
Quality Customer Service

1. The purpose of this policy is

to develop an organisational culture focussed on meeting the needs and expectations of the customer and continuously improving services for the customer.

2. Policy statement

Warringah Council is committed to demonstrating value for money for our range of customers by providing the services our customers want in the way our customers want.

3. Principles

- Each staff member is accountable for the quality of customer service delivered through their own work or the quality of output of any project or work team(s) of which they are a member
- Directors, Service Unit Managers and Team Leaders, Supervisors, Project Managers are responsible for developing a customer focussed work ethic in their teams and empowering staff to undertake more customer focussed decision making
- Management will provide staff with the appropriate tools, information and training to provide quality customer service
- Service Unit Managers, Team Leaders, Supervisors, Project Managers are responsible for working in consultation with their teams to develop and implement customer focussed systems and processes that respond to and satisfy internal and external customer needs and expectations.

4. Amendments

This policy was last amended on 7 August 2006.

5. Authorisation

The Quality Customer Service policy (STR-PL510) was authorised by Council on 24/6/1997.

This policy is due for review on 31 December 2003.

6. Who is responsible for implementing this policy?

All staff, whether on the client or provider side of the organisation are responsible for the success of the Quality Customer Service Policy.

7. Document owner

Director Planning and Assessment Services
Director Customer and Community Services.

8. File number

175.001.025.

9. Legislation and references

For further information related to the Quality Customer Service policy see:

The Local Government Act 1993, Sections 2-8 and 14

This policy is implemented in conjunction with:

- Warringah Council Human Resources Policy Manual (Learning & Development and Performance Management)
- Warringah Council's Code of Conduct
- Warringah Council's Management Plan "Leading Us into the 21st Century"

9.1 Definitions

None.

STR-PL 510 Quality Customer Service (cont.)

Guidelines:

What is Quality Customer Service?

Quality Customer Service is focussed on achieving measurable improvements in outcomes for customers.

We will achieve this by:

- Knowing and responding to the needs and expectations of our customers
- Measuring performance on a regular basis to make sure the needs and expectations of customers are being met efficiently, effectively and equitably
- Taking steps to continuously improve services as a result of customer feedback

Who are our customers?

All staff have customers. They may be internal or external or both. Before customer service can be improved, we first need to know who our customers are.

Internal customers provide services which support staff who deal directly with external customers. External customers include residents and ratepayers, community groups, the business community, volunteers, other levels of government and government agencies.

There are four categories of external customers with different values, needs and expectations:

- direct customers who are people directly using a service
- indirect customers who are people who benefit from or are affected by the service although they do not directly interact with the service themselves
- voluntary customers who choose to use Council services
- involuntary customers who are required by legislation to deal with Council in areas such as approval processes

It is only by identifying what is important to each customer group using a particular service that resources can be directed efficiently, effectively and equitably to maximise satisfaction.

It may not always be possible to maximise satisfaction with an outcome in complex areas such as local approvals where the needs and expectations of an applicant and objector to

a proposal are in conflict. The focus here is to maximise satisfaction with the process, and minimise, where possible, dissatisfaction with the outcome.

What criteria do customers use to judge the quality of customer service?

The following criteria is used by customer groups to judge the quality of customer service. They are considered by Council service units in the design and delivery of services and when measuring customer satisfaction levels with the service.

- **Timeliness** the degree to which a service is made available when it is needed.
- **Consistency** the degree to which the service (including advice) is repeated in the same way by different parts of the organization.
- **Reliability** the degree to which the service can be depended upon to be regular and predictable.
- **Accuracy** the degree to which the service is free from error.
- **Courtesy** the degree of politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of staff.
- **Value for Money** the degree to which cost of service is seen as well spent.
- **Responsiveness** the degree of willingness to help and respond to individual customers and listen to their needs.
- **Access** the degree of ease experienced by the customer in obtaining the service required.
- **Security** the degree of safety and freedom from danger for the customer while obtaining the service.
- **Probity** the degree of integrity, trustworthiness and ethics of the service provider.
- **Appropriateness** the degree to which the service matches the needs of the customer.
- **Confidentiality** the degree to which information about a customer's situation is protected.
- **Comprehensiveness** the degree to which the service completely meets customer's needs.
- **Communication** the degree to which the customers are provided with clear, relevant, timely information in a preferred format.

Different customer groups place a higher value on different attributes. For example, a developer lodging an application with Council may value timeliness, consistency and access more highly than a parent or guardian using child care services where responsiveness, appropriateness and comprehensiveness may be more highly valued.

It is important to respond to these differences between customer groups in the planning and delivery of services in order to maximise customer satisfaction.

How do we identify our Customer's needs and expectations and measure satisfaction?

If Council is to provide the right services in the right way it has to identify the needs and expectations of its key customer groups and encourage and respond to regular feedback from them.

Customer needs are the requirements a customer is wanting to fulfill when they interact with Council.

Customer expectations are the assumptions they make about what will happen as part of the service delivery process.

Systematic, deliberate and detailed research and consultation is necessary if Council is to understand its customers and successfully deliver and manager quality customer service. Council is continuously improving its research and consultation mechanisms.

Another important aspect is having a customer suggestions and complaint handling strategy in place that:

- records all written and verbal suggestions, complaints and compliments
- has a process in place to respond to suggestions and complaints
- regularly analyses complaints and suggestions at the service unit and corporate level to identify opportunities for improvement and stopping recurring problems
- enables staff to develop skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, complaints management, mediation and conciliation
- informs customers of their options and what to do if they have a problem
- informs customers of the outcome of their complaint or suggestion

Suggestions and complaints are an important source of customer feedback and are valued by our organization as an opportunity to improve services.

What are Service Standards?

Internal and external customers need to know what level of service they can expect. By identifying and communicating standards for each Service Unit, customer expectations can be effectively managed and performance of service areas can be monitored. These standards will be identified in service level agreements. Such agreements must have customer input in their development and regular customer feedback on their effectiveness.

Council will also develop a public statement called a 'Guarantee of Service' which communicates Council's commitment to quality customer service and the standards of service customers can expect. The statement identifies:

- Who our customers are

- What services we provide
- What our service standards are
- How to contact Council and access our services
- What to do and who to contact if there is a problem

How do we sustain a Customer Focused Culture?

A customer service culture is sustained if customer focused behaviours and practices are constantly reinforced by managers and work teams. All staff have an important role to play in sustaining the culture and will be held accountable within the delegated responsibilities of their position for customer focused outcomes.

Quality Customer Service is an important criteria that is identified in all position descriptions and will be considered in performance assessments, salary reviews and associated systems for reward and recognition. The corporate learning plan and induction program will also provide mechanisms to promote council's commitment to and develop staff skills in quality customer service.

Warringah Council encourages innovation and excellence and acknowledges and celebrates its successes. One significant way it does this is through the Annual Customer Service Team Awards which recognise the achievement of teams who have excelled in delivering measurable improvements in outcomes for customers. The awards are held during the first quarter of each financial year.

How will we measure our success in providing Quality Customer Service?

Service Unit Managers are responsible for identifying as part of the annual business planning process, areas that will be targeted during the 12 month period for delivering measurable improvements in outcomes for customers. They will also be responsible for reporting on the improvement outcomes.

Operating Principals for all Staff

Attached to this policy are the quality customer service operating principles for all staff of Warringah Council. These principles are consistent with Council's values of Equity, Openness, Services, Integrity and Efficiency.

Quality Customer Service

Operating Principles for All Staff

Equity

- We listen to our diverse range of customers and make every effort to understand and respond to their needs and expectations.

Openness

- We keep our customers informed about issues that affect them.
- We involve customers in our planning and decision making processes.
- We make sure our decision making processes are fair, open and unbiased.

Service

- We treat all customers politely and patiently and communicate with them clearly.
- We work towards maximising customer satisfaction with outcomes; in cases where this is not possible, we work towards maximising customer satisfaction with our processes.
- We take ownership of a problem and seek out customer focused solutions.
- We value complaints and suggestions from our customers as an opportunity for improvement.
- We acknowledge our mistakes and take steps to rectify them and learn from them.
- We promptly reply to correspondence, facsimiles and email. When we cannot address a matter quickly we forward an interim reply or give feedback on progress.
- We answer telephone calls promptly and never leave an unattended phone ringing. When answering a phone we always give our name and service area. We pass on messages or respond to messages without delay.
- We cooperate with each other to make sure staff are available at all times to assist customers.

Integrity

- We refrain from any conduct in the performance of our duties which may embarrass or offend a customer.
- We act with honesty and integrity in our dealings with customers.
- We remain calm and objective when dealing with angry or difficult customers.

Efficiency

- We take steps every day to improve what we do and how we do it.
- We have a commitment to quality in everything we do.