

Dealing with difficult customers policy

Objective

This policy explains how the City of Albany staff will deal with customers who:

- are aggressive complainants;
- are rude, abusive, and harassing complainants;
- cannot be satisfied despite the best efforts of the City;
- constantly raise the same issue with different staff; and/or
- make unreasonable demands on the City where resources are substantially and unreasonably diverted away from its other functions or unfairly allocated (compared to other customers).

Policy Statements

Customer satisfaction is one of City of Albany's values however, at times, a customer's demands or expectations may exceed the City's ability to deliver.

As a general rule, when a person approaches the City with a request, application, concern or complaint they first need to be heard, understood and respected.

Customer have a right to:

- be given an apology if required;
- be given information or an explanation;
- have action taken to address their concerns or fix their problem; and
- have the matter dealt with quickly, fairly and properly.

A. Customers who cannot be satisfied:

Customers who cannot be satisfied include members of the public or groups who do not accept that the City is unable to assist them, provide any further assistance or level of service than has been provided already and/or disagree with the action the City has taken in relation to their complaint or concern.

If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer a customer cannot be satisfied and all appropriate avenues of internal review or appeal have been exhausted and the customer continues to write, telephone, email and/or visit the following actions may be taken:

- The Chief Executive Officer may write to the customer restating City's position on the matter if necessary and advising that if the customer continues to contact the City regarding the matter, the City may:
 - not accept any further phone calls from the customer;
 - not grant any further interviews;
 - require all further communication to be put in writing; and
 - continue to receive, read and file correspondence but only acknowledge or otherwise respond to it if:
 - the customer provides significant new information relating to their complaint or concern; or

- the customer raises new issues which in the Chief Executive Officer's opinion warrant fresh action.
- The Chief Executive Officer shall advise Councillors of a person who is deemed to be 'a customer who cannot be satisfied', the customer's concerns, and any proposed management strategy by City Officers.

B. Customers who make unreasonable demands:

Customers who make unreasonable demands include members of the public whose demands on the City start to significantly and unreasonably divert City resources away from other functions or create an inequitable allocation of resources to other customers. Such demands may result from the amount of information requested, the nature or scale of services sought or the number of approaches seeking information, assistance or service.

If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer a customer is making unreasonable demands on staff and the customer continues to write, email, telephone and /or visit the offices the following actions may be taken:

- The Chief Executive Officer may write to the customer advising them of the City's concern and requesting that they limit and focus their requests and that if the customer continues to place unreasonable demands, staff may:
 - not respond to any future correspondence and only take action where, in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer the correspondence raises specific, substantial and serious issues; or
 - only respond to a certain number of requests in a given period.
- If the customer continues to contact staff after being advised of the proposed course of action, the Chief Executive Officer may, after considering representations from the customer, advise the customer that either or both of points 5(b)(i) above will now apply.

C. Customers who constantly raise the same issue with different staff:

If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer a customer is constantly raising the same issues with different staff or elected members the Chief Executive Officer may notify the customer that:

- only a nominated staff member will deal with them in the future;
- they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss a matter; or
- all future contact with City must be in writing.

The customer may wish to make a formal complaint in accordance with the Customer Service Commitment and Complains Resolution policy.

D. Customers who are rude, abusive or aggressive:

The City of Albany will not tolerate or condone intimidating or offensive behaviour toward staff members by members of the public under any circumstances. Any staff member who is the victim of such behaviour may, at their own discretion, report the matter to Police for further action.

Rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour may include rude or otherwise vulgar noises, expressions or gestures, verbal abuse of a personal or general nature, threatening or offensive behaviour, physical violence against property or physical violence against a person.

If in the opinion of any staff member rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements are made in telephone conversations or in person, the staff member may:

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

Where a conversation or interview/meeting is terminated, the staff member must notify their relevant Line Manager of the details as soon as possible.

If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer any correspondence to the City contains personal abuse, inflammatory statements or materials clearly intended to intimidate, it will be returned to the sender and not otherwise acted upon.

Violence, damage to property or threatening behaviour may be reported to police, depending on the severity of the actions.

E. Documentation and reporting:

In all of the situations referred to in this policy, adequate documentary records must be made and maintained on the appropriate file.

If an elected member feels that a customer is being difficult in a manner specified in this policy, they may notify the Chief Executive Officer who will consider taking action as per avenues described above.

Where the Chief Executive Officer determines to limit a customer's access in any of the ways specified in this policy, the Chief Executive Officer will advise Councillors as soon as possible of the relevant circumstances and the action taken and forward such advice, where appropriate, to the Department of Local Government and the Western Australian Ombudsman for information.

Scope

All employees with potential customer interaction.

Legislative and Associated Documents Relating to this Policy

This policy is complimented by the following documents and resources:

- Legislation:
 - Local Government Act 1995
 - Freedom of Information Act 1994
 - Public Interest Disclosure Act 2003
- Council Policy Positions:
 - Code of Conduct (Council Members, Committee Members, Staff and Volunteers)
- Administrative Policy Positions:
 - Employee Code of Conduct
 - Customer Service Commitment and Complaints Resolution Policy & Procedure
 - Workplace Violence Handbook Policy & Guideline
 - Customer Service Emergency Procedure
 - Responding to complaints made by customers about staff
 - Internal Review Policy & Procedures
- Ombudsman Western Australia Guidelines:
 - Dealing with unreasonable complainant conduct
 - Conducting administrative investigations

Review Position and Date

This policy and procedure is to be reviewed by the document owner annually.

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