

## Customer service

<b>Policy, procedure, protocol</b>	Policy
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<b>Related documents</b>	Code of Conduct Complaints Management Policy Community Consultation Policy Service Delivery Procedure Privacy Management Plan Excluding Abusive or Disruptive Customers from Council Premises Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy
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<b>Linkage to Our Community Plan</b>	5 Leadership
<b>Objective</b>	5.2 We will have an effective and efficient organisation
<b>Strategy</b>	5.2.3 Foster an organisational culture focused on customer service excellence, innovation and continuous improvement

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to identify mutual obligations in relation to customer contact with Council staff.

## 2. Definitions

*Council staff* – Refers to all staff employed by Clarence Valley Council

*Organisation* – Refers to Clarence Valley Council

*Customer* – Refers to all entities, internal and external that have interaction with the organisation

*Customer Service Centres* – Customer Service Main offices (Grafton & Maclean), Community Centres, Tourism Services Centres, Care and Support Offices, Libraries & Regional Art Gallery.

## 3. Background/legislative requirements

This Policy sets a standard for a quality customer contact experience for all parties who make contact with Council staff establishes a customer service standard at an organisational level and recognises that delivery of quality customer service is a core responsibility of all Council staff.

## 4. Policy, protocol or procedure statement

Council is committed to the achievement of high standards across all aspects of customer contact and the ongoing review and improvement of those standards. Council staff will at all times, treat customers with respect, courtesy, dignity, fairness and efficiency.

## 5. Council commitment to provide services

Council commits to:

- Formally recognising that our customers are our first priority and nothing is more important than keeping our customers informed and providing accurate and timely responses to customer requests for information or services.
- Developing a customer first culture throughout the organisation by providing staff with the tools they need to deliver excellent customer service including training and education and access to the appropriate systems, processes and technologies.
- Ensuring equitable access to council services and information for all customers regardless of disability, ethnicity, language or age.
- Regularly reviewing and updating the portals used for customer contact by seeking customer feedback on preferred contact methods, staying abreast of technological advancements, reviewing internal processes and procedures as necessary.
- Developing measurable service standards for customer contact to guide officers in their dealings with customers, to provide certainty for customers on when they can expect their requests to be responded to and to ensure that standards are consistently being met.

- Upholding the provisions of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*, and the *National Privacy Act*, including maintaining confidentiality for customers in all matters in strict accordance with those statutes.
- Promoting mutually respectful and courteous interactions between customers and Council staff by applying Council's Code of Conduct to the actions of staff and by protecting, supporting and equipping our staff to manage customers who display an unacceptable level of rudeness, profane language or aggression towards them.
- Prompt and efficient services.
- Easy access to our services.
- Friendly, professional service.
- Accurate and consistent information.

## **6. What you can do to help us**

- Treat our staff in a polite and respectful manner;
- Be honest and accurate in your dealings with Council;
- Work with us to solve problems;
- Give us feedback on the things we do;
- Respect community property.

## **7. Definition of customer service commitment**

### **7.1 Face to face**

- Wherever possible face to face enquiries at Council's Customer Service Centres will be dealt with on the spot.
- Where an answer cannot be provided immediately, the customer's details will be taken and their enquiry will be referred to the appropriate area of Council for a formal response within 10 business days.
- If a formal response is required inside 10 business days (e.g. relating to a rates enquiry and the due date for payment is less than 10 business days away) every endeavour will be made to respond in the required timeframe and/or to protect the customers' rights with regard to deadlines.

### **7.2 Telephone** (either through Council's switchboard or directly to an extension number)

- Council staff will answer telephone calls within 15 seconds 80% of the time.
- Council staff will strive to resolve telephone enquiries at the first point of contact 75% of time.
- If staff cannot provide an on the spot answer, they will provide a contact name and telephone number and details as to when the caller can expect to be contacted regarding their enquiry.

### 7.3 Correspondence (mail or facsimile)

- Written enquiries to Council, requiring a response, will be responded to within 10 business days.
- Where a matter is complex and cannot fully be answered within 10 business days, Council staff will make contact either by telephone, mail or email to advise that the enquiry has been received and to provide an estimated date for finalisation.

### 7.4 Internet/email

- Council will respond to email enquiries received through Council's corporate inbox immediately to acknowledge receipt of the enquiry.
- From that point, email enquiries will be dealt with in the same way as other correspondence, i.e. a full response within 10 business days or less, or in lieu of that, an interim response with an estimated date for finalisation.
- Where Council staff are emailed directly, and a response is required, a response will be provided within 10 business days unless the matter is more complex in which case an interim response will be provided with the full response to follow within 5 business days. If the email is highly complex requiring significant analysis, internal communication etc., the response may take longer than 5 business days and the customer will be provided an estimated timeframe.
- Council will respond to enquiries submitted through Council's social media sites within two days unless the matter is more complex in which case an interim response will be provided with the full response to follow within 5 business days.

### 7.5 Customer contact quality standards

The following standards will be applied to all customer contact:

- For face to face enquiries employees will have their identification displayed or readily available for observation upon request;
- For telephone enquiries employees will identify themselves by name when answering;
- Customers will at all times be treated with courtesy and respect and their enquiry will be dealt with in good faith;
- Customers will be provided with honest and accurate information and where a staff member is not able to provide a response the matter will promptly be forwarded to another employee with the appropriate expertise;
- Where Council is found to be in error, employees will take ownership of the error by acknowledging that Council has not met expectations and advising the customer of the remedial action that will be taken to redress the situation; and Privacy and Confidentiality will be strictly maintained in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009*, *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*, *National Privacy Act*.

### **7.5.1 Prompt and efficient services**

We respond quickly and effectively to your service requests by:

- Having defined service standards for most occurring service situations;
- Making a commitment to “when” and “how” the service will happen;
- Providing clear outlines of obligations, where appropriate, for any commonly occurring services;
- Notifying you if there is any delay in the service we promised;
- Referring you, where appropriate, to alternative organisations where the service might be available if Council is not able to provide the service you seek;
- Preventing unnecessary return visits or calls to Council;
- Advising you promptly of the outcome of your request.

Whether you phone, drop in personally, write or email us, we will strive to:

- Answer your phone calls within 15 seconds;
- Acknowledge your letters within 10 business days;
- Acknowledge your emails within 10 business days;
- Welcome you at the Customer Service Centre within 3 minutes;
- Stick to agreed appointment times;
- Inform you of the best ways to access services from your Council;
- Provide “After Hours” service for requests of an urgent nature;
- Provide access to council information through our website.

### **7.5.2 Friendly, professional services**

We provide all Council services in a friendly and professional manner by:

- Treating you politely and with respect;
- Identifying ourselves when we talk to you;
- Listening carefully to what you say;
- Treating your personal information with confidentiality;
- Being helpful and sensitive to your needs;
- Being competent in providing the information and services that Council has determined to provide to its community;
- Being friendly as well as professional.

### **7.5.3 Accurate and consistent information**

We do our best to provide the information you need by:

- Clearly outlining our policies, systems and service standards where this information is needed by you;
- Giving you time to fully explain your situation and needs;
- Using plain, respectful language with a minimum of jargon, acronyms and abbreviations;
- Knowing about the services we provide or knowing where to access this information quickly;
- Not unnecessarily quoting rules and regulations or details you do not need;
- Considering the information you need, not just the question you ask.

### **7.5.4 Consult you when developing and improving products and services**

We will seek your input in regard to the provision of services by Clarence Valley Council in accordance with our Community Consultation Policy.

### **7.5.5 Fix our mistakes willingly**

We willingly and reliably respond to complaints and errors by:

- Listening carefully to your situation and clarifying your needs;
- Apologising where we have made a mistake or caused delays;
- Informing you of the options open to yourself and Council;
- Taking ownership of any Council errors;
- Acting to fix the problems and mistakes quickly where we are able;
- Following up to ensure you know what we did.

## **8. Complaints**

We will respond to any complaints that we receive in accordance with our Complaints Management Policy.

## **9. Customer feedback**

Customer Feedback forms are available on the website and at Customer Service Centres, this enables customers to provide feedback.

## **10. Customers who make unreasonable demands**

Customers who make unreasonable demands include members of the public whose demands on Council start to significantly and unreasonably divert Council's resources away from other functions or create the inequitable allocation of resources to other customers. Such demands may result from

the amount of information requested, the nature or scale of services sought or the number of approaches seeking information, assistance or service.

Customers who make unreasonable demands on Council will be dealt with in accordance with Councils' Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy.

### **11. Customers who cannot be satisfied**

Customers who cannot be satisfied include members of the public and groups who do not accept that Council is unable to assist them, provide any further assistance or level of service that has been provided already and/or disagree with the action Council has taken in relation to the complaint or concern.

A customer who cannot be satisfied, and when all appropriate avenues of internal review or appeal have been exhausted and the customer continues to write, telephone, email and/or visit Council, will be dealt with in accordance with Councils' Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy.

### **12. 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, sarcastic or offensive remarks directed personally to officers, 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 conversations or interviews, the staff member may;

- Warn the caller that if the behaviour continues the conversation or interview will be terminated;
- Terminate the conversation or interview, if the rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour continues after a warning has been given;
- Call upon a manager or Police, as appropriate, if there is perceived threat.

### **13. Vexatious complaints**

A person who continues to make representation by way of correspondence, telephone, email or personal representation, that has no basis in fact and/or is considered to be undertaken with frivolous or mischievous motives may be declared a vexatious complainant and will be dealt with in accordance with Councils' Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy.

### **14. 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 the Council as soon as possible of the relevant circumstances and the action taken.

## 15. Council contact details

Offices: 2 Prince Street, Grafton  
50 River Street, Maclean

Telephone: 02 6643 0200 during office hours  
02 6626 6858 after hours emergencies

Fax: 02 6642 7647

Postal: Locked Bag 23, Grafton NSW 2460

Email: [council@clarence.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@clarence.nsw.gov.au)

Website: [www.clarence.nsw.gov.au](http://www.clarence.nsw.gov.au)

## 16. Council hours

Office hours are: 8.30 am to 4.30 pm

Cashiering hours are: 8.30 am to 4.00 pm

Duty Planners and Building Surveyors available: 8.30 am to 11.00 am  
or by appointment outside these hours

Acceptance of development applications: 8.30 am to 3.30 pm

## 17. After hours service

Council offers an after-hours service for urgent matters; you can contact the After Hours Service on 6626 6858. The After Hours Service will take the necessary details such customer contact, location and type of emergency.

## 18. Online services

Council's main website offers a wealth of information and up to date items that may be useful to its customers. The site is [www.clarence.nsw.gov.au](http://www.clarence.nsw.gov.au).

## 19. Hearing impaired facilities

Council offers facilities to assist hearing impaired customers at the main foyer and in the Council chambers at Council's Grafton (Prince St) and Maclean (River St) premises.