

Kyogle Council

Customer Service Policy



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2. Validity

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1. Title

This policy may be cited as Kyogle Council's Customer Service Policy.

2. Validity

This policy was adopted at Council's Ordinary Meeting held 11/12/06 (Resolution 111206/13) and 10/12/12 (Resolution 101212(xxx))

3. Policy Objectives

1. To ensure that when dealing with customers all staff responds in a courteous, consistent, timely and fair manner and satisfy all reasonable requests from customers.
2. To ensure that Council resources are used efficiently and effectively when dealing with customers.

4. Overview

The purpose this policy is to outline Council's commitment and approach to customer service and establish a standardised approach to managing contact with customers in their dealings with Kyogle Council.

For the purpose of this policy, customers can be defined to include individuals and organisations to whom Council provides services. Customers include ratepayers, residents, and visitors to the Kyogle Council local government area. Internal customers include other Council Departments and members of staff.

Council's dual role as a service provider and a regulatory body can create situations where not all customer requests can be met. There is though, an obligation to provide customers with an accessible, fair and equitable mechanism to access services, make service requests and obtain assistance. This policy establishes a standardized and professional approach to the management of customer contact.

5. Service Commitment

All Council staff and Councillors must strive to meet the needs of our customers in a professional and ethical manner with efficient and courteous service. Staff and Councillors will:

- a) Treat all customers with respect and courtesy
- b) Listen to what customers have to say and determine the exact nature of the request
- c) Respond to enquiries in a prompt and efficient manner
- d) Provide relevant and timely feedback to the customer
- e) Act with integrity and honesty

6. Service Standards

Council staff and Councillors should aim to project a professional image at all times. Kyogle Council endeavours to:

Provide all Council services in a friendly and professional manner by:

- Treating customers politely and with respect
- Demonstrate respect, courtesy, patience, attentiveness, consideration and sensitivity and professionalism to the customer at all times that is appropriate to the age, culture and linguistic background of the individual/group.
- Listening carefully to what the customer is saying
- Provide advice and other information that is clear and concise
- Take action to respond in accordance with Kyogle Council Policies
- Be sensitive of customers with disabilities when providing advice and other information
- Act in accordance with the law and Council's Code of Conduct
- All office staff will be provided with a Kyogle Council name badge

Respond quickly and effectively to service requests by:

- Answering phone calls within four rings
- Where appropriate acknowledging written correspondence within four working days, through sending an acknowledgment letter.
- Acknowledge emails received with an email message
- Welcoming you to our main counter within upon arrival.
- Investigating or attending to your customer requests within five working days.

Achieve quality customer service by:

- Providing clear outlines of our obligations, policies and having transparent processes.
- Notifying you if there is a delay in the service we promised.
- Preventing unnecessary return visits or calls to Council.
- Advising promptly of the outcome of your request.
- Referring you, where appropriate, to alternative places where the service might be available if Council is not able to provide the service you seek.

7. Types of Customer Service

Customers contact Council for a wide variety of issues ranging from making payments for their rates and water to making a complaint about the condition of a road in the area.

1) Telephone Calls

Council recognizes the importance of telephone calls and will answer all calls promptly and efficiently, referring calls to the appropriate officer quickly and providing clear and concise information in response to caller enquiries. Council will attempt to:

- Advise all callers of the name of the person answering the call, or making the call where it is outgoing from Council
- Deal with the call, redirect the call or take a clear message from the caller as required
- 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
- When calls cannot be fully responded to immediately, give clear advice to the caller about when the caller can expect a response.
- Put calls on hold for the minimum amount of time possible
- Speak clearly; deal with customers calmly, courteously and patiently, even when the callers are angry, aggressive or distressed.
- Answer unattended telephones in the absence of colleagues whenever practical
- Respond to telephone messages within one business day
- Change voicemail message when staff are absent on an extended period of leave

2) Written Correspondence

Kyogle Council recognises the importance of correspondence (letters, facsimiles and email messages) and will provide clear and concise responses promptly. Council will attempt to:

- Provide a response to all matters within ten (10) working days of receiving the correspondence if the item requires a response.
- Ensure that all outward correspondence includes the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter and Council's file reference.
- Provide a typed response on Council letterhead.
- Use language that is clear and concise.

3) Face to Face

Council recognises the need to promptly serve members of the public who come to Council to seek information or to transact business. Council will attempt to:

- Make staff available for interviews by prior arrangement
- Attend to members of the public in a professional and helpful manner
- Promptly advise staff there is a member of the public in the reception area for an appointment

- Provide a full range of information for public inspection in customer service areas
- Speak clearly and deal with customers calmly, courteously and patiently, even when customers are angry, aggressive or distressed.

8. Dealing with Difficult Customers

As state in other areas of this policy, Council staff are expected to treat customers with courtesy and respect at all times and to make every reasonable effort to address the customer's needs even when he or she is rude or difficult.

It is accepted that whatever standard of professional and positive customer service Council achieves, there will always be a small percentage of customers whose issues cannot be dealt with to their satisfaction. This may be due to refusal by the customer to accept a Council decision, demands placed on Council which are not within our scope or resources to meet, or a level of rudeness or aggression shown to staff by the customer that make it unsafe or unreasonable to proceed.

Where the General Manager is satisfied that every effort has been made by staff to address a customer's needs, he/she may make a decision that there is no reasonable prospect of reaching a position where particular customer is satisfied with Council's actions and service. In such a case the General Manager may decide to stop or limit responses to the customer in relation to the issue in question. This may include:

- Refusal to accept telephone calls or make appointments with the customer;
- A request that all future communication be in writing;
- Provision of responses to queries, information requests only where a new issue has been presented;
- Identification of a single staff member as contact person through whom all communication must occur

Where the General Manager has made such a decision, he/she will ensure that this is communicated in writing to the customer and that the customer is given the opportunity to make representation to Council about the proposed course of action, In addition the General Manager will advise Councillors of any correspondence issued in relation to such a decision, the General Manager will continue to monitor any further contact with the customer over the issue.

9. Dealing with Difficult Customers

Rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour may include rude or other wise vulgar noises, expressions or gestures, verbal abuse of either a personal or general nature, intimidating, 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:

- 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

Where a conversation or interview is terminated, the staff member must then inform his/her Supervisor of the incident and prepare a report to be registered in Dataworks of the event. Where appropriate, the Supervisor will then discuss the matter with the Director to determine what action should be taken with respect to the customer's behaviour.

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 placed on the relevant file and not otherwise acted upon.

10. Confidentiality and Privacy

All dealings with customers must abide by the Local Government Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998. Council has adopted a Privacy Management Plan accordance with that Act which may be viewed at Councils Administrative Office.

CUSTOMER SERVICE PROCEDURES:

This procedure applies to all staff in the organisation:

Answering Calls:

- Your phone should be answered within four rings, for both external and internal calls
- External calls should be answered:

"Goodmorning/afternoon, Kyogle Council, this is (use first name)

- Internal calls are to be answered: This is (use first name)
- When a colleagues phone is unattended, this should be answered promptly you should identify yourself

When taking a message please record:

- Name of caller and organisation/company
- Address of caller (if appropriate to a complaint/query)
- Contact phone number of caller
- Matter relating to - brief outline
- Times when caller will not be available to receive return call (if appropriate)

Information to be provided to caller when taking a message:

- Name of officer that the message will be distributed to
- Name of yourself as the message taker and in case of further enquiries

Phone Do Not Disturb (DND) and Checking Messages:

- When you are away from your desk i.e. lunch time, meetings, holidays or have customers in your office please engage DND
- Ensure an appropriate message is recorded. This may need to be changed when on extended periods of time

Email Management:

- Further information in relation to the use of email and protocols can be found in Council's Email and Internet Usage Protocol
- Staff must check their emails at least two times per day
- Staff must use out of office assistant when absent for two days or more