

Customer focus standards for staff and volunteers

Updated June, 2012



The purpose of this document is to clearly outline to staff the service standards that are expected of you when dealing with customers. This document applies to employees and volunteers of the Wodonga Council.

About our organisation:

Wodonga Council has more than 80 business units delivering hundreds of services to our city's 37,000 citizens.

The council has more than 400 staff (EFT 235) and more than 550 volunteers. Because of the breadth of services we provide to the community and visitors to our city, it is important expectations about customer service are clear.

While there are always constraints to the level of service, due to financial, legislative or resourcing implications, the focus on the customer should remain a priority.

Our commitment

As an organisation we ask our employees when dealing with customers to always:

- Be honest, ethical and professional;
- Be helpful and courteous;
- Listen with respect and understand the customer's issues;
- Meet commitments made;
- Keep the customer informed;
- Ensure that the customer clearly understands what is being said;
- Apologise if we make a mistake and attempt to make it right; and
- Assist customers with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities, to achieve equitable access to our services.

Respecting privacy

Wodonga Council employees are responsible and accountable for ensuring the security and confidentiality of records containing personal information (e.g. name, address, phone number, etc). The council's commitment to protecting personal information is set out in the *Wodonga Council Privacy Policy*, however, some important points to remember are:

- The council usually only uses the personal information for the primary purpose for which it was collected, for a related secondary purpose that would reasonably be expected, or if written consent is given; and
- In certain limited circumstances council may be required by law to disclose personal information.

If you need to decide how to handle personal information in a specific situation you should refer to council's privacy guide, ask your supervisor or contact the privacy officer (governance officer).

Cultural considerations

Language can be the most difficult issues for customers from culturally diverse backgrounds. Members of the Wodonga community come from more than 100 countries and speak 85 languages. Interpreting and translating services are available for all staff members to use to assist customers. Details of these are available from the customer focus officers.

Be aware that some culturally diverse groups may not be comfortable with eye contact or people of the opposite gender interacting with each other. Be respectful of the cultural and religious needs of customers.

Access and ability considerations

Be aware of the diverse abilities of customers. A disability can be visible or invisible, temporary or permanent, and cover a range of physical, sensory, cognitive, psychiatric and neurological disabilities and chronic illness. A customer with a disability wants to be treated the same as everyone else.

Speak clearly, but don't shout. Look at the customer when you are talking to them, and use simple language and short sentences. Communication may be difficult for the customer, so allow plenty of time and let them finish their sentences. Check with the customer to make sure you have understood the message. If the customer has no speech, they may be trying to tell you something by making noises, facial expression or body language. Ask the customer if they have another way of communicating, for example, a communication book, or ask someone who knows the person to help you.

Standards of customer service

The standards and procedures of this document set out how all council staff should deliver best practice customer service.

Face-to-face (external) customers

We will:

- Be mindful of the customer's personal space;
- Treat customers with fairness and honesty;
- Don't make assumptions about customers based on their culture or appearance;
- Always be courteous and helpful. Speak how you like to be spoken to, answer how you like to be answered and treat others as you like to be treated;
- Politely ascertain the customer's needs to ensure they are speaking to the right person;
- Offer the interpreting service if needed;
- Always make sure that you are clear about the responding time frame to the customer;
- Say goodbye to the customer, with a smile; and
- Reassure the customer of confidentiality and privacy.

Going on leave or away from the office

- If on leave or unavailable, update the 'out of office' tool on your computer;
- Activate the enable tool for 'out of office' message; and
- Always immediately disable your 'out of office' messages upon return to work.



Telephone

All council staff are expected to take accountability and ownership of calls and deliver a positive customer service experience.

We will:

- Endeavour to answer phone calls within four rings;
- Always ensure there is someone in each service area to cover phones at all times;
- Greet the customer and then state to whom they are talking to;
- Answer and end the phone call with a smile. Always be courteous and helpful – a big part of effective telephone technique is common sense;
- Speak how you like to be spoken to, and treat others as you like to be treated;
- Focus your listening skills on the customer;
- Treat customers with fairness and honesty;
- Politely ascertain the customer’s needs to ensure they are speaking to the right person;
- Offer the translations or interpreting service on request;
- Call back the customer within 24 hours of receiving a message; and
- If unable to respond with an answer or action within the 24 hours, call the customer again within three working days to update them of the process, and the expected response time.

Make sure you set up a voicemail message on your office phone and mobile and check and action messages regularly. Details of how to do this are available on the intranet under the IT section.

Letter and fax (external)

We will:

- Send a letter or fax acknowledgement within 24 hours of receiving a letter or fax from a customer;
- If unable to respond with an answer or action within the 24 hours, send another letter/fax to the customer within five working days (including postage time) to update the customer of the process, and the expected response time;
- Use council letterhead or fax cover sheet for all outgoing letters/faxes;

- Include reference numbers (automatically generated in records) on all outgoing letters/faxes;
- Include complimentary slips (handwritten or printed) with all forms and publications sent out by request;
- Personally sign all letters and faxes, not use electronic signatures (unless bulk mail);
- Follow the organisational style and writing guides;
- Avoid using all capital letters, as this can be offensive;
- Write clearly, professionally, and respectfully; and
- Check the spelling of titles, names, especially ministers (refer to writing style guide for correct format on readdress, etc).

Dealing with difficult customers

- Ensuring staff safety is the first priority;
- Keep a safe distance from an aggressive customer;
- If you feel unsafe, withdraw from the unsafe area;
- Remain calm and in control. Don't argue with the customer but instead, use listening skills to try and calm them down;
- Focus on the main issue;
- Verbal or physical abuse is not acceptable;
- You must warn the customer that you will not tolerate abuse, not just hang up or leave the counter area;
- Advise the customer you will help when they are civil; and
- Seek assistance from a senior officer or supervisor if necessary. In extreme circumstances, contact police and ask them to attend the scene.

Harassment or discrimination of a staff member by a client or other person

The Victorian Equal Opportunity Act does not allow harassment or discrimination of individuals who provide goods and services.

Workplace participants must not discriminate against, harass, sexually harass or victimise a person in the course of providing or offering to provide goods and services. It is also unlawful to discriminate against, harass, sexually harass or victimise another person in the course of receiving or selecting goods or services. Workplace participants must not cause, instruct, induce, aid or permit another person

to commit an act of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment or victimisation.

Where a workplace participant considers that he or she has been harassed, discriminated or victimised against by a client or another person in the course of his or her employment with the council, the staff member should consider approaching his or her manager, co-ordinator or team leader, a contact officer, union representative or organisational development for advice.

Staff standards and procedures

Wodonga Council customer focus service standards

- Treat customers like you would like to be treated;
- Answer phones before the fourth ring;
- Have voice mails set up on office and mobile phones. Check messages regularly;
- Return emails, letters and phone calls within one working day, even if you are just acknowledging the request; and
- Deal with customer requests within one working day if possible. If contact is requested, please phone the customer. If requests are on hold or awaiting budget, please update them regularly.

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