CUSTOMER SERVICE COUNCIL POLICY

ADOPTED BY COUNCIL: 17 NOVEMBER 2025

PURPOSE

Our customers and community are at the heart of everything we do. At Wollongong City Council, we are unwavering in our commitment to delivering efficient, professional, inclusive and accessible customer service that supports our Community Strategic Plan and reflects our Organisational Values. This policy details how Council delivers on this commitment and how we measure our performance.

Council's commitment to Customer Service is underpinned by an unwavering focus on understanding and meeting our customer needs where they are. We recognise that this includes an effective complaint handling system and a proactive approach to understanding customer satisfaction. The feedback, suggestions and other information we receive from our customers provide a valuable source of insight and serves as a cornerstone for continual improvement of our services & experiences.

This policy, the Customer Feedback and Complaints Management Policy and the Unreasonable Conduct of Customers Framework guide the way in which we deliver customer service across Council and is applicable to all Council employees.

POLICY INTENT

The main objectives of this policy are to:

- provide a clear and logical way for customers to access services and seek information from Council;
- recognise that customers may wish to contact Council through various channels, and have the flexibility to choose how and when they access customer service functions,
- provide customers with a choice as to how they provide feedback to Council about service provision
- provide a structure around responding to, recording, reporting and using feedback to improve service to customers, and
- outline customer rights and responsibilities.

Council is committed to an effective feedback and complaint handling system which aims to benefit both our customers and Council in several ways including:

- responding to feedback/complaints equitably, objectively and in an unbiased manner, ensuring there is no loss of service to the customer
- creating an opportunity to address scenarios where service delivery has not met our standards
- identifying opportunities to enhance service delivery
- providing an opportunity to strengthen relationships between the community and Council, and
- assist in the planning of and allocation of resources for customer service functions.

WOLLONGONG 2035 OBJECTIVES

This policy contributes to Goal 4 "We have a healthy, respectful, and inclusive community" within our Wollongong Our Future Community Strategic Plan.

POLICY STATEMENT

Commitment to Customer Service

Council is committed to delivering high quality customer services that are fair and accessible to all customers. We understand that customers have an expectation that they receive the best possible service that can be practically achieved. Our service will always be guided by our organisational values.

We aim to deliver service in a courteous, knowledgeable and professional manner by:

- Being respectful, courteous and impartial in all dealings
- Identifying ourselves when we talk to customers
- Listening carefully to customers
- Providing consistent and clear information across our communication channels
- Providing updates if we are unable to meet our commitments, and periodic updates for complex matters or those that will have a lengthy timeline to review and respond to
- Ensuring your personal information is protected and respected, and
- Having trained and professional staff who will embrace Council's Values and abide by the Code of Conduct.

Customer Responsibilities

Outstanding customer service is only achieved via mutual respect in all interactions. Customers can assist Council staff in our service delivery by behaving in a fair and reasonable manner. This includes:

- Treating staff with courtesy and respect
- Respecting the rights of other customers and the wider community
- Being honest and accurate in information sought and supplied to Council
- Working with us to reach a resolution
- Providing Council with respectful feedback

At times inappropriate behaviour may be directed toward Council staff, or customers, by members of the public. In such circumstances, Council staff will follow adopted procedures to deal effectively with such scenarios, ensuring the safety and the right to peaceful enjoyment of Council facilities by all. Council does not tolerate any threat to the safety or wellbeing of any individual and Police may be called in such circumstances. Our staff our empowered to terminate customer interactions that have the potential to jeopardise the safety of any individual, including the staff member themselves.

POLICY

In order to meet our Customer Service commitment, Council will ensure staff have access to relevant customer service related training and materials to support service delivery.

Our community is diverse and every member of the public have rights and unique needs. We are committed to acting with respect and sensitivity in all interactions. We aim to offer quality service by recognising this diversity and ensuring individual needs, for accessing services are met. We will provide clear and logical means for customers to access services, facilities and information including assistance where necessary to lodge requests or provide feedback.

Council is committed to accessible contact. Where required, customers can contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS 131 450 or www.tisnational.gov.au) who can assist with the following:

- Phone interpreting
- Automated Telephone Interpreting Service
- On-site interpreting
- Video remote interpreting

Customers who are Deaf, deaf, or hard of hearing can contact Council via the National Relay Service (1800 555 677 or www.accesshub.gov.au). Additionally, Council has access to multilingual staff, who may be able to assist in circumstances where translation may be required. Customers may also appoint an advocate to deal with Council on their behalf, where practicable Council requires a written authority to provide information to an advocate.

Council recognises our customers may wish to contact Council in a variety of ways to suit their needs and technology use, and we are committed to providing choice about how customers can access Council customer services. Council has a range of methods and technologies via which customers can make contact with us. These options change and expand over time due to technological and social media advancements. Customers can call Council or check the contact us webpage on the Council website to see the up-to-date range of contact options.

Our approach to interacting, communicating, and engaging with our customers is further enhanced by Council's Community Engagement Strategy and Community Participation Plan. These initiatives work in tandem to provide a holistic view of our engagement efforts, ensuring that we effectively serve our diverse customer base. By aligning our customer service practices with these strategic frameworks, we are better equipped to understand and meet the needs of our community, fostering a more inclusive and responsive service environment.

First Contact Resolution

At Wollongong City Council, delivering exceptional customer service is a shared responsibility across all divisions. Our commitment to First Contact Resolution (FCR) extends beyond our Customer Service Team (CST); it encompasses a strategic approach to creating seamless customer journeys that minimise complexity and frustration, ensuring a smooth and efficient process for our customers.

We aim to resolve enquiries and requests during the first contact whenever possible, providing timely and efficient service and reducing the need for follow-ups. While we recognise that not all requests can be resolved at the first point of contact, our objective is to eliminate barriers that might cause failure demand. Failure demand, also known as avoidable contact, is a situation where an organisation's failure to do something, or to do something right, for a customer, leads to the customer having to contact the organisation again. This approach ensures that even if multiple touchpoints are required, the process remains clear, consistent, and straightforward from start to finish.

Our principles of transparency, consistency, accuracy, and completeness guide all interactions. This collective effort supports our strategic goals and ensures that customers experience minimal delays or complications throughout their journey. Every division within the Council plays a crucial role in achieving this, and we are dedicated to continuously enhancing our processes to deliver the best possible experience for our community.

By adopting a first contact resolution approach, we may slightly increase the time our staff spend with each customer initially, but this greatly reduces the likelihood of the customer needing to contact Council again on the same issue or being transferred to another part of Council unnecessarily. This focus not only saves our customers time and effort, allowing them to get back to their day without delays, but also delivers significant improvements in overall customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Measuring Customer Service Performance

Council will assess the quality of our customer service through various performance metrics. Our performance is evaluated based on the indicators outlined in Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan. Specifically, we report as part of the outcomes that fall into *Goal 4; We have a healthy, respectful, and inclusive community*, including but not limited to:

1. Residents' average satisfaction score with customer service centre
2. Percentage of customer enquiries resolved at the first point of contact
3. Percentage of customer requests actioned within 10 days

The results of these evaluations are reported in the Quarterly Review Statement and the Annual Report.

Prioritising, Recording and Actioning of Customer Service requests

Council has an obligation to properly record and consider all customer requests and complaints.

In considering and actioning requests for service received by customers, consideration is given to:

- Public safety and situations deemed an emergency.
- Fulfilling Council's strategic priorities and statutory or policy requirements; and
- The efficient and effective use of Council resources.

Council utilises a Customer Request Management System (CRMS) to enable the recording, allocating, tracking and reporting of all Customer Service Requests. The CRMS also allows Council to measure performance in the completion of service requests.

Customers may contact Council with an expectation that specific action will be undertaken by Council. For example, according to Council's Enforcement Policy there are some categories where Council has determined no action will be taken. In these circumstances Customer Service staff may record the complaint and provide information to the customer if it is clear the complaint is a 'no action' matter. Customer service staff will advise the customer of any means available through other agencies which may assist the customer to resolve the matter.

Where Council receives a request that clearly relates to the functions of another government agency or government owned corporation, Council will provide relevant information to assist in redirecting the customer to the relevant agency or corporation to address their request.

Anonymous Requests

It is recognised that at times, anonymous service requests may be made. For many service requests a contact name, address and phone number is required to confirm information or if necessary to obtain additional information. Council will attempt to action service requests, where sufficient and relevant information is provided, or the severity of the situation warrants action. However, there may be instances where Council determines not to action an anonymous request for service , particularly where the information provided is lacking or not able to be verified.

Customer Feedback and Complaints

Quality customer service consists of providing an efficient, fair, impartial and responsive service. It is also about delivering the most appropriate and complete service at the outset. However, things can and do go wrong and can only be put right and a quality service delivered where Council becomes aware of the issue.

Council's feedback and complaint management system provides an opportunity to improve service delivery via the provision of feedback, compliments and suggestions from customers.

Feedback does not include:

- A request for service
- A request for information or explanation of policies or procedures
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure (i.e. potholes)
- Reports of hazards (e.g. fallen trees)
- Disputes concerning neighbours
- The lodging of an appeal or request to review a decision
- Complaints where Council has no jurisdiction

A 'complaint' is an expression of dissatisfaction with Council's policies, procedures, charges, employees, contractors, quality of service or goods sold or provided.

Council has trained staff dedicated to dealing with and responding to customer feedback and complaints.

Complaints Management
Members of the local community who do not believe that Council has fulfilled its commitments should address their concerns to Council in the first instance.

Council manages complaints in accordance with an internal Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy, that adopts a three-tier approach to managing complaints, that is focussed on the principle of resolving complaints at the earliest possible opportunity.

Wherever possible frontline staff shall attempt to resolve complaints at first point of contact, via explanation, provision of additional information or lodgement of an additional service request. In circumstances where issues cannot be resolved at first contact or where a complaint is received in writing, the complaint shall be dealt with by the Manager of the relevant Division/Business unit of Council. If the complaint cannot be resolved within 10 working days, the customer will be provided with an acknowledgment in writing with an estimated date of completion of the matter.

In circumstances where a customer is unsatisfied with the initial outcome of their complaint and seek further review, or complaints of a very serious nature, the complaint will be noted by the General Manager who will appoint a senior member of staff to review the matter. These matters will generally be handled by a Director, the Professional Conduct Coordinator, or Public Officer.

If the complaint, and any subsequent review, does not resolve the matter, they can raise their concerns with:

- The NSW Ombudsman (if the matter concerns maladministration)
- The Office of Local Government (if the matter concerns a serious breakdown in Council operations, if Council as a whole, is not operating satisfactorily or the matter relates to pecuniary interest matters),
- The Office of the Children's Guardian (if the matter concerns Council's legislated child safety obligations), or
- The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) (if the matter concerns corrupt conduct).

Each agency has a separate role in relation to the oversight of the conduct of councils. The NSW Ombudsman is responsible for complaints about a broad range of matters generally described as maladministration. The Office of Local Government is responsible for investigating pecuniary interest matters and will intervene if councils are operating in an unsatisfactory manner or if council operations have seriously broken down. The Office of the Children's Guardian oversees organisations to uphold children and young people's right to be safe. The ICAC is responsible for investigating corrupt conduct.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Council is committed to providing a fair and equitable service and this Policy has been developed particularly in accordance with the following legislation, regulations, policies and standards:

- Local Government Act
- State Records Act
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act

REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed every three years, or more frequently as required.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Manager Customer and Business Integrity:

Responsible Officer for the Policy and will coordinate the following functions in relation to the Policy:

- Maintaining appropriate records and reporting relating to Council's customer service functions
- Keeping the policy current, and undertaking regular reviews of both the policy and associated procedures
- Ensure that appropriate training and education of relevant employees with respect to customer service standards and processes occurs
- Provision of advice and ensuring adherence with the standards and principles of this policy
- Ensuring a culture of continuous review and improvement to enhance the customer experience

Divisional Managers:

Responsible for ensuring that all relevant customer facing services and all other customer interactions undertaken by staff of their Division are conducted in accordance with this policy.

DEFINITIONS

Customer: include ratepayers, residents, asset users, consultants, developers, government departments and visitors to the Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA) seeking products, services or information offered by Council. Internal customers are Council staff.

Customer Service: Interactions between a Customer and Council where that interaction relates to the provision of support, advice, assistance or delivery of a service by Council to the customer.

Customer Service Request: a request for action to be taken in relation to a service or product of Council.

Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction with Council's policies, procedures, charges, employees, contractors, quality of service or goods sold or provided.

Correspondence: communications received by Council, which are not submitted as a customer request, requiring a response.

Feedback: the provision of a compliment or suggestion by a customer to Council.

RELATED STRATEGIES, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Customer Feedback + Complaints Management Policy
- Unreasonable Conduct of Customers Framework
- Privacy Management Plan
- Community Strategic Plan

APPROVAL AND REVIEW	
Responsible Division	Customer and Business Integrity
Date adopted by Council	17 November 2025
Date/s of previous adoptions	24 November 2014, August 2012, October 2010, September 2008
Date of next review	17 November 2028