

Kyogle Council

Customer Service Policy



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1 Title

Customer Service Policy

2 Validity

This policy was adopted at Council's Ordinary Meeting held **TBA.**

3 Overview

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

For the purpose of this policy, customers are defined as individuals and organisations to whom Council provides services. Customers include ratepayers, applicants, businesses, residents, other government and non-government agencies, community groups and visitors to the Kyogle Council Local Government Area (LGA). Internal customers include other Council departments and members of staff.

In both Council's role as a service provider and as a regulatory body, there will be situations where a customer's expectations cannot be met. Regardless, Council staff, Councillors and agents of Council, always have an obligation to provide customers with an accessible, fair and equitable level of service.

It should be noted that all staff provide information and guidance based on best knowledge at the time of enquiry and that customers should not act on any advice or information provided by Council staff without seeking professional or legal advice. Council accepts no liability for actions taken by a customer without seeking third party advice.

4 What we strive for

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 will strive to:

- respond to customer requests in a professional manner
- ensure Council's resources are used efficiently
- provide customers with quality service.

5 What you can expect from us

Councillors and Staff will:

- treat customers with respect and courtesy
- listen to what customers have to say
- respond to enquiries in a prompt and efficient manner.
- provide relevant and timely feedback.
- act with integrity and honesty.

Council will achieve quality customer service by:

- responding quickly and effectively to service requests and correspondence
- striving for service delivery within reasonable time frames
- notifying of delays in any promised service
- preventing unnecessary return visits or calls from customers

- advising customers of the outcome of their requests when asked to.

6 What we ask of our customers

Council asks that all of its customers:

- treat our Councillors and staff with courtesy and mutual respect
- respect the privacy and rights of other customers
- respect the community we live in
- provide accurate and complete information and documentation
- understand that Council is subject to limited resources, strict governance requirements, and legislation which may result in decisions customers may not agree with
- work with us to solve problems and reach resolutions.

7 How we address challenging behaviour

Rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour towards Council and its staff is not tolerated.

If in the opinion of any staff member, rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements are made in telephone conversations, written correspondence 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
- provide the advice sought, but warn the customer that Council will not respond to further correspondence which contains rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements
- contact their supervisor or the Police, as appropriate, if there is a perceived threat.

7.1 Limiting Customer Service

The General Manager, or their delegate, may decide to stop or limit responses to a customer in relation to an issue where the General Manager, or their delegate, is satisfied that every effort has been made to address a customer's needs, and that there is no reasonable prospect of reaching a position where a particular customer is satisfied with Council's actions and service. This may include:

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

Where the General Manager, or their delegate, has made such a decision, this will be communicated in writing to the customer.

8 Customer Service Guidelines

8.1 Telephone calls

Council recognises the importance of telephone communications and provides the following customer service guidance:

- All staff will answer phone calls promptly and politely.
- Council's general enquiries number (02-66 321 611) is always attended during business hours.
- Council has an after-hours emergency number (02-66 266 800) that can be used for urgent matters outside business hours, and this number is attended at all times.
- Council's Customer Services staff will seek to resolve an enquiry at first contact wherever possible. Customer Services staff are able to provide any available information over the phone, and can provide general guidance on process and procedure to customers.
- Where Customer Services staff are unable to resolve an enquiry or request at first contact, in most circumstances they will record a Customer Action Request. In doing so, the Customer Services staff will ask for additional details that will be recorded to assist staff with follow up action or investigation by specialist staff.
- When customers are seeking to talk with staff from a specific section of Council, or a specific staff member, it is important to recognise that they will often not be available to take unplanned phone calls. In these circumstances, the Customer Services staff will either:
 - make an appointment for the customer to speak with the relevant staff member
 - take a phone message and pass this on to the relevant staff or department by internal e-mail, and provide the customer clear advice about who the message is to be referred to, providing either the officer's name and title, or the responsible department or section name
 - allow the customer to leave a voice mail message on the specific staff member's voicemail where the customer would prefer to do so
- Council staff are expected to respond to phone messages within five working days.

8.2 General Written Correspondence

The following customer services guidance is provided in relation to general written correspondence received by hard copy or through the corporate e-mail address kyoglecouncil@kyogle.nsw.gov.au:

- Where the correspondence requires a response, it will be acknowledged or responded to within 10 business days. This may include reference to the creation of one or more Customer Action Requests as a result of the correspondence.
- If a detailed reply is required, it may take additional time to provide a full response, but Council aims to respond to 80% of written correspondence within 25 working days.
- Where appropriate, outward correspondence will include the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter and Council's document reference.

8.3 Customer Action Requests

The following customer services guidance is provided in relation to Customer Action Requests (CARs):

- Many forms of communication with Council will lead to the creation of a CAR. This will include requests for works to be undertaken, maintenance or improvements to existing services and facilities, or complaints and concerns about regulatory or environmental matters.
- The customer is to be provided with the CAR number as a reference for future follow up where requested.
- All CAR are recorded and tracked to monitor the response times, inspection outcomes, approvals for any actions to be taken, and the completion of the required actions, including follow up with the original customer where requested.
- Council will prioritise the follow up of CARs based on risk and the level of resources available within the relevant service area.
- CARs will be referred to the relevant staff member within two working days, and 80% of CARs will be inspected or reviewed within 10 working days.
- Response times for approval and completion of subsequent works or actions by Council staff will vary greatly and are not set out in this policy.
- Where a customer has requested follow up contact in relation to a CAR, they will be contacted within 10 working days of the completion/closure of the CAR.

8.4 Applications

The following customer services guidance is provided in relation to formal application processes:

- Response times for determination of a range of applications and associated activities such as issuing certificates, are often subject to legislated statutory timeframes. Council aims to meet all statutory timeframes where possible. Where there is no statutory timeframe, Council aims to process all applications within 20 business days.
- Meeting these response times is subject to:
 - complete applications and all required supporting information being submitted to the required standard
 - service area demand and staff availability
 - external government agency and other third-party referrals being completed in required timeframes
- There may be circumstances from time to time where an application is not be able to be determined within the required response times. In this event, the customer/applicant is to be advised of this at the earliest opportunity after Council becomes aware of any delay, but not later than when the required response time has expired.

8.5 Direct Contact with Councillors

Councillors are the governing body of the Council, not members of Council staff. Under Council's Code of Conduct, Councillors are not permitted to be involved in the day to day operations of the Council or to attempt to direct or influence members of Council's staff. The main role of Councillors is in the setting of policy, strategy and budgeting.

Where Councillors are provided with operational communications from customers, Councillors will direct customer correspondence and requests to Council's main corporate contact points for appropriate action within two working days of receipt. Council staff will then follow up directly with the customer in accordance with the customer service guidelines set out in this policy.

8.6 Correspondence via e-mail

Any e-mail correspondence with Council should be through the corporate e-mail address kyoglecouncil@kyogle.nsw.gov.au. E-mails sent directly to an individual staff member's e-mail addresses are not monitored for corporate customer services response times. However, all communications between staff, Councillors and our customers is expected to be in accordance with this policy.

9 Regular reporting of statistics on our service

Customer services statistics are reported publicly in compliance with the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework via the:

- Six Monthly Reports
- Annual Report.

10 What is a complaint?

Complaints about customer service should be addressed to the General Manager or to the Public Officer. A complaint is dissatisfaction, made in respect to:

- a Council Officer's role in the provision of service delivery, or lack of service delivery, that has allegedly affected an individual, group or body of stakeholders
- the quality of service provided by Council
- Council failing to act upon a reasonable request from the public
- dissatisfaction with Council's action following the lodgement of a request for service or a request for information (managed through Government Information Public Access Act).

10.1 Anonymous complaints

Details of anonymous complaints should be referred to the Public Officer and will not be pursued unless it is determined that further investigation is warranted based on the merit, seriousness and nature of the complaint.

Due to anonymity, we cannot provide information of decisions or actions that may be taken.

10.2 What is not a complaint?

A complaint is not:

- a request for service covered by the customer request management (CRM) process. for example:
 - reporting of road potholes
 - requests for a road to be graded
 - water leaks
 - dust and noise
 - overgrown allotments
 - dog issues
- a request for information or an explanation of a policy or procedure
- objections to a development application before Council determination or appeals in relation to the determination by Council
- concerns regarding decisions of the elected Council.

11 Other avenues for complaints

Complaints made under the Code of Conduct or allegations of corrupt conduct, maladministration or criminal activity are administered through the application of the Code of Conduct, Protected Disclosures as well as by agencies external to Council.

Other agencies include:

- the NSW Office of Local Government, <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/>
- NSW Ombudsman, <https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/>
- Independent Commission Against Corruption, <https://www.icac.nsw.gov.au/>
- Anti-Discrimination, <https://antidiscrimination.nsw.gov.au/>
- Information and Privacy Commissioner, <https://www.ipc.nsw.gov.au/>

12 Customer Feedback

12.1 Compliments

Please feel free to tell us if you like the way we did something, are grateful for our services, or just want to say thanks. Compliments received by Council are shared with Councillors and staff, and are an important way to obtain feedback on the way quality services are delivered by Council.

12.2 General Feedback

You can also let Council know if you have other suggestions on how we can improve, or just wish to provide feedback on an issue. This kind of general feedback will always be received and considered, but will generally not be formally responded to.

The corporate e-mail address kyoglecouncil@kyogle.nsw.gov.au or on-line web form <https://www.kyogle.nsw.gov.au/council-engagement/jobs-news-community-feedback/contact/> can be used for compliments, feedback, and submission of customer action requests.

13 Open Access Information

Open access information includes but is not limited to:

- Code of Conduct
- Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct
- Code of Meeting Practice
- Agenda/Minutes of Council Meetings
- Annual Report
- Annual Financial Statements (including Independent Audit Reports)
- Integrated Planning and Reporting – documentation, including Community Strategic Plan
- Delivery Program and Operational Plan
- Policies
- Returns of the Interests of Councillors, Designated Persons and Delegates
- Development Applications.

14 Policies

See Council's website for open access information and policies:

<https://www.kyogle.nsw.gov.au/council-engagement/compliance-policies-reporting/council-policies/>

Access to information procedures and forms can be found on our website:

<https://www.kyogle.nsw.gov.au/council-engagement/compliance-policies-reporting/access-to-information/>

15 Public Officer

Section 343 of the *Local Government Act 1993* outlines the functions of the public officer as follows:

The public officer is subject to the direction of the General Manager and:

- may deal with requests from the public concerning Council's affairs
- has the responsibility of assisting people to gain access to public documents of the Council
- may receive submissions made to the Council
- may accept service of documents on behalf of the Council
- may represent the Council in any legal or other proceedings
- has such other functions as may be conferred or imposed on the public officer by the General Manager or under this Act.