction of the cost of formal legal action.

Council will endeavour to resolve quickly and fairly disputes in which it is involved, utilising alternative dispute resolution methods whenever appropriate.

Council guarantees to:

1. ensure appropriate staff members are trained in alternative resolution methods,
2. use alternative dispute resolution methods to assist members of the community in dispute over development applications to resolve their disputes,
3. support alternative dispute resolution methods to assist in the resolution of disputes to which Council is a party, and
4. provide Council representatives at mediation session with adequate authority to settle disputes the subject of mediation.

### **What are the responsibilities of members of the local community**

Communication is a two-way process. To be effective, both Council and the public should strive to adopt a fair and reasonable approach to communicating with each other. When communicating with Council, members of the public will as far as possible in the circumstances:

1. focus their dissatisfaction on the conduct or performance of Council, councillors and/or staff members rather than on personal criticism of councillors and/or staff,
2. behave appropriately, avoiding the excessive use of abusive language and/or threatening behaviour,
3. provide Council with all relevant information in order that their opinion, concern or complaint can be readily understood,
4. accept that Council operates under resource constraints, noting that the allocation of resources is a matter for Council to determine, and
5. pursue alternative means of resolving complaints and disputes through external agencies, publicity and/or taking legal action if the complaint or dispute cannot be resolved to their satisfaction.