



PARKES SHIRE COUNCIL

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS HANDLING

POLICY

PARKES SHIRE COUNCIL

Customer Requests and Complaints Handling Policy

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CONTROLLED DOCUMENT INFORMATION

ECM Number	1346688		
Department	Organisational Capability		
Position	Chief Operating Officer		
Review Timeframe	Annually	Next Scheduled Review Date	September 2021
Adoption by Council	20.10.2020	Resolution/Minute Number	20-327

Version History

Version Number	Date Changed	Modified by	Details & Comments
0	26 February 2019	Shona Henry	Policy Created
0.1	15 August 2020	Anthony McGrath	Formatting Changes, minor wording changes for clarity
0.2	21 Sept 2020	Anthony McGrath	Include suggestions from Ratepayers Association
1.0	22 Sept 2020	Anthony McGrath	Reviewed by Senior Staff

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1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Council handles customers fairly, efficiently and effectively by:

- + responding in a timely, consistent and efficient way to issues raised by people requesting service from Council or making a Customer Complaint;
- + boosting public confidence and perception of the quality of the services provided by Council; and
- + providing information that can be used by the organisation to deliver quality improvements in services, staff and customer complaint handling.

This policy also outlines arrangements associated with our customers who are not satisfied with Council services, and a process for staff who deal with customers who behave inappropriately.

2 Principles

Council commits itself to the following principles in managing our service to our Community:

- + Accountability and transparency - the policy provides a framework for transparency and a system of accountability.
- + Provide a timely acknowledgement and resolution of Customer dissatisfaction about Council services.
- + Ensuring all customers are dealt with in a timely, systematic and consistent manner, transparent to both the person making the request and Council Officers.
- + Ensuring customer service and complaint data assists Council to identify problems and improve procedures, where applicable, to improve services or to prevent similar dissatisfaction in the future.
- + Ensure Council Officers are provided with adequate and on-going training, supervision and guidance in the handling of Customer requests and complaints.
- + Encourage feedback to resolving problems and improving services to the community.
- + Acknowledge the need to use the resources provided by Council to handle Customer requests and complaints.

3 Policy

Parkes Shire Council values its customers and strives to provide the highest level of customer service to the community. Council's role is to provide a consistent level of professional services in a timely manner that enhances its relationship with the community.

Council will look to improve its procedures and the manner our staff interact with customers by assessing the end to end customer experience.

Council will set minimum acceptable standards for the provision of customer service that incorporate Council's values of Community Focus, Caring & Respect, Integrity and Teamwork.



3.1 Definitions

Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with the Council's policies, procedures, charges, agents or quality of service.

Compliment is an expression of satisfaction with the services provided and/or performance of Council staff.

Consultative Committee is a group recognised and supported by Council as representing the views of a local community.

Customer is any person, internal or external, that a Council staff member deals with regarding the provision of a Council service.

Customer Service Requests is the request for provision of a Council Service where a staff member creates a customer referral (known as a CRM request). Some examples of customer requests include:

- + Requests for service
- + Reports of damaged or faulty Council Infrastructure
- + Requests for information
- + Explanation of policies, procedures and decisions of Council
- + Concerns about neighbours or neighbouring property or unauthorised building work.

Ratepayer Association is an incorporated body formed by members of the community to work with Council on behalf of residents.

Referral is created where a customer requests a service, information or an explanation of Council policies, procedures and decisions of Council.

- + in writing, or
- + that cannot be provided at the first point of contact from a customer service staff member.

Response Time is the time taken for a customer to receive a response from a Council staff member to a phone call or written correspondence.

Service Standard (for CRM requests) is the agreed time frame for the completion of customer referral requests (CRM). Note that service standards referred to here are specifically related to the type of work to be provided.



4 Scope

This Policy covers all requests received by Council employees and contractors of Council. This Policy does not cover complaints that are:

- + Staff grievances;
- + Public Interest Disclosures made by Council staff;
- + Complaints against Councillors;
- + Code of Conduct complaints against staff;
- + Requests for information (GIPA requests).

Where a complaint, falling into one of the categories listed above is received by Council, it will be dealt with in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct, grievance procedure, Public Interest Disclosure Policy or in accordance with relevant legislation or other relevant Council policy.

5 Responsibility

Position	Delegation / Task
General Manager and Senior Staff	Endorse the policy Compliance with the policy Promote customer service to Managers and Supervisors
Managers and Supervisors	Compliance with the policy Promote the policy to staff Monitor compliance of staff
Employees	Compliance with the policy
Chief Operating Officer	Manage and review the policy Promote the policy Report status and compliance

6 Approach to Dealing with Customers

In dealing with customer service requests, Council employees will endeavour to provide an end to end customer experience which has the customer as its focal point. This means Council staff will place themselves in the position of the customer in responding to issues. Written information, whether in an email, letter or provided on our web site will be in a customer friendly, plain English tone.

We will keep the following values in mind when dealing with our customers:

- + **Respect** - we talk to our customers about their individual service needs and listen to what they say. We respond to our customers within defined response times and keep customers informed of the progress of their requests. If we cannot help for any reason, we will explain the reasons why. We will endeavour to ensure you understand the procedures that are being used and to make these as simple and user friendly as possible.
- + **Integrity** - we act in an open, honest and fair matter with our customers and treat customers with respect and courtesy. Staff shall comply with Council's Code of Conduct in their dealings with customers and conduct their exchanges about the Code's key principles of Integrity, Openness, Respect, and Accountability. Decisions and advice will be premised on relevant legislation and Council's administrative procedures and current policies.



- + **Teamwork** - we work together to achieve the right outcome. We will share information with colleagues where a referral to another staff member is required to fully answer enquiries and to avoid asking the customer the same questions.

7 Handling Customer Requests

7.1 Standards and Procedures

7.1.1 Staffing

All staff are expected to provide coverage within their own department to ensure a continuation of service during opening hours.

7.1.2 Requests Made in Person

Frontline staff including Counter/Reception and operational staff will be identifiable with a name badge or embroidered top. They will greet customers as quickly as possible and in a professional, friendly and helpful manner.

Where a frontline staff member is unable to answer an enquiry, every effort will be made to refer the person who can best assist with the enquiry in the most appropriate manner. Providing an immediate response will depend on the availability of the person best able to assist and how complex the enquiry is.

Where the enquiry cannot be resolved at the time of the visit, details will be taken, and a follow up response will be arranged. This includes on site meetings, return phone calls, letter, email etc. In such cases the request (if appropriate) must be entered into the CRM system.

7.1.3 Telephone Calls

The following customer service standards will apply when handling customer telephone calls.

- + All Telephone calls are to be handled in accord with Council's Phone and Mobile Device Usage Policy.
- + Staff will ensure their current availability is displayed to internal and external customers through using settings in Council's systems, such as
 - + Microsoft Outlook/Mitel Phone System: Use your calendar and set your free / busy status. Set an 'Out of Office' email message when away. Allow staff to see your calendar events.
 - + Microsoft Teams: Set your status to advise Teams users what you are doing
 - + Mitel Phone System: Record out of office messages using the Mitel App. If you are a member of a Call Flow Work Group, ensure you manage your availability (log-in/out).
- + Staff will respond to telephone messages or requests for return phone calls within one (1) working day.
- + Staff making outgoing calls shall identify themselves by name and Parkes Shire Council or Council Department/Section as appropriate and shall clearly outline the purpose of the call.
- + Council also provides an out of hours telephone service to assist with after-hours emergencies.
- + Calls that cannot be resolved in the first instance, that can be entered as a Customer Request, must be handled by the Council officer receiving the call. This means that if the Council Officer takes the call, listens to all the details and determines that it is a customer request, then they must enter the request themselves, advise the customer what the CRM number is and who it has been tasked to.



7.1.4 Correspondence

Correspondence includes a letter or email message received at Council as follows:

The General Manager
2 Cecile Street (PO Box 337)
PARKES NSW 2870

or

The General Manager
council@parkes.nsw.gov.au

- + All Correspondence received will be entered into Council's Document Management System (ECM) or if a service request, into Council Request Management System (CRM) on the day received or next available working day if received after hours.
- + Correspondence that is seeking a response on a number of items across various departments in Council, will be registered and tasked to the Chief Operating Officer. A concierge will be appointed to coordinate a single response.
- + All Council staff will endeavour to respond to correspondence received from customers (written, faxed or emailed) within ten working (10) days. If we cannot provide a full response to the item/s raised within this time frame, an acknowledgement letter/email will be sent to advise what is happening with your request, who will be handling the enquiry and the responsible Council Officers contact details.
- + All correspondence sent shall include a contact name and reference number from the person sending the communication.

7.2 Requests from Councillors

Councillors may make requests for Council services or information, either on behalf of a member of the community, a community group or as a citizen. Councillors are encouraged to put the information into an email and ensure it is sent to council@parkes.nsw.gov.au as well as the relevant General Manager or Director. Councillors may also raise issues for action at a Council meeting or workshop.

CRM requests are to be handled as follows

- + Customer requests received from a Councillor on behalf of another person or group will be entered and linked to both the person or group (as the customer) and the Councillor (as the source) so that those requests can be tracked on behalf of the Councillor.
- + Request received from the Councillor will be linked to the Councillor as the customer and to the Councillor as the source.
- + The Councillor will be advised that the request has been entered into the request system, the request number and who it was assigned to.

Other referrals not considered CRM requests must be

- + Registered into the records system
- + Referred to the Chief Operating Officer so that they can be tracked for each Councillor and monitored.



7.3 Requests from Consultative Committees or Ratepayer Associations

Consultative Committees or Ratepayer Associations may make requests for Council services or for information. Committees and Associations are encouraged to put the information into an email and ensure it is sent to council@parkes.nsw.gov.au

CRM requests are to be handled as follows:

- + Requests received from the Committee will be linked to Committee/Association customer.
- + The Committee or Association will be advised that the request has been entered into the request system, the request number and who it was assigned to.

Other items not considered CRM requests must be:

- + Registered into the records system
- + Referred to the Chief Operating Officer so that they can be tracked for each Committee or Association and monitored
- + Correspondence that is seeking a response on a number of items across various departments in Council, will be registered and tasked to the Chief Operating Officer. A concierge will be appointed to coordinate a single response.

7.4 Website

Information provided on Council's Web site will adhere to the following guidelines:

- + Council's website will contain information in an easy to understand format and be updated on a regular basis
- + Council's website is under constant review to ensure it meets the needs of our customers
- + Council will provide access to commonly requested items such as payments, forms, items on exhibition, tenders and job vacancies in an easy to find location
- + The website will contain links to useful information and other Council facilities such as the Library, Visitors Information Centre

See Council's [Communications Policy](#) for more details on Website communications.

7.5 Social Media

Council's customer service standards regarding social media interaction with Customers is contained within its [Communications Policy](#).



8 Customer Complaints

8.1 Lodging a Customer Complaint to Council

Customer Complaints can be made as follows:

- + Email: council@parkes.nsw.gov.au
- + Post: PO Box 337 PARKES NSW 2870 or 2 Cecile Street PARKES NSW 2870, or
- + In person to 2 Cecile Street, Parkes NSW 2870

Council encourages the person making the Customer Complaint to do so in writing to ensure Council has all the relevant information and facts. If a person has difficulty making a Customer Complaint in writing, they should speak to Council's Customer Service Team on 6861 2333.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making their Customer Complaint, Council will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a Customer Complaint with their consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

8.2 Lodging a Complaint to an External Agency

Customers are welcome to seek advice or lodge complaints with external agencies.

Find below some relevant contact details:

Office of Local Government 5 O'Keefe Avenue NOWRA NSW 2541 P 02 4428 4100 F 02 4428 4199 TTY 02 4428 4209 E olg@olg.nsw.gov.au W www.olg.nsw.gov.au	NSW Ombudsman Level 24, 580 George Street SYDNEY NSW 2000 P 02 9286 1000 F 02 9283 2911 E nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au W www.ombo.nsw.gov.au	Independent Commission Against Corruption Level 21, 133 Castlereagh Street SYDNEY NSW, 2000 P 02 8281 5999 F 02 9264 5364 TTY 02 8281 5773 E icac@icac.nsw.gov.au W www.icac.nsw.gov.au
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8.3 Anonymous Complaints

Council will not accept anonymous Customer Complaints.

8.4 Early Resolution

Where possible, Customer Complaints will be resolved by Council's Customer Service staff at first contact with Council.

8.5 Acknowledgment

Where a Customer Complaint cannot be resolved at first contact, Council will assess and prioritise in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

Council is committed to providing high levels of customer service and will acknowledge a Customer Complaint as soon as possible, and no later than 10 business days of receipt of the Customer Complaint.



8.6 Initial assessment

When determining how a Customer Complaint will be addressed, Council will make an assessment as to the seriousness, complexity and urgency of the complaint.

8.7 Finalisation of the Customer Complaint

Following consideration of the Customer Complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, Council will contact the person making the Customer Complaint within 21 calendar days and advise them of:

- + the outcome of the Customer Complaint and any action taken;
- + the reason/s for the decision;
- + the remedy or resolution/s that Council proposes to put in place, where relevant; and
- + the options for review.

If there are any delays in responding to a Customer Complaint, Council will keep the person making the Customer Complaint informed.

8.8 Objectivity and Fairness

Council will address each Customer Complaint in a fair and unbiased manner.

Council will ensure that the staff member handling a Customer Complaint is different from any staff member whose conduct or service is the subject of the Customer Complaint.

Conflicts of interests, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly.

8.9 Privacy

Personal information that identifies the person making the Customer Complaint will only be disclosed to a third party as permitted under the relevant privacy laws and other relevant legislation.

8.10 Review Options

Where the person making a Complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of Council's decision about their Customer Complaint; they may seek:

- a) An internal review - this will be conducted by the Chief Operating Officer - or a senior staff member independent of the original decision; or
- b) Council will advise the person making the Customer Complaint of appropriate options for an external review of Council's response directly with the agencies listed in Section 8.2.

9 Continuous Improvement

Council is committed to improving the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of its service delivery by:

- + supporting the making, and appropriate resolution, of customer complaints and service requests;
- + implementing best practices in customer complaint and service handling;
- + regularly reviewing this Policy and customer service data;
- + implementing appropriate service changes arising out of its analysis of customer service data; and
- + continually monitoring its systems and processes and amending and updating them as required.



10 Managing Expectations

Not every issue brought to Council's attention is within Council's jurisdiction and Council will not take complaints that are not within Council's power to resolve. (e.g snakes). Staff will endeavour to direct the customer to the appropriate agency or organisation to deal with the respective issue.

11 Unreasonable Conduct by Customers (UCC)

It is Council's responsibility to treat all customers fairly and with respect. Staff need to show impartiality and professionalism when facing challenging behaviour. This does not mean that staff should tolerate conduct that is threatening, aggressive or abusive.

Parkes Shire Council has a zero tolerance towards any harm, abuse or threats directed towards staff.

11.1 Unreasonable conduct by customers

Most of our customers act reasonably and responsibly in their interactions with us, even when they are experiencing high levels of distress, frustration and anger about their complaint. However, in a very small number of cases some customers behave in ways that are inappropriate and unacceptable – despite our best efforts to help them. They are aggressive and/or verbally abusive towards our staff. They threaten harm and violence, bombard our offices with unnecessary and excessive phone calls and emails, make inappropriate demands on our time and our resources and refuse to accept our decisions and recommendations in relation to their complaints. When customers behave in these ways we consider their conduct to be 'unreasonable'. Unreasonable conduct by customers ('UCC') is any behaviour which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for our organisation, our staff, other service users and customers or the customer himself/herself.

UCC can be divided into five categories of conduct:

- + Unreasonable persistence
- + Unreasonable demands
- + Unreasonable lack of cooperation
- + Unreasonable argument
- + Unreasonable behaviours

11.2 Unreasonable persistence

Unreasonable persistence is continued, incessant and unrelenting conduct by a customer that has a disproportionate and unreasonable impact on staff, services, time and/or resources. Some examples of unreasonably persistent behaviour include:

- + An unwillingness or inability to accept reasonable and logical explanations including final decisions that have been comprehensively considered and dealt with.
- + Persistently contacting Council about the same matter when it has been comprehensively considered and dealt with.
- + Reframing a complaint in an effort to get it taken up again.
- + Bombarding staff/organisation with phone calls, visits, letters, and emails (including cc'd correspondence) after repeatedly being asked not to do so.
- + Contacting different people within our organisation and/or externally to get a different outcome or more sympathetic response to their complaint – internal and external forum shopping.



11.3 Unreasonable demands

Unreasonable demands are demands (express or implied) that are made by a customer that have a disproportionate and unreasonable impact on Council staff, services, time and/or resources. Some examples of unreasonable demands include:

- + Issuing instructions and making demands about how we have/should handle their complaint, the priority it was/should be given, or the outcome that was/should be achieved.
- + Insisting on talking to a senior manager, Director or the General Manager personally when it is not appropriate or warranted.
- + Demanding services that are of a nature or scale that Council cannot provide when this has been explained to them repeatedly.

11.4 Unreasonable lack of cooperation

Unreasonable lack of cooperation is an unwillingness and/or inability by a customer to cooperate with our organisation, staff, or complaints system and processes that results in a disproportionate and unreasonable use of our services, time and/or resources. Some examples of unreasonable lack of cooperation include:

- + Sending a constant stream of comprehensive and/or disorganised information without clearly defining any issues of complaint or explaining how they relate to the core issues being complained about
- + Providing little or no detail with a complaint or presenting information in 'drips and drabs
- + Refusing to follow or accept our instructions, suggestions, or advice without a clear or justifiable reason for doing so.
- + Arguing frequently and/or with extreme intensity that a particular solution is the correct one in the face of valid contrary arguments and explanations.
- + Displaying unhelpful behaviour – such as withholding information, acting dishonestly, misquoting others, and so forth.

11.5 Unreasonable arguments

Unreasonable arguments include any arguments that are not based in reason or logic, that are incomprehensible, false or inflammatory, trivial or delirious and that disproportionately and unreasonably impact upon Council, staff, services, time, and/or resources. Arguments are unreasonable when they:

- + Fail to follow a logical sequence
- + Are not supported by any evidence and/or are based on conspiracy theories.
- + Lead a customer to reject all other valid and contrary arguments.
- + Are false, inflammatory or defamatory.



11.6 Unreasonable behaviour

Unreasonable behaviour is conduct that is unreasonable in all circumstances – regardless of how stressed, angry or frustrated that a customer is – because it unreasonably compromises the health, safety and security of our staff, other service users or the customer himself/herself. Some examples of unreasonable behaviours include:

- + Acts of aggression, verbal abuse and derogatory, racist, or grossly defamatory remarks.
- + Harassment, intimidation or physical violence
- + Rude, confronting and/or threatening face to face or phone contact or correspondence.

12 Dealing with Unreasonable Customers

12.1 Telephone or Face to Face (Counter)

If, in the opinion of any staff member, rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements are made in telephone conversations or interviews, the staff members may:

- a) warn the customer 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
- c) Activate the duress alarm (if available) and / or call upon a supervisor or the Police as appropriate if there is a perceived threat.

Where a conversation or interview is terminated in accordance with this section, the staff member must notify their supervisor and note the details on the Customer's account. If a threat has been made and/or the police have been called, the General Manager or relevant Director must be notified of the details, as soon as possible.

12.2 Correspondence

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.

If in the opinion of the General Manager a customer is constantly raising the same issues the following actions may be taken by the General Manager to notify the customer that:

- a) only a nominated staff member will deal with them in future and
 - b) they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter
- or
- c) all future contact with Council must be in writing

The General Manager shall advise the Mayor of any notification issues in accordance with the above clause and the customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action.



12.3 Restricting Access to Council Services or Properties

Restricting a customer's access to Council properties or dealing with Council Officers can be made if in the opinion of the General Manager the customer poses a significant risk for a staff member or other parties because their actions involve one or more of the following types of conduct:

- + Acts of aggression, verbal and/or physical abuse, threats of harm, harassment, intimidation, stalking, assault. Damage to property while on our premises.
- + Threats with a weapon or common office items that can be used to harm another person or themselves.
- + Physically preventing a staff member from moving around freely either within their office or during an off-site visit
- + Conduct that is otherwise unlawful.

In these cases the customer will be sent a letter notifying them that their access to Council services/properties has been restricted.

The Police may also be notified in these circumstances and possible charges may be laid.

13 Customers Threatening Self-Harm

Employees and contractors engaged in contact roles may on occasion be confronted by a distressed person threatening suicide or self-harm, either in person, on the telephone or in writing. Such situations can be difficult to handle, especially when most employees are not trained or qualified to assist the person with such related issues.

There are numerous factors which may have influenced or led a person to the point of making such a threat. You must take the threat seriously and you have a duty of care to the distressed individual to, as far as possible and practicable, provide them with the support they need to obtain the professional care and assistance that they need.

The person who was the recipient of the threat should be encouraged to utilise free confidential support and counselling through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a service that provides employees with confidential and professional counselling and related services to assist them in resolving issues that may be work related or of a personal nature.

Employees and contractors are encouraged to access the EAP service as early as possible.

13.1 Procedure for Handling Customers Threatening Self-Harm

- a) Take the person and the threat seriously.
- b) Advise the person that threats of suicide or self-harm are taken seriously and that you may need to refer them to someone who is more appropriately trained or qualified to help.
- c) Inform the person that you have a duty of care to ensure that they are safe and have appropriate support.
- d) Seek details of the person making the threat, i.e. name, address, telephone number, treating doctor details and the person's current location (if threat made by telephone).
- e) Encourage the person to seek immediate support from a friend, partner, General Practitioner or an appropriately qualified health worker and supply them with telephone numbers such as Lifeline 131 114.



- f) If the person refuses to seek such support, wherever possible seek their agreement to contact a support person or service on their behalf.
- g) Advise the person that you will be contacting and providing their details to the Mental Health ACT Triage and Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team, the police or their local hospital to ensure that they have someone to come and assess them as the case may be.
- h) For immediate life threatening or dangerous situations call 000 for emergency services.
- i) Do not attempt to counsel the person or make a judgement about whether you think the person will carry out the threat of suicide or self-harm - refer the matter to appropriately qualified personnel at the earliest possible opportunity.
- j) Notify your manager immediately and outline the course of action you have taken.

14 References

- + [Parkes Shire Council Code of Conduct Policy](#)
- + [Parkes Shire Council Communications Policy](#)
- + [Parkes Shire Council Workplace Operations Policy - Telephone & Mobile Device Usage Policy](#)

