



# Customer Service - Council Policy

## 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline Council's Customer Service Charter and related safeguards regarding unreasonable customer conduct. This ensures a staff focus on high levels of customer service performance, and that customers are treated fairly and reasonably whilst also providing for Council staff to undertake their work safely and for Council resources to be used efficiently and effectively.

## 2. SCOPE & AUTHORITY

The Customer Service Council Policy and included Customer Service Charter applies to all Councillors and Council Employees in relation to their dealings with all customers of Council through all customer and communications channels.

This is a discretionary policy, resolved by Council under its powers in accordance with the Queensland Local Government Act (2009) Chapter 2, Section 9 which states:

### **9 Powers of local governments generally**

*(1) A local government has the power to do anything that is necessary or convenient for the good rule and local government of its local government area.*

## 3. POLICY STATEMENT

### 3.1 Customer Service Charter

Balonne Shire Council is committed to being accessible and responsive to all residents, ratepayers and visitors who approach Council for service or with a complaint.

All Customer Service will be delivered in accordance with the Customer Service Charter of Council, including standards, included as Attachment A.

### 3.2 Dealing with Unreasonable Customer Conduct

The success of Council depends on:

- Council's ability to do Council work and perform Council functions in the most effective and efficient ways possible
- the health, safety and security of Council staff; and
- Council's ability to allocate resources fairly across all the requests for services and complaints received.

Most customers who interact with Council conduct themselves reasonably and responsibly in their interactions, even when they are experiencing high levels of distress, frustration and anger about their request for service or complaint. However, in some cases, some customers may conduct themselves in ways that are inappropriate and unacceptable despite Council's best efforts to help them. This may be due to refusal by the customer to accept a Council decision, demands placed on Council which are not within scope or resources to meet, or a level of rudeness, abusiveness or aggression shown to staff by the customer that makes it unsafe or unreasonable to proceed.

If customers conduct themselves unreasonably in their dealings with Council, their conduct can significantly affect the safety of staff and the effective and efficient allocation of resources. As a result, Council will take decisive action to manage any customer conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects the effective and efficient allocation of resources and will support Council staff who have concerns for their health, safety and security when responding in accordance with this policy.

Where a Manager is satisfied that every effort has been made by staff to address a customer's needs, and that the customer's conduct has become unreasonable, they may make a decision that there is not reasonable prospect of reaching a position where a particular customer is satisfied with Council's actions and service. In such a case the Manager may decide to stop or limit responses to the customer in relation to the particular issue in question.



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This may include:

- refusal to accept telephone calls or make appointments with the customer
- a request that all future communication be in writing
- provision of responses to queries, information requests only where new issue has been presented
- identification of a single staff member as contact person through whom all communication must occur
- the Chief executive officer writes directly to the person regarding the appropriate behaviour they have to display

The aim, when taking such actions must not be to punish the customer, but solely to manage the negative impacts of their conduct.

Where the Manager has made such a decision, they will ensure that this is communicated in writing to the customer and that the customer is given the opportunity to make representation to Council about the proposed course of action. In addition, the Manager will advise the relevant Director, or the Chief Executive Officer of any correspondence issued in relation to such a decision. The Manager must then continue to monitor any further contact with the customer over the issue.

In the first instance, staff should attempt to settle a situation that could become escalated by applying the advice contained in any relevant guidelines of Council and to the best of their ability:

- not taking the behaviour personally
- acknowledging the customer and their concerns
- actively listening to the customer
- empathising with and seeking to understand the customer's concerns
- seeking an outcome and asking for feedback
- following-up

If in the opinion of any staff member unreasonable customer conduct is displayed in personal or telephone conversations, meetings or interviews, the staff member may:

- warn the person that if the behaviour continues the conversation or interview will be terminated
- terminate the conversation if the rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour continues after a warning has been given

Where a conversation or interview is terminated in accordance with above, the staff member must notify the Manager or the relevant Director of the details as soon as possible.

If in the opinion of the Manager any correspondence to Council contains unreasonable customer conduct it will be returned to the sender and not otherwise acted upon unless determined to be of such a serious nature that it must be referred to an appropriate law enforcement agency.

If a staff member feels that the safety of themselves or others has been or could be compromised due to unreasonable customer conduct, they should attempt to remove themselves from the situation. At all times personal safety of staff and others is the highest priority and every effort should be made to ensure it. The staff member should call police if the situation is urgent and there is or could be a threat to personal safety of any person or property.

## 4. RESPONSIBILITIES

### 4.1 All Councillors and Council employees

- It is mandatory for all Councillors and Council employees to undertake any dealings with customers in compliance with this Policy and any subordinate Guidelines

### 4.2 Managers and Directors

- Are obliged to respect, promote and act compatibly with this policy and any subordinate guidelines
- Must implement localised processes to ensure compliance with this policy
- Must consider and decide whether to stop or limit responses to a customer on a particular issue in the context and manner described in clause 3.2



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- Must record and monitor all cases where the limitations described in clause 3.2 are applied

## 4.2 Director Finance and Corporate Services

- Shall be the custodian of this policy
- Shall implement control measures and training that provide assurance that Council acts in accordance with the policy
- Shall implement systems and processes to measure actual Customer Service performance

## 4.3 Chief Executive Officer

- Shall ensure, through the Director, Finance & Corporate Services that the Council is complying with this Policy and reports actual customer service performance to Council against the Customer Charter on a regular basis.

## 5. RISK

This policy and the related Customer Charter exist in order to minimise the risk of unsatisfactory or inconsistent service to council customers, and also to provide staff and management with guidance and authority to protect themselves and colleagues from any rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour from customers, and the related unreasonable use of ratepayer funded council resources.

## 6. IMPACTS

**Corporate Plan:** Goal – 5. Governance; Program Areas – 5.4 Excellence in service delivery and project management

**Human Rights Compatibility Statement:** This Policy has been assessed as compatible with the Human Rights protected under the Human Rights Act 2019;

**Engagement:** This policy has been developed in consultation with the Senior Leadership Group.

## 7. RELATED LAWS

- Local Government Act (Qld) 2009
- Local Government Regulation (Qld) 2012
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011

## 8. RELATED COUNCIL DOCUMENTS

- Work Health and Safety Council Policy

## 9. REVISION HISTORY

### Revokes:

- Customer Service Charter # 523261 Version No.1 adopted by Council 5/06/2020
- Dealing with Difficult Customers Policy # adopted by Council 05/12/2016

**Previous approved versions:** Nil

**Suggested to review by:** 21/10/2023

## 10. DEFINITIONS

**CEO** means the Chief Executive Officer of the Balonne Shire Council appointed in accordance with the Local Government Act 2009.

**Council** means Balonne Shire Council, its elected Councillors, its management and its employees.

**Council Employees** means all permanent, casual and temporary employees, contractors, volunteers, apprentices, trainees and work experience students.

**Unreasonable Customer Conduct** can be categorised into the following:



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## *(a) Unreasonable persistence*

Unreasonable persistence is continued, incessant and unrelenting conduct by a customer that has a disproportionate and unreasonable impact on Council organisation, staff, services, time and/or resources. Some examples of unreasonably persistent behaviour include:

- an unwillingness or inability to accept reasonable and logical explanations including final decisions that have been comprehensively considered and dealt with
- persistently demanding a review simply because it is available and without arguing or presenting a case for one
- pursuing and exhausting all available review options when it is not warranted and refusing to accept further action cannot or will not be taken on their requests for service or complaints
- reframing a request or complaint in an effort to get it taken up again
- bombarding Council staff/organisation with phone calls, visits, letters, emails (including cc'd correspondence) after repeatedly being asked not to do so
- contacting different people within Council and/or externally to get a different outcome or more sympathetic response to their request or complaint – internal and external forum shopping

## *(b) Unreasonable demands*

Unreasonable demands are any demands (express or implied) that are made by a customer that have a disproportionate and unreasonable impact on Council organisation, staff, services, time and/or resources. Some examples of unreasonable demands include:

- issuing instructions and making demands about how Council have/should handle their request or complaint, the priority it was/should be given, or the outcome that was/should be achieved
- insisting on talking to a senior manager, Chief Executive Officer or Councillor personally when it is not appropriate or warranted
- emotional blackmail and manipulation with the intention to guilt trip, intimidate, harass, shame or portray themselves as being victimised – when this is not the case
- insisting on outcomes that are not possible or appropriate in the circumstances – eg for someone to be sacked or prosecuted, an apology and/or compensation when no reasonable basis for expecting this
- demanding services that are of a nature or scale that Council cannot provide and when this has been explained to them repeatedly

## *(c) Unreasonable lack of cooperation*

Unreasonable lack of cooperation is an unwillingness and/or inability by a customer to cooperate with Council, staff, or complaints system and processes that results in a disproportionate and unreasonable use of Council services, time and/or resources. Some examples of unreasonable lack of cooperation include:

- sending a constant stream of comprehensive and/or disorganised information without clearly defining any issues of complaint or explaining how they relate to the core issues being raised
- providing little or no detail with a request for service or complaint or presenting information in 'dribs and drabs'
- refusing to follow or accept Council instructions, suggestions, or advice without a clear or justifiable reason for doing so
- arguing frequently and/or with extreme intensity that a particular solution is the correct one in the face of valid contrary arguments and explanations
- displaying unhelpful behaviour – such as withholding information, acting dishonestly or misquoting others

## *(d) Unreasonable arguments*

Unreasonable arguments include any arguments that are not based in reason or logic, that are incomprehensible, false or inflammatory, trivial or delirious and that disproportionately and unreasonably impact upon Council organisation, staff, services, time, and/or resources. Arguments are unreasonable when they:



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- fail to follow a logical sequence
- are not supported by any evidence and/or are based on conspiracy theories
- lead a customer to reject all other valid and contrary arguments
- are trivial when compared to the amount of time, resources and attention that the customer demands
- are false, inflammatory or defamatory

(e) *Unreasonable behaviour*

Unreasonable behaviour is conduct that is unreasonable in all circumstances – regardless of how stressed, angry or frustrated that a customer is – because it unreasonably compromises the health, safety and security of Council staff, other service users or the customer himself/herself. Some examples of unreasonable behaviours include:

- acts of aggression, verbal abuse, derogatory, racist, or grossly defamatory remarks
- harassment, intimidation or physical violence
- rude, confronting and threatening correspondence
- threats of harm to self or third parties, threats with a weapon or threats to damage property including bomb threats
- stalking (in person or online)
- emotional manipulation

## 11. ATTACHMENTS

**Attachment A:** Customer Service Charter



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## Attachment A: Customer Charter

The customer Service Charter is included on the following two (2) pages.



# Customer Service Charter

This Customer Service Charter outlines our commitment to you and the standards you can expect and your options if we don't meet those standards.

Our Customer Service Charter will be guided by:

## Our values



<b>Our Customers</b>	Our customers are the centre of everything we do; we get things done with speed, conviction and agility.
<b>Our People</b>	We value teamwork and interdependence; we value each other and seek benefit from diverse people and perspectives.
<b>Our Reputation</b>	Our reputation is our most valuable asset; we act honestly and consistently in our behaviours, actions and decisions.

## Our standards

Personal Information provided by a customer to Council is protected in accordance with the requirements of the *Information Privacy Act 2009* and the *Right to Information Act 2009*

### We aim to:

Answer your telephone calls	➤ Within 4 rings
Return your telephone message	➤ Within 24 hours
Respond to written correspondence	➤ Within 10 business days
Acknowledge service requests	➤ In 3 business days
Action/Resolve service requests	➤ Within 10 business days
Acknowledge complaints	➤ In 3 business days
Investigate complaints	➤ Within 30 business days
Keep you updated	➤ When matter cannot be resolved within above timeframes
Refer customers on social media to service request process or customer service charter	➤ Within 24 hours on business days
Provide excellent customer service	➤ To all customers in a professional and polite manner
Continuously improve our services	➤ Through customer feedback
Respond to emergencies	➤ After-hours service available via Council's phone number ➤ For genuine emergencies officers will respond as a call out

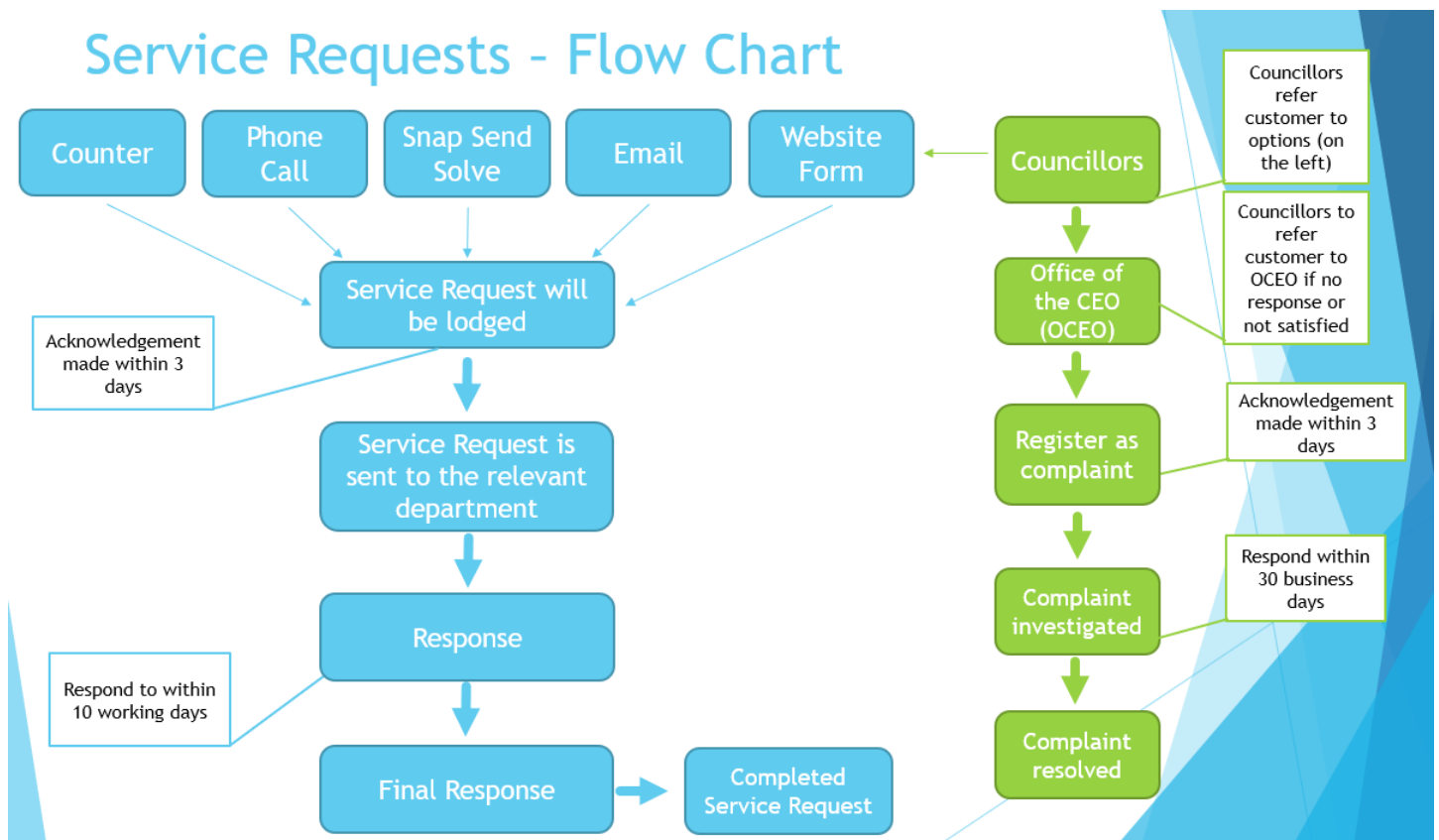


# Customer Service Charter

*If Council cannot provide the service you require, we will endeavour to refer you to an appropriate service provider.*

<p><b>To allow us to help, we expect that you will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide us with all the information that we need to assist you</li> <li>Communicate with us respectfully</li> <li>Contact us if you believe we have made an error</li> <li>Provide reference numbers where applicable</li> <li>Provide feedback on our services</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">(i)</p>	<p><b>What if you are not happy with our responses?</b></p> <p>We recognise that there are times when you will disagree with our actions or decisions. Therefore we have a complaints management policy in place.</p> <p>You can lodge a complaint:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On our Website; or</li> <li>By submitting it in writing to Council</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">(frowning face)</p>	<p><b>Whenever you contact us we will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify ourselves</li> <li>Greet and listen to you with respect, courtesy and understanding</li> <li>Respond to your enquiry in a professional and timely manner</li> <li>Endeavour to resolve your enquiry at the first point of contact</li> <li>Set clear expectations of the next steps and deliver on those commitments</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">(smiling face)</p>
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## Service Requests - Flow Chart



**Contact Council:**

- 112-118 Victoria Street, ST GEORGE QLD 4487
- 07 4620 8888
- Balonne Shire Council
- council@balonne.qld.gov.au
- Snap Send Solve (Download the free app)
- BalonneSC
- PO Box 201, ST GEORGE QLD 4487
- www.balonne.qld.gov.au