

Our Vision:
Connected - Sustainable - Creative

Bellingen Shire
COUNCIL



Customer Service Charter

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Introduction

Bellingen Shire Council is committed to providing high levels of customer service. To emphasise this commitment, Council has created a Customer Service Charter which details our service commitment to our customers. This Charter will be regularly reviewed and adapted to meet the changing needs of our customers.

Our Commitment to Customer Service

At Bellingen Shire Council we are committed to providing efficient, responsive and friendly service that is value for money for those who live, work or visit the Bellingen Shire. We will work in partnership with our community to deliver excellent service through dedication, innovation and continuous improvement.

Our Customer Service Charter outlines our commitment to providing quality services and gives our customers standards by which our performance can be measured. It provides staff with clear standards to aim for, making our focus on our customers our main priority

Customer service vision and mission

Vision:

Bellingen Shire Council is focussed on shaping the future by being connected, sustainable and creative. Through this vision, Council is committed to the provision of timely, efficient and consistent quality services provided by experienced, knowledgeable and helpful officers that meet our customer's expectations.

Mission:

Our mission is to provide excellent local government services to our community that contribute towards the achievement of Council's vision for the Bellingen Shire. We expect that all staff, whether they are at the counter, working in an office, driving a truck or mowing a park, to be committed to pursuing excellence in their role and be proud and responsible representatives of the Council.

Our customer service promise

Bellingen Shire Council promises to provide a customer friendly organisation, committed to providing service excellence to our community. We will project positive attitudes, a focus on solutions and demonstrate a committed, can do approach.

We will work to understand and respond to the needs of our customers both now and into the future and provide opportunities for community engagement. We will continuously improve our service by proactively welcoming suggestions and seeking feedback from the community and actively measuring and communicating our performance against these commitments.

Service standards you can expect

Our Customer Service Charter is our firm statement of commitment to our customers. Service Standards help to define how we will undertake those activities involving customer relationships, in line with the Community Vision and our Customer Service Charter.

Service Standards set out what our customer service promise means in practice and will be consistently applied across all contact points within Council.

Customer service standards

1 In all dealings with customers, staff will....

- Take personal ownership for customer satisfaction;
 - Treat customers courteously and with respect;
 - Act in a professional and helpful manner;
 - Provide accurate, relevant and timely information;
 - Seek to resolve requests/enquiries at the first point of contact;
- Focus on solutions for customers with a 'can do' approach.

2 When customers telephone, we will...

- Answer calls within three (3) rings or as quickly and efficiently as possible;
- Greet customers politely with a smile in our voice;
- Deal with the call, redirect the call (endeavouring not to transfer the call more than once) or take an accurate message as appropriate;
- Provide customers with an opportunity to leave a voice message when calls cannot be answered personally;
- Return phone calls immediately where possible but not exceeding one (1) business day.

3 When customers visit us, we will...

- Attend the customer service counter(s) promptly;
- Acknowledge people if there is a queue and apologise if they have been kept waiting;
- Give a courteous welcome and offer assistance;
- Meet with customers within five (5) minutes of the appointed time (if a prior appointment has been made), or provide customers with an estimated wait time should they be seeking a meeting with a staff member that has not been prearranged;
- Listen carefully to customer needs by asking pertinent questions, taking notes and confirming details;
- Ensure all customer service officers are professionally attired and identified by name badges and/or personal introduction, and our customer service areas are clean, tidy and aesthetically pleasing whilst also being functional.

4 When customers write to us, we will...

- Respond to letters, emails and faxes within the nominated timeframes for the type of correspondence or within fifteen (15) working days of receipt if no previously nominated timeframe;
- If a full reply is not possible initially, forward an acknowledgement which will indicate when a reply can be expected and the name of the officer to contact with queries;
- Deal with all correspondence as promptly as possible and write in clear, concise language that's easily understood.

Customer Service Requests

Council responds to service requests relating to activities that are the responsibility of Council such as road maintenance, tree clearance and town maintenance. Service requests relating to public safety will be dealt with immediately.

All service requests will be investigated within fifteen (15) working days. Actions will be determined by the priority of the request, Council work schedules and available resources.

When handling requests for service by telephone, personally, letter or email, we will....

- Complete a Customer Request by entering the details into our computerised Corporate Information System;
- Where possible relay the allocated request number to the customer to enable them to follow up on their request if needed;
- Ensure the request is referred to the appropriate supervisor/department for action;
- Respond to the customer within fifteen (15) working days after investigative action has been completed, if the request indicates a response is required;
- Ensure all requests are processed in accordance within standard time frames and documented procedures.

Internal customer service

Regardless of where a staff member works in Council, everyone has a customer and everyone is a customer. Whether the service is provided internally to a direct team member, another business unit, to councillors or externally to the community, we all provide a customer service.

As such we recognise and value the importance of all our customers and will endeavour to deliver excellent service to both our external and internal customers. We acknowledge that the same principles of quality customer service for our external customers apply to every member of staff as internal customers and we will train and monitor staff customer service delivery provided to each other.

All employees will work in partnership with each other to fulfil customer service obligations with the same Service Standards, regardless of whether the customer is a colleague or external customer. Each has a responsibility to ensure that a positive and effective internal customer service culture exists.

When staff are announcing telephone calls, the expectation exists that if the individual staff member is able to answer the telephone at that time, they are able to talk to the customer and not expect a message to be taken on their behalf by the staff member announcing the call.

Quality internal customer service should be managed using the following core set of assumptions:

- Courtesy – can be demonstrated through a helpful and pleasant manner and listening carefully to requests and clarifying our understanding;
- Respect – valuing the feelings, opinions and views of all staff and respecting constructive feedback;
- Maturity – demonstrating a mature and professional approach to our work in a genuine and friendly manner;
- Confidence – doing our job thoroughly and organising our work and systems so that they, and we, are reliable;
- Accuracy – developed by implementing and adhering to checking and monitoring processes.

Helping us to help you

Our Expectations of the Customer

To help us to meet these commitments, we ask our customers to...

- Treat Council officers with respect and courtesy;
- Not answer or conduct conversations on mobile phones whilst dealing with our staff;
- Respect the privacy, safety and needs of other customers;
- Provide accurate and complete details at the time of the initial contact;
- Telephone to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or if there is a need to see a specific officer;
- Telephone the officer nominated in any correspondence sent to the customer and quote the reference details noted on the letter;
- Provide your current contact details and advise us if they change;
- Work with us to solve problems;
- Provide us with feedback so we know how we are performing and where necessary, can continue to improve our service.

Handling Difficult Situations or Abusive Customers

Abusive behaviour is displayed when customers shout, display bullying behaviour, use abusive or obscene language or make threats to Council personnel.

- Staff are not expected to tolerate abusive behaviour;
- Communication may be terminated immediately by staff if abusive behaviour occurs. If face to face, the officer may walk away. If by telephone, the officer may terminate the call. If by email, the address may be blocked or not responded to;
- The Deputy General Manager may decide to limit or cease responses to any person who is abusive and/or derogative in his/her communication with Council or who fails to accept that Council has done all that it can to assist. A decision of this nature will be communicated in writing to the person;
- If an officer feels threatened by the language or behaviour of the customer, the Police may be notified.

Complaints

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision, level or quality of service, or behaviour of an employee or agent which can be investigated and acted upon. Bellingen Shire Council acknowledges the individual's right to make a complaint if it is considered Council has been remiss in its service provision or actions.

What is not 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 of Council;
- An expression concerning the general direction and performance of Council or its Councillors;
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure;
- Reports about neighbours, noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building works or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of our service.

Many of the issues mentioned above are called “complaints” when a customer contacts us. They are called complaints because a customer is unhappy about a situation and wants something done. The actions we take to resolve many “complaints” are often an everyday part of the services we provide and will be dealt with apart from the formal complaints management process.

A complaint lodged in person, by telephone, letter or email may be responded to in the same format. Irrespective of the manner in which the complaint was received, a response to the complaint can be expected within ten (10) working days. There are times when it is not possible to meet this timeframe eg where a complaint is a complex one requiring investigation, however we will keep the customer informed of progress via an interim update.

Council is confident that it can resolve the majority of complaints received, however we understand that we may not be able to satisfy every customer on every occasion. 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 may include referral to the most appropriate external complaints handling body.

Customer satisfaction counts

Service Standard Performance Management and Reporting

Bellingham Shire Council is committed to managing its business in a transparent manner. Council will develop realistic service performance measurements and report our progress to the community. As we strive to deliver better customer service we encourage you to provide feedback.

Council has a Customer & Business Support team in place specifically employed to deliver a range of customer service functions. In addition, there is an expectation that all staff across the organisation will demonstrate the common set of Service Standards outlined in this document when dealing with our customers.

Methods of Measurement

It is important that our customer service delivery and initiatives are regularly and appropriately monitored and assessed. This allows us to know at any given time, where we are performing well, what needs attention and any patterns or trends which may need to be addressed.

Customer satisfaction will be the most appropriate measure of compliance with our Service Standards. The following tools will be used from time to time to gauge the level of customer satisfaction:

- Call backs - random customers may be telephoned and asked a series of questions relative to recent contact with Council;
- Focus groups - where Council needs information concerning a particular service;
- Customer Service Surveys – available from Council's website or in hardcopy from Council's Customer Service counters;
- Mystery Shopping - whereby our service is assessed for efficiency and quality.

Reporting

A range of significant performance indicators relating to customer service and service delivery will be used within Council. These will be regularly monitored and reported to gauge our level of performance and to assess opportunities for improvement.

Results of Council's performance measures will be reported to Councillors and the community on an annual basis via appropriate communication mediums. The reporting format will include the Service Standards already in place, how performance has been measured, whether standards have been achieved and the next steps in the customer service improvement process. Where Service Standards have not been met, we will identify how it is intended to meet those standards in the future. Reporting will include the results of all customer surveys and the level of customer compliments/complaints received.

Future Development

Council is committed to implementing information and corporate systems to track customer requests and provide the ability to measure customer service standards. Provision will be made in Council's Operational Plan for this to occur on a continual basis.

The Customer Service Charter and the Service Standards contained in this document will be reviewed at least every two (2) years. Performance management targets will be reviewed and developed in accordance with the implementation of appropriate systems.

Contact us

If you would like to suggest ways in which we can serve you better, you can:

- Contact our Customer Service Team on 02 6655 7300;
- Email council@bellingen.nsw.gov.au;
- Complete a Customer Service Survey Form available from our Customer Service Centre or from the web site www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au; or
- Write to the:
General Manager
Bellingen Shire Council
PO Box 117
BELLINGEN NSW 2454