



Customer Service Experience

COUNCIL POLICY

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| Branch: | Business Transformation and Customer Experience | Adopted Date: | 9 May 2023 |
| Responsible Officer: | Manager Business Transformation and Customer Experience | Next Review Date: | July 2027 |
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Hawkesbury City Council (Council) provides a wide range of facilities and services to the community.

In providing these facilities and services, Council:

- Strives for excellence, continuous improvement and best practise in all interactions with customers and the community;
- Is committed to delivering a quality customer service experience that is consistent, accurate, efficient, effective, solutions-focused and responsive and delivered in ways that are professional, respectful, inclusive and uphold the rights of all customers; and
- Actively encourages feedback about our program delivery, services, processes, performance and conduct of Council staff from our customers. Council is committed to using this information to improve our services for the benefit of all customers, as well as adapt to the changing needs and expectations of our customers.

Our commitment to customers is reflected in our Community Strategic Plan and our Organisational Values.

This Policy outlines the principles that drive, inform and direct staff on how to interact and connect with customers to ensure they effectively contribute to a quality customer service experience within minimum standards.

This Policy and the Customer Service Experience Charter will assist Council to meet its statutory obligations as defined by legislation.

1.2 Statement

Section 270 of the *Local Government Act 1993* requires Council to establish policies and procedures to respond to reasonable requests for the provision of a service by the Council or the improvement of a service provided by the Council and to deal with complaints about the actions of the Council, staff and/or other persons acting on behalf of the Council.

Council recognises the equal importance of internal and external customers, and that the way in which staff interact with customers impacts significantly on the customers' perception of Council. Providing a quality customer service experience for our customers supports the effectiveness and value of our organisation.

This Policy reflects legislative and regulatory guidelines, ensuring Council has an approach to delivering quality customer service and experience that is equitable for all customers.

1.3 Definitions

The definitions of certain terms are:

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| Complaint | An expression of dissatisfaction with our services, staff or procedures. |
| Compliment | An expression of when we have met or exceeded the needs or expectations of the customer. |
| Customer | An individual or business (internal or external) who accesses, receives, or benefits from facilities, goods and/or services and interacts with or within Council to request information, services or actions from officers. |
| Customer Request | A request for a service or action by a customer. |
| Customer Service | The task or query on behalf of a customer. |
| Customer Experience | The perception or feeling a customer has during and after they access one of the Council's services, interact with our staff, visit our facilities or use one of our systems. |



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| Customer Service Experience | The concept of looking at both the customer service and customer experience as a whole responsibility in the way in which the Council communicates, interacts and connects with its customers. The fundamental principle being Council cannot be delivering to its community expectations if it isn't focused on delivering effective customer service and creating quality customer experiences; these go hand in hand. |
| General Feedback | A complimentary or constructive feedback about our program delivery, services, processes and performance. |
| Service Standards | They set the expectations for the customer on the amount of time it is reasonable to expect Council will take to respond, resolve an enquiry or deliver a service. |

1.4 Scope

This Policy applies to all Councillors, Council staff and persons carrying out work on behalf of the Council, such as contractors, consultants, workplace students and volunteers.

Council staff are responsible and accountable for delivering and creating a quality customer service experience in line with this Policy, the Customer Service Experience Charter and in conjunction with any other related Policy or Council directive.

In addition, the Mayor and Councillors play a role in referring requests for services, handling sensitive or escalated requests back to Council for appropriate action and identifying any policy or strategy changes.

1.5 Objectives

The overall aim of this Policy is to:

1. Ensure Councillors, Council staff and persons carrying out work on behalf of the Council deliver a customer service experience in line with best practise expectations.
2. Develop a 'customer-first' culture throughout the organisation by providing staff with the support and tools they need to deliver a quality customer service experience. This includes training, education and access to the appropriate systems, processes, technologies and strategies.
3. Ensure our customers are our priority, and work towards resolving enquiries at the first point of contact wherever possible.
4. Deliver a quality customer service experience across multiple channels that is consistent, accurate, efficient, effective, solutions-focused, responsive, and delivered in ways that are professional, respectful and uphold the rights of all customers.
5. Ensure Council's activities remain customer-focused by considering feedback to continuously improve our program delivery, services, processes and performance.
6. Demonstrate that Council values our customers' time and is committed to offering a choice on how to interact with us.
7. Improve the quality and timeliness of customer experiences through regular performance reporting on a defined suite of service standards.
8. Recognise that delivering a quality customer service experiences is everyone's responsibility, and that these standards are clearly set and supported by our organisation.



2. PRINCIPLES

2.1 General Principles

1. Council's customer service experience mission is *'our customers and working well together is at the heart of everything we do'*.
2. Council's customer service experience vision is *'we strive for excellence, continuous improvement and best practise in all interactions with customers and the community. We look to deliver a quality customer service experience that is consistent, accurate, efficient and effective, solutions-focused and responsive and delivered in ways that are professional, respectful, inclusive and uphold the rights of all customers'*.
3. Council encourages customer feedback to monitor and improve our service for the benefit of all customers, as well as adapt to our customers' changing needs and expectations. Council actively invites feedback through community consultations, public exhibitions, and surveys. In addition, Council seeks feedback periodically when customers interact with our services.
4. Council recognises the importance of complaints and regards them as an opportunity to improve our processes, delivery of services and conduct of staff.

Council makes consistent and fair decisions in line with Council policies and relevant legislation that may result in decisions customers may disagree with. When providing the outcomes, we seek to do this in an empathetic way, understanding customer circumstances.

While most problems can be resolved quickly, there are times when a detailed investigation is required. We will keep you informed of the progress if this is the case.

If a customer is dissatisfied, we encourage the customer to ask for a review of our handling of the matter. The review will determine if we acted according to our policies and guidelines.

5. Council recognises the importance of compliments and regards them as an opportunity to identify when we have met or exceeded customer needs or expectations.
6. Council has a Customer Service Experience Charter, which will drive, inform and direct staff on interacting and connecting with customers.
7. Customer Service Experience corporate channel and service standards have been established as a set of expectations on the amount of time the Council will take to respond, resolve an enquiry or deliver a service. Standards also address how Council wants customers to feel about their experience with us.

These standards do not apply during the festive season office closure, public holidays or periods of emergency or natural disaster. 'Normal periods of operation' refer to times when Council operations are not impacted by holiday periods, a disaster or an emergency that affects their capabilities to deliver services as expected.

8. Council has adopted a Statement of Business Ethics, which requires staff to conduct the Council's business activities in accordance with the Code of Conduct and to observe the highest standards of integrity, ethical behaviour and transparency in their business dealings.

The Code of Conduct holds Council staff accountable for their actions and requires them to act honestly, legally and ethically when dealing with the community and others; to avoid conflicts of interest, both real and perceived; and to act with due care and diligence and in the public interest.

9. Council recognises that customers have the right to expect an acceptable level of service.



Council values the mutual benefits of providing a quality customer service experience but acknowledges that within this experience, there is a clear line between customer rights and staff (Council) responsibilities.

Customers should be mindful of the need to balance their rights with health, safety and wellbeing of Council staff or equity in the use of Council resources.

3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Policy Responsibilities

| Role | Key Responsibilities |
|---------------------------|---|
| Mayor and Councillors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for adhering to this Policy • Refer requests for services, and handling sensitive or escalated requests back to Council for appropriate action • Input into the proposed strategies and policies in relation to customer service experience |
| Executive Leadership Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for adhering to this Policy • Ensure staff awareness and compliance with the Policy • Responsible for the final approval of this Policy • Regularly review reports on arising trends, issues and support recommendations for improvement • Ensure integrity of reports • Develop a culture of customer focus and continuous improvement by taking on customer feedback and integrating it into Operational Plan actions to be undertaken within their division • Encourage staff to make recommendations for improvements |
| Senior Leadership Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for adhering to this Policy • Ensure staff awareness and compliance with the Policy • Ensure employees receive training on this Policy • Ensure that staff are delivering customer service experiences in line with this policy, Customer Service Experience Charter, Council Values and Code of Conduct • Assist and support staff to resolve requests or provide information at first contact • Develop a culture of customer focus and continuous improvement by taking on customer feedback and integrating it into Operational Plan actions to be undertaken within their department. • Recognise staff who deliver exceptional Customer Service Experience • Lead, monitor and mentor staff to resolve requests within Corporate Channel and Service Standards • Ensure team related processes, guidelines and directives are in line with this policy, Customer Service Experience Charter, Council Values and Code of Conduct. |
| Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for adhering to this Policy • Deliver a quality customer service experience in line with this policy, Customer Service Experience Policy and Charter, Council Values and Code of Conduct • Attempt to resolve requests or provide information at first contact • Lodge requests, notes on interactions and all associated communication documents in our corporate systems. If it's existing, look up the original request and add interaction notes • Attempt to resolve issues or concerns before they escalate to a formal complaint in line with Customer Feedback Policy • Escalate any concerns or issues in meeting Corporate Channel or Service Standards with your direct supervisor • Regularly review their service content on centralised knowledge management systems (including information, processes, guidelines, procedures etc) to support the Call Centre resolving request or provide information at first point of contact. Support customers and staff to self-service by retrieving, distributing and sharing knowledge. |



| Role | Key Responsibilities |
|---|---|
| Business Transformation and Customer Experience Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for the development and review of this policy in line with Customer Service Experience Charter, Values and Code of Conduct • Embed a customer first culture throughout the organisation by providing staff with support and the tools they need to deliver a quality customer service including training, education and access to appropriate systems, processes, technologies and strategies • Provide regular reports to Senior Leadership and Executive Leadership teams • Ensure integrity of reports • Assist and support Council employees in relation to administering the Policy • Investigate non-compliance in-line with this Policy, Customer Service Experience, Values and Code of Conduct • Carrying out periodic community surveys to assess how the local community thinks about where Council is performing well and areas where Council needs to improve service. |
| Frontline Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the coordination of customer feedback in line with Council's Customer Feedback Policy. |
| Records Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the coordination of customer feedback in line with Council's Customer Feedback Policy. |

3.2 Breaches of this Policy

Any breach of this Policy may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the Performance Counselling (Disciplinary) Corporate Policy.

4. DOCUMENT CONTROL

4.1 Review

This Policy is reviewed at least every four (4) years or when relevant legislation changes.

4.2 Related Documents

- Hawkesbury City Council - Code of Conduct
- Hawkesbury City Council - Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct
- Hawkesbury City Council - Statement of Business Ethics
- Hawkesbury City Council - Customer Feedback Policy
- Hawkesbury City Council - Customer Service Experience Charter
- Hawkesbury City Council - Community Engagement Policy
- Hawkesbury City Council - Workplace Surveillance Corporate Policy
- Hawkesbury City Council - Performance Counselling (Disciplinary) Corporate Policy
- Hawkesbury City Council - Privacy Management Plan

4.3 Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Guidelines:

- NSW Local Government Act
- NSW State Records Act
- NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act
- NSW Government Information (Public Access) Act
- NSW Ombudsman Good Conduct and Administrative Practice – Guidelines for state and local Guidelines
- NSW Ombudsman Enforcement Guidelines for Councils
- NSW Ombudsman Unreasonable conduct by Complainant Model policy
- NSW Ombudsman Unreasonable conduct by a Complainant
- NSW Ombudsman Effective complaint handling guidelines
- NSW Ombudsman Complaint management framework and model policy
- NSW Ombudsman Apologies – A practical guide