

Document Name	Document Version Number	Review Date
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Purpose

Greater Hume Council is committed to providing a high level of service to our customers by ensuring service delivery in a professional and timely manner.

Council is committed to addressing and resolving enquiries and complaints, improving customer service delivery and increasing community satisfaction.

Scope

This policy applies to Councillors, staff, volunteers and contractors at Greater Hume Council who deal with customers, members of the public, other agencies, service providers, community organisations or other members of staff.

Definitions

EDRMS – Electronic Document Records Management System (InfoXpert) is a type of content management system and refers to the combined technologies of document management and records management systems as an integrated system.

Policy Content

Greater Hume Council is committed to delivering a quality customer service that is equitable for all customers. We understand that customers have an expectation that they receive the best possible service that can be practically achieved.

We aim to deliver service in a friendly, knowledgeable and professional manner. Councillors and staff will endeavour to:

- Treat customers with respect, courtesy, patience, sensitivity and attentiveness
- Listen to what customers have to say and determine the exact nature of the request
- Respond to customer enquiries promptly and efficiently
- Provide clear, concise and accurate advice and information
- Handle customer requests and enquiries with discretion
- Make impartial and ethical decisions
- Use information and Council resources responsibly and efficiently
- Advise the community of major policy and procedural changes and consult with the community on major decisions that may affect them
- Act in accordance with the law and Council's Code of Conduct
- Maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Customers can help Council by:

- Treating staff and Councillors with respect, courtesy and patience
- Clearly articulating enquiries, problems and complaints
- Providing sufficient information to enable a response
- Adhering to Council policies and procedures
- Recognising that Council does not have unlimited resources and will set priorities
- Using Council assets and services responsibly, safely and within the guidelines set
- Acting in accordance with State and Federal laws
- Being attentive and not using mobile phones while being served.

In its aim towards efficiency and in the interest of customers, Council reserves the right to limit the use of staff and resources on false or unreasonable demands.

Types of Customer Service

In Person

In serving members of the public who come to Council seeking information or to transact business we will:

- Provide professional and courteous customer service
- Make staff available for interviews on request (making a mutually convenient appointment time if the staff member is not available), or by prior arrangement during Council's hours of business
- Where appropriate, make appointments to visit a customer external to Council's facilities
- Speak clearly and deal with visitors calmly, courteously and patiently, even when visitors are angry, aggressive or distressed.

Telephone Calls

Telephone calls are an important way in which customers communicate with the Council. We undertake to:

- Advise all callers of the name of the person answering the call, or making the call where it is outgoing from Council
- Answer all calls promptly and efficiently, providing clear and concise information, and redirecting the call to the appropriate officer where necessary
- Speak clearly, deal with customers calmly, courteously and patiently, even when the callers are angry, aggressive or distressed
- Put calls on hold for the minimum amount of time possible
- 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
- Respond to telephone messages within one business day, or if this is not possible give clear advice to the caller about when the caller can expect a response
- Record all significant calls in the form of a written file note in Council's official Electronic Document Records Management System (EDRMS).

Written Correspondence

Council recognises the importance of written correspondence, including letters and email messages and will provide clear, concise and prompt responses. We will:

- Respond to written correspondence by telephone where appropriate and record the response in Council's EDRMS
- Reply to correspondence within ten working days. Complex matters may take longer to finalise or may need to be referred to a Council meeting. Under these circumstances an interim response prior to completion is required, either in writing or by telephone and should be documented
- Ensure that all outward correspondence includes the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter.

After Hours Emergencies

At certain times it is necessary to contact the Council outside of normal business hours. At these times we undertake to:

- Respond to messages left on the answering machine within one business day
- Redirect after hours calls, through our message service, to the Officer on Duty.
- Respond to calls based on the severity of the emergency, prevailing circumstances and public safety. Prioritisation will be based on written standards incorporated into Council's strategic business plans and standard operating procedures. Where necessary work will be carried out immediately or scheduled for completion during normal working hours

- Non urgent enquiries will be referred to the appropriate staff member and dealt in accordance with Council's comment and complaint handling procedures.

Comments & Complaints

If you are pleased with our level of service, then please take a moment to let us know. We value your feedback, either in person, by mail, telephone or email, as it gives us the opportunity to recognise and reward excellent service by our staff.

Complaints or suggestions are also welcome as they provide us with an opportunity to improve customer service levels. If you are aware of a problem or dissatisfied about a specific Council decision, policy, procedure, charge, staff member or quality of service please let us know in the following ways:

- Contact us in writing by mail or email
- Staff receiving your comment will register it and ensure that it is resolved as quickly as possible
- If the issue cannot be resolved by the person you first speak to, you may be referred to a manager or someone in a specialist area who will be responsible for resolving your complaint
- Upon completion of the investigation, and within ten working days, you will receive a reply outlining any action taken or what will be done to resolve the matter.

Complaints relating to employees of Greater Hume Shire Council shall be submitted in writing and dealt with in accordance with Council's Complaint Against Staff Policy, as adopted.

If you are not satisfied with the response you receive, you can appeal to the General Manager or Council's Public Officer who will review the decision and report back to you as soon as possible and within 28 days.

If you are still not satisfied with the response you may be able to take your complaint to the Office of Local Government, the Independent Commission Against Corruption or the NSW Ombudsman depending on the issue involved.

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.

If, in the opinion of the General Manager, a customer is making unreasonable demands on Council and the customer continues to write, telephone, email and or visit the Council the following actions may be taken;

- The General Manager may write to the customer advising them of the Council's concern and requesting that they limit and focus their requests and that if the customer continues to place unreasonable demands on the organisation Council may;
 - Not respond to any future correspondence and only take action where, in the opinion of the General Manager, the correspondence raises specific, substantial and serious issues; or
 - Only respond to certain number of requests in a given period.
- The customer will be given the opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action and will be referred to Council's Code of Conduct for options available to them by way of formal complaint about particular staff or via submissions they might make to the NSW Ombudsman.
- If, in the opinion of the General Manager, a customer is constantly raising the same issues with different staff the General Manager may notify the customer that;

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- Only a nominated staff member will deal with them in the future;
 - They must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter;
or
 - All future contact with Council must be in writing.
 - The General Manager will advise Councillors of any correspondence issued in accordance with the above clauses.

Customers who are rude, abusive or aggressive

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 customer 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.

Rude abusive or aggressive behaviour may include rude or otherwise vulgar noises, expressions or gestures, verbal abuse of a personal or general nature, intimidating, threatening or offensive behaviour, physical violence against property, or physical violence against a person.

Where a conversation or interview is terminated, the staff member will inform their supervisor of the incident and make a diary note of the event. Where appropriate, the Supervisor will discuss the matter with their Director to determine what action should be taken with respect to the customer's behaviour.

Vexatious Complainants

If, in the opinion of the General Manager, a person 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 then the General Manager may declare such a person to be a vexatious complainant. The General Manager may take the same action as outlined above "Customers who cannot be satisfied".

General

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

Links to Policy

Code of Conduct
Grievance Policy & Procedure
Bullying & Harassment Policy
Internal Reporting & Public Interest Disclosures Policy
Complaints Against Staff Policy
Complaints Handling Policy
Records Management Policy
Access to Information Policy

Links to Procedure

Customer Service Standards
Privacy Management Plan
Records Management Procedure
GIPA Information Public Access (GIPA) Guide

Links to Forms

Nil.

References

Nil.

Responsibility

General Manager
Director Corporate and Community Services
Director Engineering
Director Environment and Planning
All Managers

Document Author

Manager Corporate Services

Relevant Legislation

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
Protected Disclosures Act 1994
Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009

Associated Records

Nil.