Ku-ring-gai Council

Providing a Service to Customers Policy

1.   PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to formalise Ku-ring-gai Council's service delivery standards by promoting the motto "*I provide quality service*" as a behavioural value for the whole of Council.

2.   OBJECTIVES

Ku-ring-gai Council recognises and highly values the importance of providing quality service to customers. The motto "*I provide quality service*" is to be absorbed into the actions of all staff and Councillors through an ongoing commitment to the delivery of quality service in every interaction they have.

The aim is for all staff and Councillors to be committed to providing quality service and to work towards achieving outcomes that benefit all customers through a process of continuous improvement. Ku-ring-gai Council will become the benchmark for quality service delivery.

The right balance between implementing service standards and using a flexible approach to service delivery will be implemented. Customers will be provided with a professional service that is adaptable to their needs, that clearly explains Council's policies, procedures and standards and builds positive and enduring relationships with customers.

3.   DEFINITIONS

A Customer: is anyone who interacts with or asks anything of a Councillor or a member of staff. A customer may be a member of the general public or from another government body or from a business organisation or community group. Customers are also internal to Council. They may be a Councillor or a work colleague in the same area or in a different area. Council places equal importance on providing quality service to internal and external customers.

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A Service: can take many forms. Responding to correspondence, both mail and email, making and answering phone calls and having face to face contact represent some of the forms in everyday use. Ku-ring-gai Council is committed to knowing who our customers are and developing processes that address their needs in all forms of communication.

4. COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT

All customers are valued and will be treated with dignity and respect. The service provided to customers will be professional and accessible. Service delivery will be focused on accuracy, timeliness and reliability with staff and Councillors taking ownership of the issues they handle. Signage will be highly visible and easily understood.

Staff and Councillors alike will consistently and impartially act in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct and Statement of Business Ethics.

Council's priority is that a customer will be able to speak to a person in preference to a machine. Council will ensure that public contact points in all departments are resourced and that staff are provided with current and reliable information at all times during business hours.

The services that are provided to customers will meet the vision, values, principles and objectives spelt out in Council's Management and Sustainability Plans to provide for –

- a fair, just and vibrant community,
- a safe and healthy work place,
- a creative and liveable local government area, and
- an active and stable local economy that conserves our magnificent environment.

Council has a strong commitment to meeting its management and sustainability obligations in order to maintain a good quality of life and a viable organisation for the community and for staff.

Staff will be trained in the application of this policy and customers will be educated in the services that can be provided and the standards they should expect from Councillors and staff.

5. REFERRAL PROTOCOLS

Should a dedicated officer be unable to attend to an assigned matter, then it will be referred immediately to a nominated officer or their supervisor or manager for further action.

If an immediate answer cannot be provided, then the matter will be referred to the appropriate person in Council or, where it cannot be dealt with by Council, referral information about the appropriate organisation or authority will be provided where possible.

6. ACCOUNTABILITY

The Council: is responsible for monitoring performance and revising this policy when necessary.

The General Manager: is accountable for the implementation of this policy.

Directors and Managers: are accountable for implementing systems and procedures to ensure compliance with this policy in their departments and/or sections.

Human Resources: is responsible for complying with the policy review timetable to ensure the currency of this policy.

All Staff: are accountable for and will -

- display a willingness to help,
- be attentive and develop processes that ensure a good flow of communication,
- use a variety of communication vehicles including but not limited to technology,
- recognise that different customers have different needs,
- be flexible in their approach to service delivery,
- develop strategies to meet varying needs,
- be responsive and deliver on the commitments that they make,
- adhere to Council's values, principles, standards, guidelines, policies and procedures,
- keep customers informed regularly of the processes undertaken to address their enquiries,
- advise customers of contact details and reference numbers for future contacts,
- limit the use of colloquialisms and jargon,
- provide referral information where possible,
- maintain accurate and current documentation, and
- be open and transparent in their service provision.

7. BREACHES OF THIS POLICY

Breaches of this policy by staff may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

Should a member of staff believe that a work colleague is in breach of this policy they should discuss the matter with their immediate supervisor or manager. Should the staff member be dissatisfied with the outcome of the discussion and subsequent action, they should raise the matter with their director or the General Manager.

A serious breach of this policy may amount to corrupt conduct or maladministration. Should a staff member be concerned that reprisal action may be taken against them for reporting a serious breach then they might consider making a protected disclosure. A protected disclosure allows a member of staff to report corrupt conduct, maladministration or serious and substantial waste of public money and be protected from any reprisal action.

8. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

Service Standards Manual
Complaints Management Policy
Code of Conduct
Statement of Business Ethics
Internal Reporting Policy - Protected Disclosures
Access and Equity Policy
Policy/Manual for Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

Service Standards
Manual

Contents:

6. Managing customer feedback

7. Departmental protocols

8. Measurement and review

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Providing quality service needs to be incorporated into the culture and values of an organisation as it is not an independent approach of a particular person or department. At Ku-ring-gai, in recognition of the fact that everything we say and do provides a service to someone else, the motto '*I provide quality service*' has been developed as a core value in our service delivery.

One of the key strategies that we have sought to develop is the creation and implementation of service standards. In identifying the importance of achieving a cultural shift, in terms of the attitude and values held by all staff and councillors towards the service we provide, we believe that the implementation of service standards will facilitate our efforts in working towards achieving this goal.

In addition, we aim to find the right balance between implementing clearly defined processes and systems to deliver quality service, whilst acknowledging that we are dealing with real people. To do this we will remain professional and flexible in our approach to service delivery and we will demonstrate ethical behaviour by being accountable for our actions.

1.2 Defining our customers

Anyone who asks anything of us is our customer. From members of the general public to other government bodies and businesses, and from councillors to our own colleagues, we are constantly providing a service to others. Whether it be answering a telephone, responding to an email from a colleague or attending a meeting at an external location, the person we have made contact with becomes our customer.

Council is committed to acknowledging the needs of all of our customers and recognises that measures may need to be in place as our service delivery may vary between departments, but we will always ensure that the quality of our service is not negotiable.

2. Telephones

In providing quality service to our customers, all staff and councillors will adhere to the following procedures for attending to telephones.

2.1 Answering calls

- A ringing phone will always get answered as soon as possible and never be allowed to ring out.
- The following information will always be provided when answering a call - greeting, name and department.
- Speak in a pleasant tone of voice.
- Always use positive language and phrasing.
- Actively listen to what the caller has to say.
- When you are out of the office or away from your desk, always ensure that there is an option for the customer to either leave a voice message or be transferred to an operator.
- When dealing with a customer in person and a phone needs to be answered, always excuse yourself and deal with the call promptly.
- Always use the hold button when leaving a line to ensure professionalism at all times and tell the customer you are putting them on hold.
- Put calls on hold for the minimum amount of time possible.

2.2 Making calls

- Always identify who you are when making a call.
- Always know and state the purpose of the communication.
- When you reach a wrong number, excuse the interruption and then hang up.
- If you told a person that you would ring at a certain time, call them as you promised. If you need to delay the conversation, call to postpone it, but do not make the other person wait around for your call.

2.3 Transferring calls

- No 'cold' transfers are to occur – all calls must be announced.
- Ask for the name of the caller and ask what their call is in regard to.
- Ask the caller to please hold for a moment.
- Transfer the call and wait to speak to the officer at the other end and advise who is calling and what it is in regard to.
- Press transfer again to send the call through.

2.4 Screening calls

All phone extensions will be made available to members of the general public upon request. Anyone wishing to have their calls screened needs to make an arrangement with a designated officer to take such action and this must be approved by their director and/or the General Manager.
Once this has been established, then the following procedures will apply:

- Answer the call according to 3.1.
- If the caller wishes to speak to someone other than yourself, ask if the caller can provide their name and what their call is in regard to.
- Dial the extension of the person that the caller wishes to speak to and wait for the person to answer.
- Tell the officer who is calling and wait for a response as to whether the call will be taken:
  - If the called party wishes to take the call, then press the transfer button.
  - If the called party has approval for the call not to be received by them, take the call back and advise that the officer is out of the office or currently unavailable and ask to take a message.

2.5 Taking messages

- Be prepared to take a message when you answer the phone.
- When taking a message be sure to ask for:
  - The caller's name (including their title – Mr, Mrs, etc)
  - The caller's contact details.
- Repeat the message to the caller to ensure that you have the correct details.
- Include the date, time and your name on the message as a reference for the called party.
- Place the message in a conspicuous place on the called party's desk or send them an email or CRS.
- The caller should be advised if the called party is on extended leave or told that they are unavailable if it is for a short period of leave so that they do not expect an immediate return phone call from the caller party.
- Phone messages should be responded to before the end of the following working day.
- Where the caller does not wish to leave a message, advise of the appropriate number and available hours to contact the officer.

2.6 Use of answering services and mobile phones

- Staff members will answer their phone when it rings.
- If a staff member cannot answer their phone, the phone must be re-directed to another person who can answer it.

- Where applicable, phones should be diverted to mobile phones during business hours when staff cannot answer their phone.
- Phones may be diverted to answering services, provided that an option is made available for the customer to speak to a person within the department, when:
  - a staff member is on leave and an appropriate message has been left to indicate when the staff member will return
  - a staff member is present in the office but unable to attend to calls during that time (departmental protocols may apply)

3. Written Correspondence

As Council receives a significant amount of correspondence via mail and fax services, we will stay committed to communicating effectively with our customers by adhering to the following standards.

3.1 Acknowledging and responding to correspondence

- All written correspondence received via mail and fax will be acknowledged by Council within five (5) working days of receipt.
- A formal response to all correspondence will be made within fourteen (14) working days. For more complex matters that require a longer period of time for a response, an update will be provided to the customer advising them of the situation.
- Fax and mail correspondence should generally be responded to by the same form of communication used by the customer.
- All faxes should be sent with the Council fax number as the return contact number.

3.2 Standards for written correspondence

- All letters and faxes should adopt the guidelines established in Council's Corporate Style Guide.
- Standard letters and faxes should be written using established pro-forma.
- All correspondence should include the name and contact phone number of the person that has sent the communication.
- Correspondence should consist of plain English and be clear, concise and considerate.
- Where required, documentation will be proof read and signed off by an appropriate officer.

3.3 Recording information

- All written external correspondence received by Council will be recorded in Council's electronic records database, TRIM, according to established user guides and business rules.
- All correspondence that is sent to external customers must be recorded in Council's electronic records database, TRIM, according to established user guides and business rules.
- Hand written and electronic notes will be used on a regular basis to ensure that information is recorded properly and available to be viewed.

4. Email

Email contact with our customers forms an integral part of how we communicate. The following guidelines will enable all staff and councillors to meet Council's objective in providing quality service through this medium.

4.1 Acknowledging and responding to correspondence

- All email correspondence will be acknowledged within two (2) working days, either by the receiver or the Council email address. Where a staff member is on sick leave, the officer's direct supervisor will arrange for an 'out of office' message to be placed on their email account.
- All email correspondence will be formally responded to within fourteen (14) working days (this can include acknowledgement). For more complex matters that require a longer period of time for a response, an update will be provided to the customer advising them of this situation.
- An 'out of office' message will always be applied when an officer is on leave for two (2) or more working days.
- 'Out of office' messages will always include the contact details of the officer's supervisor/manager or other nominated person to attend to enquiries in their absence.

4.2 Protocols for the use of carbon copy ('cc') and blind carbon copy ('bcc') when sending emails

- The use of 'cc' and 'bcc' in email responses should only be applied when it is appropriate for additional staff and/or councillors to be aware of the information contained within the email. Anyone who is uncertain of levels of appropriateness should refer to their manager or director or the General Manager.
- The use of 'cc' and 'bcc' in email responses should not be used for emails that contain privileged Council information.

4.3 Standards for writing emails

- Email correspondence should adopt the guidelines established in Council's Corporate Style Guide.
- All emails will contain a descriptive subject in the subject line.
- All external email correspondence will include professional language and an electronic signature indicating name, position and contact details of the person sending the email.
- The use of the 'All Online Users' group to send emails to internal customers will be kept to a minimum and shall only be used for work related matters of importance.
- Staff and councillors sending emails will ensure that measures are in place for information to be relayed to those who do not have access to email where the information contained in the email needs to be passed onto all staff.

4.4 Recording information

- All external email correspondence received by Council will be recorded in Council's electronic records database, TRIM, according to established user guides and business rules.
- All email correspondence that is sent to external customers must be recorded in Council's electronic records database, TRIM, according to established user guides and business rules.
- As all individual Council email addresses will be made available to customers upon request, it is the responsibility of all staff to ensure that the aforementioned guidelines are strictly adhered to.
- All work related internal email correspondence will be incorporated into TRIM in accordance with the State Records Act 1998.

5. Face to face interactions

Council seeks to ensure that a minimum level of service will be delivered through the interactions we have with our customers in person. Our face to face interactions with our customers includes service at Council Chambers, external contact points and other facilities, meetings, site inspections and general communications in the public arena.

5.1 Corporate dress code and staff presentation

All staff are required to adhere to the established guidelines for presentation as indicated in Council's Corporate Dress Code and Uniform Policy (to be developed).

5.2 Identification of staff and councillors

All staff and councillors will identify who they are when attending to duties in public. Staff will identify themselves according to the following guidelines:

- Name badges must include the minimum information of the officer's first name and their position within Council.
- Staff who are stationed in a public area will be required to wear name badges at all times.
- Staff who represent Council at public events (including festivals, concerts, ceremonies, etc) will wear a name badge for the duration of the event.
- Staff who conduct business in a public area will identify themselves to the member/s of the public they are meeting with. This should include the wearing of a name badge or identification tag.

5.3 Protocols for meetings

Meetings, both formal and informal, form an integral part of the contacts we have with customers. Council seeks to make sure that protocols are in place for the effective management of meetings. The protocols for formal Council meetings have been established in Council's Code of Meeting Practice.

5.3.1 Formal meetings (other than Council meetings)

- Invitations to all formal meetings will be sent so that staff, councillors and external customers are officially notified of their required attendance, meeting time and location.
- All meetings will have an established agenda.
- All meetings will have a chair to guarantee that it is conducted within the established guidelines of appropriate behaviour and to the set agenda.
- An appropriate physical space will be established in order to hold the meeting.
- Minutes of all meetings will be recorded.
- Meeting chairs will be required to ensure that follow-up processes and actions are satisfied.

5.3.2 Informal meetings

- Meetings should be attended by more than one Council representative where possible.
- An appropriate physical space should be established in order to hold the meeting.
- Notes and/or minutes of the meeting should be kept to ensure that the content of the discussion is recorded and then placed in the relevant file.

6. Managing customer feedback

The feedback we receive from customers is invaluable in recognising the performance of councillors, individual officers and the organisation as a whole. We will ensure that all forms of feedback will be effectively managed and recorded.

Where relevant, any matters that require the specific action of an officer or department will be recorded in the Customer Request System (CRS) database and actioned according to defined CRS procedures.

6.1 Recording comments

We will have processes in place to ensure that we can effectively capture the views and opinions of our customers. This will include being able to accept comments verbally and/or in writing and appropriately recording the information. Comments received on an individual officer will be passed onto the officer through their manager or direct supervisor. General comments received about Council or Council's services will be recorded in our Community Feedback Register.

6.2 Retaining compliments

All compliments are highly valued by Council as an indication of the high level of service that we provide. Council will record all compliments in a central location within our Compliments Register.

In addition, positive feedback about the performance of an individual person/s will be passed onto the appropriate supervisor and recorded in personal files. This information will be retained and should then form a part of the officer's annual performance assessment.

Compliments that are received about the service provided by a department or by Council, as a whole, will be forwarded to the relevant director and/or General Manager and recorded according to 5.4.

6.3 Managing and recording complaints

All complaints received about councillors, staff or Council services will be managed and recorded as defined by the protocols established in Council's Complaints Policy.

7. Departmental Protocols

7.1 Guidelines for the development of departmental protocols

These standards establish the benchmark for the minimum level of expectation of service provision across the organisation. However, due to the significant differences in the types of services that Council offers, we acknowledge that departmental protocols may need to be developed to accommodate the differing services and resource capabilities of each department.

All protocols that are developed will not compromise on the base amount of service expectation that has been defined within this document. We will remain committed to providing consistency and equity in our service to all customers through the creation of departmental protocols that define particular rules on service delivery, though the methods of delivery may vary according to service type. All protocols will ensure:

- Professionalism is assured at all times.
- Customers are able to communicate effectively with officers in the department.
- Information is easily reached and presented in a simplistic and understandable format.
- We remain focused on addressing the needs of our customers by applying a flexible approach to service delivery.
- We will take ownership of issues and provide positive outcomes for our customers.

7.2 Approval and review of protocols

Departmental protocols will require the approval of all directors and the General Manager before they can be implemented. This will ensure that there is consistency between this manual and the protocols developed.

Departmental protocols will be reviewed on an annual basis, in line with the review of this manual. Additionally, a review of all established protocols will be undertaken when required – e.g. changes in service procedures, resourcing levels or technological advances.

8. Measurement and review

To be successful in implementing standards it is important to measure and review the level of service on a regular basis. As an organisation, we need to be sure that we are providing quality service through established procedures and protocols and through our attitudes and values.

8.1 Measuring individual performance

All staff are required to comply with this Service Standards Manual and will be measured on an annual basis through individual performance reviews. These standards will form a component of the generic outputs of all position descriptions and staff will be assessed against their compliance with this, as well as other outputs of their position.

8.2 Measuring our service as an organisation

Council will measure the service that we provide as an organisation to ensure that we meet our obligations in providing quality service. We will do this by:

- Surveying our customers, both internal and external, and conducting internal reviews.
- Allowing customers to respond to our service through an open comments form/feedback register.
- Monitoring phone calls.
- Reporting on management plan and service policy objectives.
- Reviewing and recording comments, compliments and complaints that are received.

8.3 Reviewing our service standards

The development and implementation of our service standards will be reviewed to ensure consistency with strategic and operational changes within the organisation. Council will commit to reviewing our standards on an annual basis and will seek to gather input from staff, councillors and customers in re-assessing and refining our adopted standards.