

DOCUMENT TYPE	Policy
TITLE	CUSTOMER SERVICE
NUMBER:	POL-2001

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish Council's commitment to delivering professional and quality customer services within the limits of Council resources, priorities and risk management requirements.

The Policy aims to:

1. Promote consistency and fairness in the manner in which the Shire responds to customer service requests, concerns and compliments;
2. Make Council's Policies, and the limits for addressing customer service requests accessible and understandable to the customer;
3. Ensure customers receive full and appropriate level of service within the bounds of available resources, priorities and risk management requirements;
4. Promote leading practice behaviours and attitudes as the basis for effective and efficient customer service.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with Ombudsman Western Australia's "Guidelines on Complaint Handling" and "Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct: Practice Manual".

DEFINITIONS

Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with Council's level of service, employees, or policies and procedures affecting an individual or group of customers.

Compliment is a statement of satisfaction regarding Council's level of service, employees, or policies and procedures affecting an individual or group of customers.

Concern is any matter of interest or importance to the customer.

Customer is any person or organisation having dealings with the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley.

Customers Who Cannot Be Satisfied and/or Constantly Raise the Same Issue With Different Staff may include any person or groups who do not accept that the Council is unable to assist them, provide any further assistance or level of service than has been provided already and/or disagree with the action Council has taken in relation to the complaint, concern or customer service request and who continue to make representations to staff insisting, demanding action/attention/resolution to their matter.

Customers Who Make Unreasonable Demands include any person whose demands staff to significantly and unreasonable divert Council's resources away from core functions or create an unequitable allocation of resources to other customers. Such demands may result from the amount of information requested, the nature or scale of services sought or the number of approaches seeking information, assistance or service.

Customer Service Request is a request for the provision of services (including the provision of information); a report about damaged or faulty infrastructure; a report requiring action by the Shire, for example reports about noise, dogs, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspects of the Shire's service provision. All customer service requests will be recorded as a Customer Service Request within the Records Module of SynergySoft (the Shire's software system).

Difficult Customer Behaviours includes behaviour that is rude, abusive or aggressive through expressions or gestures, verbal abuse of a personal or general nature, intimidating, threatening or offensive behaviour, physical violence or physical violence against a person.

Service Standard is a stated timeframe for the completion of customer service requests as published in the Council's Customer Service Charter (under development).

Unreasonable Behaviour includes behaviour from those who, because of their contacts with the Shire and staff, negatively impact on the ability to deal effectively with their, or other customer's concerns, requests or complaints.

Unreasonable Complainant Conduct, Customer Service Requests or Requests for Information include those that are likely to cause distress, disruption, irritation or embarrassment, without any proper or justified cause.

POLICY STATEMENTS

Scope

This Policy applies to all Councillors and staff at the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley who deal with customers, members of the public, other agencies, service providers, community organisations or other members of staff. The policy applies to all customer compliments, concerns and customer service requests made by customers in relation to the Shire's operations.

This Policy does not apply to concerns or complaints about the conduct of Councillors or staff that are in accordance with prescribed rules of conduct as described in the *Local Government Act 1995 and Local Government (Rules of Conduct) Regulations 2007* or the Council's Code of Conduct. Please refer to Council's Complaint Management Policy and Code of Conduct.

The Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley's Commitment to Customer Service

- We are committed to the timely, efficient, and consistent delivery of a range of quality services which support the vision and mission contained within the Strategic Community Plan 2012-2022:

Vision: For the East Kimberley to be a thriving community with opportunities for all.

Mission: To enable the East Kimberley to develop in a manner that will achieve social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits for all.

- We will ensure that all customer contact is fair, courteous, respectful and professional. We subscribe to continuous improvement in service delivery to meet the changing needs of our customers and community.
- We will provide accurate information and advice about a customer's obligations and entitlements.
- We strive to provide a level of service that does not attract complaints, however in the instances where customers are dissatisfied, we will take all possible steps to achieve a resolution.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

How You Can Contact Us

You can contact us to make an enquiry, lodge a customer service request, concern or compliment:

1. In person by visiting one of the Shire Administration Offices, or by telephone between the hours of 8:00am to 4:00pm Monday to Friday (except Public Holidays) at:

<u>Kununurra Administration Office</u> 20 Coolibah Drive, Kununurra Ph: (08) 9168 4100 Fax: (08) 9168 1798	<u>Wyndham Administration Office</u> Koolama Street, Wyndham Ph: (08) 9161 1002 Fax: (08) 9161 1295
---	--
2. By post to PO Box 614, Kununurra, WA, 6743
3. By email to: mail@swek.wa.gov.au
4. Via the internet by visiting the Shire's website at: www.swek.wa.gov.au

Service Standards

When you, as a customer, visit or telephone the Shire, we will:

- Treat you politely and with respect;
- Listening carefully to what you say;
- Provide a prompt, relevant, accurate and professional service;
- Refer you, where appropriate, to alternative places where the service may be available if the Shire is not able to provide the service you seek;
- Treat your personal information with confidentiality;
- Be helpful and sensitive to your needs;
- Keep you informed if the resolution to your enquiry is being delayed.

Where an enquiry is of a complex nature, or a meeting with a specific Officer is required, customers are requested to make a prior appointment.

Response Times

- The Shire undertakes a wide variety of activities which vary both in complexity and time taken to complete.
- If you lodge a concern, request for information or a customer service request, you will be provided with an acknowledgement of receipt within 10 working days.
- After an acknowledgement is issued, the response times will be dependent upon your request or concern, whereby Officers will endeavour to keep you informed of the progress.
- The Shire is currently developing a schedule of processing/response times to provide a guide to the most common service requests, with target times for completion or resolution.
- Response times extend to any online communications.

Accessibility

- We will make our services accessible for customers by supplementing personal contact options with a range of web and telephone-based payment, service request and information services.

Our Expectations of Our Customers

To help us to help you, we ask that you:

- Treat our staff courteously and with mutual respect.
- To respect the privacy and rights of other people.
- Provide us with your name, address and telephone number so that compliments, customer service requests and concerns can be registered and responded to.

- Provide complete and accurate details of your customer service request or concern and work with us to resolve these together.
- Provide separate communications for individual issues.
- Report any damage to, or failure of, the Shire's infrastructure or property.
- Provide us with constructive feedback.
- Phone to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or a need to see a specific Officer.

Customer Service Process

1. If a customer's dissatisfaction relates to a failure in the Shire's infrastructure or service, such as potholes in a road, or an uneven footpath, this will be treated in the first instance as a customer service request.
2. A customer service request may be lodged by telephone or in writing, at the Customer Service counter, or via the internet where an appropriate department or Officer will be allocated the task.
3. If a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of a customer service request or concern, or the matter relates to unsatisfactory conduct of an Officer(s), the matter will be treated as a complaint and dealt with by the Chief Executive Officer. All complaints are to be lodged in writing. Please refer to the Complaints Management Policy for further information.
4. We commit to a range of options for addressing unfair and incorrect decisions, or any unreasonable Policy or procedure, or any inappropriate response, action or treatment by an Officer. Appropriate remedies may include:
 - Admission of fault and apology
 - Explanation
 - Change of decision
 - Change to a policy or procedure
 - Repair / rework / replacement
 - Counselling or disciplining of staff

More than one remedy may be applied if the circumstances justify that course of action.

Dealing with Difficult Customer Behaviours

Councillors and staff aim to treat customers with respect at all times and make every reasonable effort to address the customer's needs even if they are being difficult or demanding. However, customers are also expected to treat staff and Councillors with respect and courtesy. This expectation is also extended to any online communications.

Customers Who Cannot Be Satisfied and/or Constantly Raise the Same Issue With Different Staff

It is certain however, that whatever standard of professional and positive customer service the Shire achieves, there will always be a small percentage of customers whose issues cannot be dealt with to their satisfaction. This may be the result of a refusal by the customer to accept a decision, demands placed on the Council or staff which are not within our scope or resources to meet, or a level of rudeness or aggression shown to staff or a Councillor by the customer that makes it unsafe or unreasonable to proceed. In these situations, the Shire will take steps to ensure our staff's health, safety and wellbeing is protected.

If, in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, a customer cannot be satisfied and all appropriate avenues of internal review or appeal have been exhausted and the customer continues to write, telephone, email and/or visit the Council the following actions may be taken:

1. Not accept any further phone calls from the customer;
2. Not grant any further interviews (meetings);

3. Continue to receive, read and file correspondence including online communications, but only acknowledge or otherwise respond to it if:
 - a. The customer provides significant new information relating to their concern, customer service request or complaint;
 - b. The customer raises new issues which, in the Chief Executive Officer's opinion, warrant fresh action.

If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, a customer is constantly raising the same issues with different staff, the Chief Executive Officer may notify the customer that:

1. Only a nominated staff member will deal with them in the future; and
2. All future contact with the Council must be in writing, addressed to the nominated staff member; and
3. They must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter.

The customer will be given the opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action and will be referred to Council's Complaint Management Policy or Council's Code of Conduct for options available to them by way of formal complaint about particular staff or via submissions they might make to the Western Australian Ombudsman.

The Chief Executive Officer will advise Council of any correspondence issued to customers who cannot be satisfied.

Customers Who Make Unreasonable Demands

If, in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, a customer is making unreasonable demands on the Council or staff and the customer continues to write, telephone, email and/or visit the Council the Chief Executive Officer may write to the customer advising them of the Council's concern and requesting that they limit and focus their requests and that if the customer continues to place unreasonable demands on the organisation then the Shire may;

- a. Not respond to any future correspondence and only take action where, in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, the correspondence raises specific, substantial and serious issues; or
- b. Only respond to a certain number of requests in a given period.

The customer will be given the opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action and will be referred to Council's Complaint Management Policy or Council's Code of Conduct for options available to them by way of formal complaint about particular staff or via submissions they might make to the Western Australian Ombudsman.

Customers Who Are Demonstrating Difficult Customer Behaviours

If, in the opinion of any Councillor or staff member, rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements are made in telephone conversations or meetings, the Councillor or staff member may:

1. Warn the customer that if the behaviour continues, that the conversation or meeting will be terminated or
2. Terminate the conversation or meeting if the rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour continues after a warning has been given or
3. Call upon a Manager or Police, as appropriate, if there is a perceived threat.

Where a conversation or meeting has been terminated, we as the staff member must notify the Chief Executive Officer as soon as possible.

If, in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, any correspondence to Council contains personal abuse, inflammatory statements or material clearly intended to intimidate, it will be returned to the sender and not otherwise acted upon.

Customers Who Are Demonstrating Unreasonable Complaint Conduct

- If a customer continues to make representations that include one or more of the following;
- That have no basis of fact and/or are considered frivolous or mischievous;
- That are conducted in a manner to harass or annoy, to cause delay or detriment, or any other wrongful purpose;
- That have been instituted or pursued without reasonable grounds;
- Whereby the customer is unreasonable in their persistence of demands;
- Whereby the customer demonstrates an unreasonable lack of cooperation;
- Whereby any staff member's personal boundaries are made to feel threatened, stressed or ill at ease through any of the customer's behaviours;

The Chief Executive Officer may declare unreasonable complaint conduct and the following actions may be taken:

1. Not accept any further phone calls from the customer;
2. Not grant any further interviews (meetings);
3. Continue to receive, read and file correspondence but only acknowledge or otherwise respond to it if:
 - a. The customer provides significant new information relating to their concern, customer service request or complaint;
 - b. The customer raises new issues which, in the Chief Executive Officer's opinion, warrant fresh action.

The customer will be given the opportunity to make representations about the Shire's proposed course of action and will be referred to Council's Complaint Management Policy or Council's Code of Conduct for options available to them by way of formal complaint about particular staff or via submissions they might make to the Western Australian Ombudsman.

The Chief Executive Officer will advise Councillors of any correspondence issued to customers that have been deemed to have unreasonable complaint conduct.

General

In all of the situations referred to in this Policy, adequate documentary records must be made and maintained on the appropriate Shire file.

Where the Chief Executive Officer determines to limit a customer's access to the Shire in any of the ways specified in this Policy, the Chief Executive Officer must advise the Councillors as soon as possible of the relevant circumstances and the action taken.

RISK

Risk: Failure to comply with legislative requirements leading to damage of reputation and/or financial loss.

Control: Review policies and procedures in accordance with review schedule.

Risk: Inability to deliver levels of service expected by the community.

Control: Current budget and service levels.

Risk: Loss of corporate knowledge with staff turnover.

Control: Documentation of service procedures; multi-skilling where appropriate.

Risk: Wrong advice provided by CEO leading to political damage or financial loss.

Control: Seek specialist technical and legislative/legal advice from relevant agencies and organisations.

Risk: Poor communication of Council issues to the community.

Control: Media and communications policy and procedures; media training for Councillors.

DOCUMENT AND VERSION CONTROL

Responsible Directorate	Corporate Services		
Responsible Officer	Director Corporate Services		
Statutory References	<i>Local Government Act 1995 – Sections 2.7, 5.40</i> <i>State Records Act 2000</i>		
Related Documents	Nil		
Amendment History (Adoption and last 3 amendments)			
Version	Date Issued - Resolution Number	Item #	Description of Change
1.0	23/06/2015 – 10977	13.1.4	Council Adoption
2.0	23/05/2017 – 11689	12.4.4	Review Adopted by Council
2.1	08/11/2023 – CEO028	--	Reference Updates as per POL-1014 Policy Management (previously CP-CS-3281)
Date of Next Review June 2020			