

POLICY AP010

CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER



Table of Contents

1	PURPOSE	3
2	OBJECTIVE	3
3	SCOPE	3
4	POLICY	3
4.1	OUR COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE	3
4.2	WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?.....	4
4.3	OUR SERVICE STANDARDS.....	4
4.3.1	What customers can expect from Council staff and services:-	4
4.3.2	Council Values:-	4
4.3.3	When a customer visits or telephones the Council:-	4
4.3.4	When a customer writes or emails:-	5
4.4	OUR EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMER	6
4.4.1	Hostile Customers.....	6
4.5	COMPLIMENTS	6
4.6	ENQUIRIES AND REQUESTS	7
4.7	COMPLAINTS	7
4.7.1	What is a complaint?	7
4.7.2	What is not a complaint?.....	7
4.7.3	Complaints Management Process	8
4.7.4	Form of Complaint	8
4.7.5	Internal Review	8
4.7.6	Consideration of a Complaint	8
4.7.7	Vexatious Complaints	9
4.7.8	Anonymous Complaints.....	9
4.7.9	Protection of Customer	9
4.7.10	What if a customer is not satisfied with the resolution of the Complaint?	9
4.8	HOW TO CAN CONTACT COUNCIL.....	10
4.9	PAYING BILLS	10
4.10	PERSONAL INFORMATION PROTECTION	10
4.11	REPORTING	10
4.12	AVAILABILITY	10
4.13	REVIEW	10
5	LEGISLATION	10
	Related Documents	10
	Authority.....	10
	Policy Owner / Further Assistance.....	11
	Review Date	11
	Revision History	11

1 PURPOSE

To provide guidance to staff and customers in relation to the standards of service and interactions including the process for making compliments, enquiries, requests and complaints in relation to Council services in line with legislation and Bogan Shire Council's values.

2 OBJECTIVE

Council's values include having respect for other people and providing responsive customer service. In order to achieve this Council will facilitate consistent standards of service delivery across Council and provide a mechanism whereby compliments and complaints may be received and processed.

3 SCOPE

This policy covers all services provided by Council to all of its customers.

4 POLICY

The mission of the Bogan Shire Council is to provide a comfortable country lifestyle by progressively improving the level of appropriate facilities and services and encouraging growth and economic development that is responsive to the needs of the community

This Customer Service Charter is in accordance with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993* and outlines our commitment to all customers in accordance with our mission statement and provides a formalised process for making complaints. It outlines customer's rights, the standards customers can expect when dealing with Council and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with Council decisions or actions.

Bogan Shire Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan, together with the intent of the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014*, provides actions towards including people with disabilities in all aspects of our community, consistent with contemporary policy and practice.

4.1 OUR COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Council is committed to the provision of timely, efficient, consistent and quality services provided by polite and helpful officers that meet our customer's expectations.

The Council places great emphasis on the efficient handling of customer feedback. Our aim, at all times, is to provide a quality service. Council may not be able to provide complete satisfaction but will always be trying for the best possible solution.

To achieve this, customers are encouraged to voice their concerns and Council's aim is to work towards increasing customer satisfaction and continuously improve our services by responding to customer complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Council has a Customer Request Management (CRM) system that is used to process all customer requests and complaints. All customers are entitled to lodge a customer request these include compliments, requests, enquiries and complaints. This ensures that all records are kept and any action taken by responsible officers is captured.

4.2 WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?

A customer is any person or organisation having dealings with or using the services of the Council.

4.3 OUR SERVICE STANDARDS

Council will take a 'person-centred approach' to genuinely seek to understand and meet the individual needs of a person, including a person with a disability. Customers will be put at ease and made to feel that it is acceptable to make a request or complaint and that they all help to improve Council's service to the community.

4.3.1 What customers can expect from Council staff and services:-

- Professional and informative approach
- Courteous, polite and friendly manner
- Efficient execution of tasks
- Commitment to listening and responding to their needs
- Referral of requests to the appropriate person or agency if unable to fulfil their requirements
- All information will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality
- Acknowledgement and respect for customer's time.

4.3.2 Council Values:-

We are driven by strong corporate values that guide our thinking, actions and decision making:

1. Having respect for other people.
2. Providing responsive customer service.
3. Taking pride in Nyngan and the greater Bogan Shire.
4. Working together as a team to get things done.
5. Being accountable for our decisions and actions.
6. Acting with integrity and honesty.
7. Demonstrating strong leadership.

4.3.3 When a customer visits or telephones the Council:-

Enquiries at the front counter

- Staff attending the front counter will attend to the customer courteously and deal with an enquiry directly without unnecessary referrals.
- If staff cannot deal with the enquiry or the customer requests to speak to a particular Council officer then they will provide the customer with the name of the department and person the enquiry will be referred to.
- The enquiry will then be referred to key contacts in each area of Council as follows:
 - Mayor and General Manager - Executive Assistant
 - Development and Environmental Services Department - Administration Officer
 - Engineering Department - Administration Officer
 - People and Community Services - Administration Officer
 - Bogan Shire Early Learning Centre - Administration Officer
 - Bogan Shire Medical Centre – Practice Coordinator

Bogan Shire Council Customer Service Charter Policy AP010

- If the customer has been referred to these officers to deal with the enquiry, this officer is then responsible for the lodging of a customer request in the CRM System or an email message and for any other follow up.
- If the administration officer is not available then front counter staff will attempt to contact the officer requested directly. This officer will then be responsible for lodging the customer request in the CRM System and for any other follow up.
- If there is still no response then the front counter is responsible for emailing a message to the administration officer and the officer requested as well as lodging a Customer Request in in the CRM System if necessary.

Enquiries by phone

- It is expected that all phones must be answered within 6 rings and all staff are responsible for answering phones. All Council staff are expected to pick up any unattended ringing phone near them.
- The phone will be answered politely and by saying "Good Morning or afternoon Bogan Shire Council (staff name) speaking".
- Once the phone is answered the above procedures for front counter enquiries should be followed.
- Where information is not readily available the customer should be contacted within 2 days to explain the situation, and that they will be recontacted once the information is to hand. This contact can be made by either the officer or the administration officer and can be via a phone call, email or in writing.

4.3.4 When a customer writes or emails:-

- Council will respond to all customer written requests, complaints or enquiries within three (3) working days to acknowledge the correspondence. This response will be issued by Council's Records Officer, therefore all correspondence should be directed to Council's admin@bogan.nsw.gov.au email or to PO Box 221, Nyngan, 2825. The Records Officer will then save the correspondence in Council's Record Management System and lodge a customer request in the CRM System if applicable.
- All emailed customer requests, complaints or enquires will be issued with an automated response to show that Council has received the email and has lodged the request and will issue the customer with a reference number.
- All letters received through the mail with a customer request, complaint or enquiry will be issued with a standard response either emailed or posted to advise the customer that Council has received the correspondence and will deal with it as soon as possible.
- A full response should be received by the customer within a 30 day period by the officer or the administration officer of the department that has received the request, complaint or enquiry. If the response is not delivered in writing then the response should be recorded in the Customer Request in the CRM System or saved in Council's Record Management System.

4.4 OUR EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMER

Customers can help Council meet our charter commitments by:

- Treating our staff with courtesy and respect
- Not engaging in bullying behaviour, including aggressive, threatening or intimidating conduct as well as making belittling or humiliating comments
- Not harassing staff including behaviour that is not wanted by the person, offends, humiliates or intimidates and behaviour that creates a hostile environment
- Being open and honest in their dealings with Council
- Providing information that is clear, concise and complete
- Advising Council when their circumstances have changed – e.g. post or street address or animal registration details
- Respecting the privacy, safety and needs of other members of the community
- Phoning to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or a need to see a specific officer
- Paying their bills in a timely manner

4.4.1 Hostile Customers

In any interaction with members of the community where personal abuse, including offensive language, is used the communication may be terminated immediately by the officer. If face to face, the officer may walk away. If on a telephone, the officer may terminate the call. If in an email, the address may be blocked.

In any interaction with members of the community where staff feel bullied or harassed, particularly with regard to hostile, threatening or intimidating behaviour, staff may terminate the conversation. The General Manager is to put in place procedures for staff to deal with these circumstances which may include seeking assistance from a manager and/or informing the customer to address their concerns in writing and/or request a meeting with the General Manager and/or Mayor.

There may be occasions when the issue(s) a person has cannot be dealt with to their satisfaction and it is not possible for Council officers to continue to respond; especially where in-person interaction or correspondence contains personal abuse, offensive language, harassment or bullying behaviour. In these cases, the General Manager may decide to limit or cease interaction and/or responses to the person. A decision of this nature will be communicated in writing to the person with an explanation of how they can seek to resolve their matter – eg the Ombudsman or Office of Local Government.

If a staff member feels threatened by the language or behaviour of the customer, they may notify the Police.

4.5 COMPLIMENTS

Bogan Shire Council welcomes compliments about its staff and the services they provide. Compliments assist us to determine whether we are doing something well and also enhance the morale of staff. If a customer would like to pay a compliment, they may do so by telephone, at the counter or in writing. Council appreciates the time customers take to make a compliment. These compliments will also be recorded in Council's Record Management System or Council's Customer Requests Management System.

4.6 ENQUIRIES AND REQUESTS

All customer enquiries and requests received by staff at Council are to be dealt with appropriately and according to this charter. All customer requests will be entered into Council's Customer Request Management system (CRM).

This ensures requests are directed to the appropriate officer/s for further actioning. Enquires and Requests can be made by telephone, in person, or in writing. Customers are asked to direct all complaints or requests for action directly to Council's Customer Service Staff located at the front counter of Council's Office. This will ensure that all requests are dealt with in a timely manner and by the correct department.

4.7 COMPLAINTS

4.7.1 What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a particular decision (outside of a structured process), level or quality of service, or behaviour of an employee or agent, which can be investigated and acted upon and has been specifically referred to Council for action. From an operational perspective, a complaint is also an opportunity for Council to review certain processes to see whether they can be improved.

A structured process is where legislation (Act, Regulation, Rule or By-law) specifically makes provision for an appeal, internal or external review of a decision.

4.7.2 What is not a complaint?

The following are not considered a complaint:-

- A request for service (unless there was no response to a first request for service)
- A request for information or an explanation of a policy or procedure
- Disagreement with a policy or decision of the Council
- An appeal or request for internal or external review of a decision for which a structured process applies, other than that made as the result of a complaint
- An expression concerning the general direction and performance of Council or its Councillors
- An expression of dissatisfaction with the behaviour of a Councillor
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure
- Reports about neighbours, noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of our service

Many of the issues above are called 'complaints' when a customer contacts Council. They are called complaints because a customer is unhappy about the situation and wants something done. The actions Council takes to resolve many such 'complaints' are an everyday part of organisational life, due to the nature of services we provide. These issues are dealt with separately from the formal complaints management process.

4.7.3 Complaints Management Process

The Council Officer that receives the Customer Request is responsible for handling requests / complaints relevant to that Department.

While most problems can usually be resolved at an early stage, there are times when they require detailed investigation. If a complaint is of a serious nature, it will be referred to the General Manager.

Irrespective of the manner in which the complaint was received, a response to the complaint can be expected in accordance with Council's service definition. If a Councillor has submitted a complaint on a customer's behalf we will also respond to the Councillor within five (5) working days.

There are times when it's not possible to meet this deadline, e.g. where a complaint is a complex one and Councillors are to be briefed on the outcome of the investigations. In these cases we will endeavour to keep the customer informed of progress.

4.7.4 Form of Complaint

A complaint may be lodged orally (by telephone or at the counter) or in writing. The complaint will be referred to the relevant Director or Manager and may be responded to verbally by telephone, by meeting with the Director or Manager to discuss the complaint, or in writing.

If the complaint relates to a complex matter or there is no resolution from discussing the matter with the relevant Director or Manager, the complaint will then be referred to the General Manager for consideration.

At this stage, all complaints should be put in writing setting out the complaint details as simply as possible. If a customer is unable to provide a written complaint themselves, assistance with writing the complaint can be provided.

To assist Council in dealing with the complaint a customer should include the following, if relevant:

- Date, times and location of events
- What happened
- To whom the customer has spoken (names, position in the Council and dates)
- Copies or references to letters or documents relevant to the complaint
- State what the customer hopes to achieve as an outcome to the complaint

4.7.5 Internal Review

Experience has shown that the majority of complaints will be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Director or Manager. However, a person who is not satisfied with the outcome may request a review of the complaint by the General Manager. A request for a review of the complaint to the General Manager is to be in writing.

The General Manager will inform the customer of the findings on completion of an investigation.

4.7.6 Consideration of a Complaint

In considering a complaint the relevant Director or Manager or the General Manager will:

- Examine and analyse the information already available and follow up points requiring clarification;
- Look at the Council Policies which might have a bearing on the complaint;
- Consider whether or not the Council is at fault;

- Consider any necessary action to be taken to correct the faults identified; and
- Consider a review of the Council's procedures to avoid recurrence of any similar complaint in the future if necessary.

The relevant Director or Manager may enter into informal discussions or mediation on a complaint with a view to resolution. If this process does not resolve the situation it may be referred to the General Manager.

4.7.7 Vexatious Complaints

All complaints received by Council will be treated with the utmost seriousness however if a complaint is found to be malicious, frivolous or vexatious no further action will be taken on the complaint. The customer will be informed of this decision in writing.

4.7.8 Anonymous Complaints

While Council will receive anonymous complaints, it will generally only act on them where the matter is considered to be serious and where there is sufficient information in the complaint to enable an investigation to be undertaken.

4.7.9 Protection of Customer

Council will take all care to ensure that the reporting of complaints will not result in a customer experiencing any form of victimisation or retribution as a result of the complaint.

4.7.10 What if a customer is not satisfied with the resolution of the Complaint?

Council is confident that it can resolve the majority of complaints received. However, we understand that it may not be able to satisfy every customer on every occasion.

Sometimes Councils have to make difficult and complex decisions involving many people and individual customers do not get the outcome they want.

If a complaint remains unresolved or a customer is dissatisfied with our process in dealing with a complaint, other avenues remain for the customer to explore which include:

- Available NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal;
- The *Administrative Decisions Review Act, 1997*; and
- Contact external agencies which can review actions and decisions taken by the Council.

These include:

- The Ombudsman: an officer responsible to Parliament for investigating complaints made about administrative actions (or inactions) of New South Wales Government Departments, most Statutory Authorities and Local Government. The Ombudsman is located on the 24th Floor, 580 George Street, Sydney, 2000. Ph. (02) 9264 8050.
- Complaints On-Line Form: Web: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
E-Mail: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au

While a customer is entitled to refer a complaint directly to these bodies at any time, customers are encouraged to allow the Council to investigate the complaint first.

4.8 HOW TO CAN CONTACT COUNCIL

Customers can contact Council to make an enquiry, request, compliment or a complaint:

- In person at Council's Offices, 81 Cobar Street, Nyngan during the hours of 8:00am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday.
- By phoning (02) 6835 9000 during the hours of 8:00am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday.
- By emailing admin@bogan.nsw.gov.au
- By visiting the Council website at www.bogan.nsw.gov.au

4.9 PAYING BILLS

Accounts can be paid in person by cash, cheque or credit card, over the phone via credit card, direct debits by contacting Council staff, BPay and via the internet on Council's website.

If customers are having difficulty paying please contact Council before the due date to discuss payment options.

4.10 PERSONAL INFORMATION PROTECTION

Council has a commitment to protection of Personal Information provided by a customer to Council in accordance with the requirements of the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* and the *Government Information Public Access Act 2009*.

The *Government Information Public Access Act 2009* allows for a person to obtain certain information that is held by the Council that is not already publicly available.

4.11 REPORTING

Council is required to report to the Ombudsman annually on the number and nature of Public Interest Disclosure complaints received.

4.12 AVAILABILITY

This Customer Service Charter is available:

- For public inspection at the Council Office during normal office hours,
- On the Council's website free of charge, and
- From the Council offices free of charge.

4.13 REVIEW

This Customer Service Charter will be reviewed at least once every four years.

5 LEGISLATION

- Local Government Act 1993
- Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998
- Government Information Public Access Act 2009
- Disability Inclusion Act 2014

Related Documents

N/A

Authority

Council Meeting 22/02/2024 Resolution no. 020/2024

Policy Owner / Further Assistance

Director Finance and Corporate Services

Review Date

02/2028

Revision History

Date	Description of Change	Sections Affected
25/05/2017	Adopted by Council	All
17/12/2020	No modifications	All
22/02/2024	Adopted with modifications	All