



YOUNG SHIRE COUNCIL

CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

VERSION CONTROL

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1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The mission of Young Shire Council is to partner our community to achieve their vision of planning and delivering quality services and promoting the wellbeing of the Shire and its people.

The Customer Service Policy outlines our commitment to customers in accordance with our mission statement and provides a formalised process for making complaints. It outlines customers' rights, the standards customers can expect when dealing with Council and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with Council decisions or actions.

2.0 PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES

This policy covers all services provided by Council to all of its customers.

To provide guidance to Councillors, staff and customers in relation to the standards of service and the process for making compliments, enquiries and requests, and complaints in relation to Council services.

To facilitate consistent standards of service delivery across Council and to provide a mechanism whereby compliments and complaints may be received and processed

3.0 POLICY

3.0.1 OUR COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

3.0.2 The Council is committed to the provision of timely, efficient, consistent and quality services provided by polite and helpful officers that meet our customer's expectations.

3.0.3 The Council places great emphasis on the efficient handling of complaints. Our aim at all times is to provide quality service. Council may not be able to provide complete satisfaction but will always be trying for the best possible solution.

3.0.4 To achieve this, customers are encouraged to voice their complaints and from Council's perspective work toward increasing customer satisfaction and continuously improve our services by responding to customer complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible.

3.1 WHO IS A CUSTOMER

A customer is any person or organisation having dealings with or using the services of the Council.

3.2 OUR SERVICE STANDARDS

3.2.1 What you can expect from Council staff and services:

- Professional and informative approach
- Courteous, polite and friendly manner
- Efficient execution of tasks
- Commitment to listening and responding to your needs
- Referral of requests to the appropriate person or agency if unable to fulfil your requirements

- All information will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality
- Acknowledgement and respect for customer's time.

3.2.2 When a customer visits or telephones the Council

Staff will attend the counter and answer the telephone promptly, courteously and deal with an enquiry directly without unnecessary referrals or transfers. If staff cannot deal with the enquiry they will provide the customer with the name of the person or agency the request or enquiry should be referred to. If that information is not readily available, staff will request the relevant person or agency to contact the customer directly. Telephone calls to the Council will be returned at the first opportunity and within 24 hours day, however where information is not readily available verbal enquiries will be answered within 7 (seven) days.

3.2.3 When a customer writes or emails

Council will acknowledge all written requests or enquiries within 7 (seven) days. Our response will be either in full, or as an acknowledgment outlining the name of the person handling the matter. Such acknowledgement may be by telephone or in writing as appropriate. All correspondence will be as prompt as possible, courteous and written in plain English but may contain some technical terms.

A more detailed response will be provided within a further 14 (fourteen) days, however when matters cannot be resolved in that period you will be advised.

3.3 OUR EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMER

3.3.1 To make our job easier in providing our services Council asks customers:

- to treat staff with respect and in a civil and courteous manner
- for patience and understanding
- to provide information that is clear, concise and complete
- to respect the privacy, safety and needs of other members of the community
- to phone to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or need to see a specific officer
- to phone the officer nominated on correspondence sent to the customer, quoting the file reference on the letter.

3.3.2 Abusive Customers

In any interaction with members of the community where personal abuse or vulgar language is used, the communication may be terminated immediately by the officer. If face to face, the officer will walk away. If on a telephone, the officer will terminate the call. If in email, the address may be blocked.

There may be occasions when

- the issue (s) a person has cannot be dealt with to their satisfaction and it is not possible for Council officers to continue to respond: or
- correspondence contains personal abuse or vulgar language is used.

In these cases, Council may decide to limit or cease responses to the person. A decision of this nature will be communicated in writing to the person.

If a staff member feels threatened by the language or behaviour of the customer, they may notify the Police.

3.4 COMPLIMENTS

Young Shire Council welcomes compliments about its staff and the services they provide. Compliments assist us to determine whether we are doing something well and also enhance the morale of staff. If you would like to pay a compliment, you may do so by telephone, at the counter or in writing. Council appreciates the time you take to make a compliment.

3.5 ENQUIRIES AND REQUESTS

All customer enquiries and requests received by staff at Council are dealt with appropriately. If necessary, customer requests are entered into a Customer Request Action and Enquiry system (CARE). This ensures they are directed to the appropriate officer/s for further actioning. Enquiries and Requests can be made by telephone, in person, or in writing.

3.6 COMPLAINTS

3.6.1 What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision (outside of a structured process), level or quality of service, or behaviour of an employee or agent, which can be investigated and acted upon and has been specifically referred to Council for action. From an operational perspective, a complaint is also an opportunity for Council to review certain processes to see whether they can be improved.

A structured process is where legislation specifically make provision for an appeal, internal or external review of a decision.

3.6.2 What is not a complaint

- A request for service (unless there was no response to a first request for service).
- A request for information or an explanation of a policy or procedure.
- Disagreement with a policy or decision of the Council.
- An appeal or request for internal or external review of a decision for which a structured process applies, other than that made as the result of a complaint.
- An expression concerning the general direction and performance of Council or its Councillors.
- An expression of dissatisfaction with the behaviour of Council or its Councillors
- reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure.
- Reports about neighbours, noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of our service.

Many of the issues above are called 'complaints' when a customer contact us. They are called complaints because a customer is unhappy about the situation and wants something done. The actions we take to resolve many 'complaints' are an everyday part of organisational life for us, due to the nature of services we provide. These issues will be dealt with separately from the formal complaints management process.

3.6.3 Complaints Management Process

The Director of each Department of the Council is responsible for handling complaints relevant to that Department.

While most problems can usually be resolved at an early stage, there are times when they require detailed investigation. If a complaint is of a very serious nature, it will be referred to the General Manager.

Irrespective of the manner in which the complaint was received, a response to the complaint can be expected within seven (7) days. If a Councillor has submitted a complaint on a customer's behalf we will also respond to the Councillor within seven (7) days.

There are times when it's not possible to meet this deadline, eg. where a complaint is a complex one and Councillors are to be briefed on the outcome of the investigations. In these cases we will endeavour to keep the customer informed of the progress.

3.6.4 Form of Complaint

A complaint may be lodged orally (by telephone or at the counter) or in writing. Your complaint will be referred to the relevant Director and may be responded to orally by phoning, or by meeting with the Director to discuss the complaint, or in writing.

If the complaint relates to a complex matter or there is no resolution from discussing the matter with the Director, the complaint will then be referred to the General Manager for consideration. At this stage, all complaints should be put in writing setting out the complaint details as simply as possible. If you are unable to provide a written complaint yourself, assistance with writing your complaint can be provided.

To assist Council in dealing with your complaint a customer should include the following, if relevant:

- a) date, times and location of events
- b) what happened
- c) to whom the customer has spoken (names, position in the Council and dates)
- d) copies or references to letter or documents relevant to the complaint.
- e) State what the customer hopes to achieve as an outcome to the complaint.

3.6.5 Internal Review

Experience has shown that the majority of complaints will be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Director. However, a person who is not satisfied with the outcome may request a review of the complaint by the General Manager, such request must be made in writing.

The General Manager will inform the customer of the findings on completion of an investigation.

3.6.6 Consideration of a Complaint.

In considering a complaint the relevant Director or the General Manager will:

- Examine and analyse the information already available and follow up points requiring clarification,
- Look at the Council Policies which might have a bearing on the complaint,
- Consider whether or not the Council is at fault;
- Consider any necessary action to be taken to correct the faults identified; and
- Consider a review of the Council's procedures to avoid recurrence of any similar complaint in the future if necessary.

The relevant Director or General Manager may enter into informal discussions or mediation on a complaint with a view to resolution. Should this process not resolve the situation it may be referred to Council.

3.6.7 Vexatious Complaints

All complaints received by Council will be treated with the utmost seriousness however if a complaint is found to be malicious, frivolous or vexatious no further action will be taken on the complaint. The customer will be informed of this decision in writing.

3.6.8 Anonymous Complaints

While Council will receive anonymous complaints, it will generally only act on them where the matter is considered to be serious and where there is sufficient information in the complaint to enable an investigation to be undertaken.

3.6.9 Protection of Customer

Council will take all care to ensure that the reporting of complaints will not result in a customer experiencing any form of victimisation or retribution as a result of the complaint. Council records are subject to the Government Information (Public Access) Act and may be accessed under the GIPA.

3.6.10 What if a customer is not satisfied with the resolution of the Complaint

Council is confident that it can resolve the majority of complaints received. However, we understand that it may not be able to satisfy every customer on every occasion.

Sometimes Councils have to make difficult decisions involving many people and individual customers do not get the outcome they want.

If a complaint remains unresolved or a customer is dissatisfied with our process in dealing with a complaint other avenues remain for the customer to explore which include:

- available Administrative Appeals Process,
- the Judicial Review Act 2000, and
- contact external agencies which can review actions and decisions taken by Council. These include”
- The Ombudsman who is an officer responsible to Parliament for investigating complaints made about administrative actions (or inactions) of NSW Ombudsman Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000. Ph 02 9286 1000 or freecall 1800 451 524
- Division of Local Government Premier & Cabinet, 5 O’Keefe Avenue, Nowra, NSW 2541 Ph 20 4428 41003

- ICAC (Independent Commission Against Corruption) Level 25, 133 Castlereagh Street, Sydney NSW 2000. Ph 02 8281 5999 Fax 02 9264 5364.

While a customer is entitled to refer a complaint directly to these Bodies at any time, customers are encouraged to allow Council to investigate the complaint first.

3.6.11 How you can contact us

You can contact us to make an enquiry, compliment or a complaint:

- in person by visiting Council's Offices at 189-205 Boorowa St, Young during the hours of 8:30 am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday,
- by telephone by phoning 02 6380 1200 during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday.
- By Email to mail@young.nsw.gov.au

4.0 PERSONAL INFORMATION PROTECTION

Council as a commitment to protection of Personal Information provided by a customer to Council in accordance with the requirements of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (PPIPA) and Councils Privacy Management Policy.

5.0 AVAILABILITY

This customer Service Policy is available:

- for public inspection at the Council Office during normal office hours,
- on the Council's web-site free of charge

6.0 REVIEW

This Customer Service Policy will be reviewed at least once every four (4) years.



Customer Service Charter



Our commitment to YOU

Young Shire Council will ensure that our customers and stakeholders receive efficient, responsive and friendly service.

We will set acceptable standards and provide quality service.

This Charter will be reviewed and adapted to meet the changing needs of our customers.

Our Customer Focus Values

We demonstrate customer focus when we:

- are friendly and polite
- make our resident and community our prime focus
- respond to all enquiries promptly
- work hard to make our relationship with the community, Councillors and our colleagues professional and productive
- consider how our actions impact on our community, our future and the Council.

Helping us to help you

You can help us to meet these commitments by:

- having a note pad and pen by the phone when you call the Council
- providing us with accurate and complete details when you contact us
- respecting the privacy and rights of other customers
- treating our employees with courtesy and respect
- phoning to make an appointment if you have a complex enquiry or need to see a specific officer
- phoning the officer nominated on correspondence sent to you and quoting the reference number on the letter
- letting us know how you found our service.

Service standards you can expect

On the telephone we will:

- answer calls within five (5) rings
- greet you politely
- listen carefully, establish your concerns and act on them accordingly
- respond to your messages within one working day
- keep you appropriately informed of the progress of an issue
- endeavour not to transfer your call more than once
- try to direct you to the correct service provider, where the service you are seeking is not provided by the Council

Face to face we will:

- provide you with a prompt, courteous, friendly and professional service at all times
- treat you with respect
- value you as a customer
- listen carefully and identify your needs
- provide you with answers to enquiries or make arrangements for the enquiries to be addressed
- accept responsibility for the timely processing of your business.

When we respond to your letters, emails and faxes we will:

- write clearly in plain English
- fully explain decisions or the Council's position on issues raised
- provide you with a contact name and telephone number
- acknowledge your correspondence within 7 days
- provide a substantive response within 21 days.

On our website we will:

- use plain English
- provide up-to-date and accurate information
- endeavour to make information easy to find.

Customer Service Requests

Requests for some specific services such as potholes, tree or storm damage, illegal dumping, etc, will be recorded in our computerised customer works request system and actioned within established standard times.

If you wish, your request will be confirmed in writing within 7 days of its receipt.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION COUNTS

As we strive to deliver even better service, we encourage you to give feedback. Whether you have a request for service, a complaint or a compliment, we would like to hear from you.

Please phone us on (02) 6380 1200 or visit our website www.young.nsw.gov.au