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# QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS AND DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

## Policy Objectives

1. To provide guidance for staff in dealing with ratepayers, residents/clients.
2. To ensure that Council resources are used efficiently and effectively when dealing with people.
3. To ensure that all residents and clients are treated fairly and reasonably.

## Policy Protocol

### Service Commitment

1. Council staff shall strive to meet the needs of our ratepayers, residents and clients in a professional and ethical manner with courteous and efficient service. Staff shall, wherever possible:
  - a) treat all people with respect and courtesy;
  - b) listen to what residents/ratepayers have to say;
  - c) respond to resident/ratepayer enquiries promptly and efficiently;
  - d) act with integrity and honesty when liaising with residents/ratepayers/clients;
  - e) consult residents/ratepayers and clients about service needs;
  - f) apply Clause 14 when dealing with an abusive, rude or difficult resident/ratepayer/client.

### Standards of Service

2. Council staff shall respond to correspondence received from residents, ratepayers and clients (written, faxed or emailed) within fourteen (14) days, in accordance with Policy C3.16. Where the correspondence cannot be responded to within 14 days an acknowledgement advice must be sent within the 14 days.
3. Telephone calls to Council shall be answered as quickly and efficiently and where practical within five (5) rings.
4. Council staff shall answer incoming calls by clearly and appropriately identifying themselves. Unanswered calls shall divert to another member of staff or voice mail.
5. Staff making outgoing calls shall identify themselves by name and council/division/branch, as appropriate, and shall clearly outline the purpose of the call.
6. Reception area and customer service centre staff shall greet residents, clients and visitors as quickly as possible and in a professional and helpful manner.

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7. Staff required to visit a resident/client external to Council facilities will, where appropriate, attempt to contact the person first and make an appointment. At the beginning of a Council visit, staff shall clearly identify themselves (via their ID card) and the purpose of the visit.

#### Resident/Ratepayer/Client Who Cannot be Satisfied

8. Enquirers who cannot be satisfied include members of the public or groups who do not accept that Council is unable to assist them, provide any further assistance or level of service than has been provided already and/or disagree with the action Council has taken in relation to their complaint or concern.
9. If in the opinion of the General Manager a resident, ratepayer, client cannot be satisfied and all appropriate avenues of internal review or appeal have been exhausted and the person continues to write, telephone and/or visit Council the following actions may be taken:
  - a) the General Manager may write to the resident/ratepayer/client restating Council's position on the matter if necessary and advising that if the person continues to contact Council regarding the matter Council may:
    - i) not accept any further phone calls from the resident/ratepayer/client
    - ii) suggest alternative avenues of support/advice
    - iii) not grant any further interviews
    - iv) require all further communication to be put in writing
    - v) continue to receive, read and file correspondence but only acknowledge or otherwise respond to it if:
      - the complainant provides significant new information relating to their complaint or concern; or
      - the complainant raises new issues which in the General Manager's opinion, warrant fresh action
  - b) the General Manager shall advise councillors of any correspondence issued in accordance with clause 9(a).
  - c) the resident/ratepayer/client shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action
  - d) if the resident/ratepayer/client continues to contact Council after being advised of Council's proposed course of action, the General Manager may, after considering any representations from the person, advise the person that any or all of points i) - iv) above will now apply, and inform the person of their rights to pursue other options.
  - e) the suspension of interaction between Council and the party will, only in respect to the specified matter, apply for a specified period of between three and six months as determined by the General Manager.

- f) staff are to be advised of the nature and extent of suspension action.

#### Residents/Ratepayers/Clients Who Make Unreasonable Demands

10. People 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 an inequitable allocation of resources to other residents/ratepayers/clients. 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.
11. If in the opinion of the General Manager a resident/ratepayer/client is making unreasonable demands on Council and the person continues to write, telephone and/or visit the agency the following actions may be taken:
- a) the General Manager may write to the customer advising them of 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:
    - i) 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
    - ii) only respond to a certain number of requests in a given period
  - b) the General Manager shall advise councillors and staff of any correspondence issued in accordance with clause 4(a)
  - c) the customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action via Community Access
  - d) if the person continues to contact Council after being advised of Council's proposed course of action, the General Manager may, after considering any representations from the person, advise the person that either or both of points i) - ii) above will now apply and inform of their rights to pursue other options.
  - e) the suspension of interaction between Council and the party will, only in respect to the specified matter, apply for a specified period of between three and six months as determined by the General Manager.
  - f) staff are to be advised of the nature and extent of suspension action.

#### People Who Constantly Raise The Same Issue With Different Staff

12. If in the opinion of the General Manager a resident/ratepayer/client is constantly raising the same issues with different staff the following actions may be taken:
- a) the General Manager may notify the person that:
    - i) only a nominated staff member will deal with them in future
    - ii) they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter; or

- iii) all future contact with Council must be in writing
- b) the General Manager shall advise councillors and staff of any notification issued in accordance with clause 5(a)
- c) the person shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action via Community Access

#### Residents/Ratepayers/Clients Who Are Rude, Abusive or Aggressive

13. Rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour may include rude or otherwise vulgar noises, expressions or gestures, verbal abuse of either a personal or general nature, threatening or offensive behaviour, physical violence against property or physical violence against a person.
14. 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:
  - a) warn the caller that if the behaviour continues the conversation or interview will be terminated
  - b) terminate the conversation or interview if the rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour continues after a warning has been given
15. Where a conversation or interview is terminated in accordance with clause 14(b), and the staff member deems it appropriate, the General Manager or the relevant Director/Manager is to be notified of the details as soon as possible.
16. If in the opinion of the General Manager any correspondence to Council contains personal abuse, inflammatory statements or material clearly intended to intimidate, it will be returned to the sender and not otherwise acted upon.

#### General

17. In all of the situations referred to in this policy, adequate documentary records must be made and maintained on the appropriate Council file in accord with Policy No. C3.9.
18. Where the General Manager determines to limit 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 and forward such advice, where appropriate, to the ICAC, Department of Local Government and the NSW Ombudsman for information."

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## CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

### Policy Objectives

Tweed Shire Council is committed to striving to meet the needs of our ratepayers, residents and clients in a professional and ethical manner with courteous and efficient service.

### We aim to:

- a) treat all people with respect and courtesy;
- b) listen to what residents/ratepayers have to say;
- c) respond to resident/ratepayer enquiries promptly and efficiently;
- d) act with integrity and honesty when liaising with residents/ratepayers/clients;
- e) consult residents/ratepayers and clients about service needs;

### Standards Of Service

#### *In Writing*

#### WE WILL:

- Respond to correspondence received from residents, ratepayers and clients (written, faxed or emailed) within fourteen (14) days, in accordance with Response to Correspondence Policy.
- Where the correspondence cannot be responded to within 14 days will send an acknowledgement advice within the 14 days.

#### *On the Telephone*

#### WE WILL:

- Answer incoming calls quickly and efficiently and where practical within five (5) rings.
- Answer incoming calls by clearly and appropriately identifying ourselves in a friendly manner.
- Divert unanswered incoming calls to another member of staff or voice mail.
- Identify ourselves when making outgoing calls by name and council/division/branch, as appropriate, and shall clearly outline the purpose of the call.

*In Person*

WE WILL:

- Greet residents, clients and visitors upon arrival as quickly as possible.
- Assist you with your enquiry promptly and professionally in a helpful manner.
- Wear name badges and give you staff names who are relevant to your dealings.
- Attempt to contact persons to make an appointment where a visit to a resident/client external to Council facilities is required.
- Identify ourselves at the beginning of the Council visit and the purpose of the visit.

**How can you help us?**

If you can suggest ways in which we can deliver better service we encourage you to give feedback.