

# Cairns Regional Council Service Charter



## Service charter

For the purpose of this charter 'customer' refers to both external customers e.g. ratepayers, residents and members of the community, and internal e.g. all members of staff and elected members.

This charter will outline:

- the commitment of Council towards provision of quality services and effective communication;
- a program for continuous improvement of service and communication between Council and the community; and
- the responsibilities of members of the community in their dealings with the Council.

### Service methods

Council is committed to providing quality services to the community in order to meet their needs using available resources. To demonstrate this commitment, Council will build and maintain a relationship based on open and effective communication with the community. Cairns Regional Council offers several service methods:

In person: Council Chambers: 119-145 Spence Street, Cairns.  
Smithfield Library Office: 70 Cheviot Street, Smithfield  
Gordonvale Library Office: 88 Norman Street, Gordonvale  
Earlville Library Office: Stockland Shopping Centre, Mulgrave Road  
Babinda Library Office: 24 Munro Street, Babinda

By Post: PO Box 359  
Cairns QLD 4870

By Phone: Cairns (07) 4044 3044

By Fax: (07) 4044 3022

By email: [council@cairns.qld.gov.au](mailto:council@cairns.qld.gov.au)

Via the web: [www.cairns.qld.gov.au](http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au)

## **I. Commitment to service**

Cairns Regional Council is committed to better understanding the needs and expectations of the community and will do so by:

- 1.1 Continuing to deliver information on the services and activities of Council through a variety of means including publishing regular community updates, publishing community information in local newspapers, on the Council website and through social media, placing plans and other documentation relating to Council activities on exhibition at Council offices and libraries and, using public meetings and other open forms of consultation and dialogue where appropriate, including referring matters to any appropriate committee.
- 1.2 Establishing levels of service in a number of areas and regularly measuring the performance of Council against these levels of service
- 1.3 Consulting with representatives of the community to create an ongoing dialogue between Council and the community about service, improvement and issues of public interest through customer feedback surveys that Council will record and analyse and utilising various other methods to obtain community feedback to learn what the community thinks about the areas where Council is performing well and the areas where Council needs to improve service
- 1.4 Maintaining a centralised complaint handling system to respond to service failures and unsatisfied expectations
- 1.5 Transparency in accordance with the *Right To Information Act 2009* whereby members of the public can inspect files by prior arrangement (subject to fees and conditions and maintaining Council's obligation to confidentiality and privacy under the *Information Privacy Act 2009*) and,
- 1.6 Continuing to encourage input from the community on Council's activities through a variety of means including provision for the community to attend Council meetings, address Council through the Deputations process, the ability to contact Councillors to discuss concerns and giving full consideration to submissions on plans and other documents relating to Council activities.

## **2. General levels of service**

Council is committed to:

- 2.1 Engaging with and taking into consideration the views of the community when making major decisions affecting the community
- 2.2 Treating members of the community with courtesy, patience, sensitivity and attentiveness
- 2.3 Providing the community with advice and other information that is clear and concise
- 2.4 Being sensitive to the principles of multiculturalism and any language or other communication barriers experienced by members of the community when providing advice and other information, seeking feedback, consulting and taking appropriate action, through use of language aides and interpreter services and in line with the Cairns Regional Council Cultural Diversity Policy No.1:06:17 and the Reconciliation Action Plan

- 2.5 Promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons with disabilities, to promote respect for their inherent dignity, through use of alternate formats of communication such as but not limited to Australian Sign Language (Auslan) interpreter services and to provide a framework through the *Access and Equity Plan* to enable Cairns Regional Council to comply with the goals of the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)* and the Queensland *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*
- 2.6 Adopting fair, lawful and appropriate procedures when making decisions, carrying out activities and performing services, making decisions using processes that are impartial and otherwise ethical, using information and Council resources responsibly and efficiently, and act in accordance with the law, Council's Code of Conduct and the Council's General Policy for Standing Orders for Council Meeting - No.1:02:58.

### 3. Specific levels of service

#### 3.1 Answering correspondence

Council recognises the importance of correspondence such as letters and email messages and will try to provide a clear and concise response promptly. Council is committed to:

- 3.1.1 Responding to correspondence by telephone where appropriate (such as simple requests and correspondence for information only) and documenting the details of the response
- 3.1.2 Responding to general correspondence or providing an interim reply, where appropriate, within five (5) business days
- 3.1.3 Providing a substantive response or progress update within ten (10) business days in the case of more complex enquiries
- 3.1.4 Where a substantive response is required, a formal acknowledgement should be made to the customer within five (5) working days, providing a timeframe for expected response
- 3.1.5 Keeping the member of public informed if a final reply cannot be provided within the time allowed
- 3.1.6 Ensuring all correspondence includes the name and contact details of the officer dealing with the matter and Council's file reference
- 3.1.7 Using plain language that is clear and concise.

#### 3.2 Telephone calls

Council recognises the importance of telephone calls and will try to answer them promptly, quickly refer calls to the appropriate officer and provide clear and concise information in response to caller inquiries. Council is committed to:

- 3.2.1 Answering calls within 60 seconds, wherever possible

- 3.2.2 Advising the caller on answering, of the name and department of the officer answering
- 3.2.3 Dealing with the call, redirecting the call or taking a clear message as appropriate
- 3.2.4 When redirecting the call, ensuring the staff member to whom the call is being redirected is available and the caller's details are announced
- 3.2.5 Ensuring messages taken include details of the caller's name and number, the caller's message and details of the timing of the call and who took the call
- 3.2.6 If the caller's enquiry cannot be fully responded to, giving clear advice on what has to be done to respond to the enquiry and how long that will take
- 3.2.7 Speaking clearly and dealing with callers calmly, courteously and patiently
- 3.2.8 Recording all significant telephone calls in the form of a written file note
- 3.2.9 Answering unattended telephones in the absence of the responsible officer
- 3.2.10 Responding to telephone messages within 3 hours where possible
- 3.2.11 If using voicemail, ensuring that it is used in compliance with Council's Customer Interaction and Correspondence Protocol.

### 3.3 Availability of staff at counter and for interviews

Council recognises the need and will provide Customer Service counters, to promptly serve members of the public who come to Council to seek information and transact other business. Council has various office locations and will accommodate interviews by appointment and will try to ensure the appropriate Council officers are available. Council is committed to:

- 3.3.1 Making staff available for interviews by prior arrangement and otherwise during Council's hours of business (which Council will widely publicise)
- 3.3.2 Attending promptly to members of the public at Customer Service counters
- 3.3.3 Promptly advising staff when there is a member of the public in the reception area for an appointment
- 3.3.4 Attempting to arrange a mutually convenient appointment in the future if staff cannot attend interviews on request
- 3.3.5 Providing convenient access to all information that is available for public inspection
- 3.3.6 Speaking clearly and dealing with visitors calmly, courteously and patiently.

### 3.4 Customer requests

Council is committed to:

- 3.4.1 Entering the customer request immediately, wherever possible
- 3.4.2 Obtaining sufficient information from the customer, relevant to the customer request
- 3.4.3 Acquiring contact details including customer name, address, phone number and email address where provided

- 3.4.4 Supplying the customer with a customer request number and response time, wherever possible
- 3.4.5 Referring the customer request to the appropriate Council officer
- 3.4.6 Re-allocating the customer request to the relevant Council officer promptly, if it is initially allocated incorrectly
- 3.4.7 Actioning the customer request within the specified timeframe of the request type
- 3.4.8 Updating the status on the customer request appropriately and only finalising the customer request when work has been completed
- 3.4.9 Documenting a substantive and accurate response on the customer request
- 3.4.10 Contacting the customer, wherever applicable and particularly when this action forms part of the customer request, informing the customer of the action taken
- 3.4.11 Providing customers with the opportunity to provide feedback through random user perception surveying.

### 3.5 Addressing meetings of the Council

The Council meeting is the peak decision-making forum of Council. Council values the input of members of the public in the consideration of issues determined by Council. Council is committed to:

- 3.5.1 Publicising the time and date of meetings of Council and Council committees as per Council's obligations under the *Local Government Act 2009* and the General Policy for Standing Orders for Council Meeting - No.1:02:58
- 3.5.2 Making agendas available to interested persons prior to meetings as per Council's obligations under the *Local Government Act 2009* and Council's General Policy for Standing Orders for Council Meeting - No.1:02:58
- 3.5.3 Providing opportunities for members of the public to address meetings of Council and through Deputations as provided by Council's General Policy for Standing Orders for Council Meeting - No.1:02:58
- 3.5.4 Providing members of the public wanting to address meetings with information on the conduct of meetings
- 3.5.5 Taking into account any relevant points of view expressed by members of the public on issues for decision
- 3.5.6 Making available contact details, as agreed by each Councillor, including telephone number and, where relevant, the contact hours of each Councillor to members of the public wanting to present their views to Councillors directly and in accordance with Councils Development Interaction Guidelines Policy - No. 1:02:29
- 3.5.7 Endeavouring to provide Councillors, in a timely fashion, with submissions and other information provided by members of the public for the consideration of Councillors.



### 3.6 Notification and consultation

Council recognises that a fundamental component of quality service and improved communication is effective notification and consultation with the community. Council recognises that the community would like to be notified of proposals that affect, or might reasonably be seen as likely to affect their interests and to have their attitudes, concerns and needs acknowledged and taken into account. Council is committed to:

- 3.6.1 Complying with all legal requirements in relation to notification (including, where relevant, its obligations under the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* and/or the *Information Privacy Act 2009*)
- 3.6.2 Complying with the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* in relation to notification
- 3.6.3 Publishing details of all development applications in the local newspapers and on the web site (subject to obligations under the *Information Privacy Act 2009*)
- 3.6.4 Providing persons notified with information in relation to submissions
- 3.6.5 Meeting Council's obligations under the Local Government, Sustainable Planning and Right to Information Acts and in accordance with the *Information Privacy Act 2009* including informing persons notified that submissions may be obtained by members
- 3.6.6 Ensuring letters of notification include the full name and the direct telephone number of the officer responsible for the application and information on how to obtain further information on the matter
- 3.6.7 Ensuring that information is available for inspection and staff are available for consultation in relation to matters that are the subject of notification, consultation and procurement
- 3.6.8 Ensuring that consultation is timely and appropriate but does not unduly delay the decision making process
- 3.6.9 Providing access to Council files consistent with Council's legal obligations under the *Local Government Act 2009*, the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009*, the *Right to Information Act 2009* and the *Information Privacy Act 2009*.
- 3.6.10 Ensuring residents are provided with a minimum of 48 hours advance notice for planned work which may disrupt services or amenities where possible.
- 3.6.11 Providing adequate notification and project specific consultation with community and business owners for large scale projects which may disrupt services or amenities with the intention of providing at least 2 business weeks' notice where possible.

### 3.7 Complaint handling and reviewing decisions

Council values the opportunity that complaints offer in identifying areas of service that may need improvement, in responding to individual dissatisfaction and in strengthening the relationship between Council and the community. Council is committed to:

- 3.7.1 Dealing with complaints in accordance with *its* General Complaints Management Policy No.1:02:52
- 3.7.2 Advising members of the public dissatisfied with Council's service, of their ability to lodge complaints
- 3.7.3 Ensuring that complainants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and remain dissatisfied are offered a review
- 3.7.4 Advising complainants of their right to complain to the Ombudsman, or if the matter relates to pecuniary interest issues or alleges a serious breakdown in Council operations or if there are reasonable grounds to suspect corrupt conduct, the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission
- 3.7.5 Dealing with public interest disclosures in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosure Policy No.1:02:53
- 3.7.6 Regularly reporting on the outcome of complaints, using this information to identify opportunities for improvement in Council services.

### 3.8 Using alternative dispute resolution methods

Council is committed to the efficient use of its resources. Disputes involving Council are capable of draining substantial amounts of Council's human and financial resources. Council recognises the capacity of alternative dispute resolution methods to assist parties in dispute to identify their interests and resolve their disputes quickly. Council will endeavour to resolve quickly and fairly disputes in which it is involved, utilising alternative dispute resolution methods, whenever appropriate. Council is committed to:

- 3.8.1 Ensuring appropriate staff members are trained in alternative dispute resolution methods
- 3.8.2 Supporting alternative dispute resolution methods to assist in the resolution of disputes to which Council is a party
- 3.8.3 Providing Council representatives at mediation sessions with an appropriate level of authority.



## **4. Responsibilities of members of the community**

Communication is a two-way process. To be effective, both Council and the public should strive to adopt a fair and reasonable approach to communicating with each other. When communicating with Council, members of the public should:

- 4.1 Focus their dissatisfaction on the conduct or performance of Council, Councillors and/or staff members rather than on personal criticism of Councillors and/or staff
- 4.2 Behave appropriately, avoiding the use of abusive language and/or threatening behaviour
- 4.3 Provide Council with all relevant information in order that their opinion, concern or complaint can be readily understood
- 4.4 Accept that Council operates under resource constraints, noting that the allocation of resources is a matter for Council to determine
- 4.5 Pursue alternative means of resolving complaints and disputes through external agencies, if the complaint or dispute cannot be resolved to their satisfaction
- 4.6 Use the methods of service delivery outlined in section three.

## **5. What if Council does not honour its commitments?**

- 5.1 Any member of the public who believes that Council has failed to honour its commitments set forth in Council's Service Charter should raise the matter with Council in the form of a complaint. Council will investigate the complaint and advise the complainant of the outcome in a reasonable time.
- 5.2 Complaints will be investigated in accordance with Council's General Complaints Management Policy No.1:02:52.
- 5.3 If the complaint is justified, Council will acknowledge the mistake and outline what Council is doing to resolve the matter.
- 5.4 If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complainant can seek a review. If the complainant is still not satisfied after receiving an internal review then they can take the matter to the Queensland Ombudsman or Crime and Misconduct Commission.

## **6. Putting limits on services from and communication with Council**

- 6.1 Council accepts and values complaints and criticism of Council's performance. Council also understands and accepts that some members of the public may experience frustration arising from dissatisfaction with Council services.
- 6.2 Council will advise the outcome of the complaint investigation along with the escalation options should the complainant remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation. Escalation options may include an 'internal review' within Council or external review with an external agency such as the

Queensland Ombudsman, Office of Information Commissioner for privacy complaints, Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) or the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT)

- 6.3 Council will consider placing limits on communication between certain members of the public and Council. This applies where communication becomes abusive of persons or excessively demanding on resources. This is in the interests of responsible management of Council's limited resources and in order to fulfil Council's obligations as a responsible employer.
- 6.4 These limits will only be applied on the decision of the Chief Executive Officer or a member of staff with appropriate delegated authority in serious cases of inappropriate conduct and only if the person concerned has first been warned about the consequences of persisting with the identified inappropriate conduct. Council will set out the limits in writing and include a statement of reasons for their imposition.
- 6.5 Council will not impose unconditional limits on communication between Council and any member of the public. Council will keep an accurate record of the limit imposed and will, on request; review the limitation (on the decision of the Council) following the expiration of a period of three months.

## **7. Customers who make unreasonable demands**

Customers who make unreasonable demands include members of the public whose demands on Council start to significantly and unreasonably divert Council's 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.

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

- 7.1 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 and/or visit Council the following actions may be taken:
  - (a) The Chief Executive Officer may write to the customer restating Council's position on the matter if necessary and advising that if the customer continues to contact Council regarding the matter Council may:
    - i. not accept any further phone calls and/or emails from the customer;
    - ii. not grant any further interviews;
    - iii. require all further communication to be put in writing (excluding email);

iv. 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.
- (b) The customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action
- (c) If the customer continues to contact Council after being advised of Council's proposed course of action, the Chief Executive Officer may, after considering any representations from the customer, advise the customer that any or all of points 7.1(b)i – iv above will now apply.
- (d) The Chief Executive Officer shall advise Councillors of any correspondence issued in accordance with the clause 7.1(b)

## **8. Customers who constantly raise the same issue with different staff**

8.1 If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer a customer is constantly raising the same issues with different staff the following actions may be taken:

- (a) The Chief Executive Officer may notify the customer that:
- i. only a nominated staff member will deal with them in future;
  - ii. they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss their matter; or
  - iii. all future contact with Council must be in writing.
- (b) The customer shall be given an opportunity to make representations about Council's proposed course of action.
- (c) The Chief Executive Officer shall advise Councillors of any notification issued in accordance with clause 9.1(b)

## **9. Customers who behave in a rude, abusive or aggressive manner**

Rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour may include 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. Council has a zero tolerance to racism.

9.1 If in the opinion of any staff member or Councillor rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements are made in telephone conversations, interviews or public forums, the staff member may:

- (a) Warn the customer that if the behaviour continues the conversation or interview will be terminated
- (b) Terminate the conversation or interview if the rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour continues after a warning has been given

- (c) If the customer continues to give verbal abuse and/or threatens physical abuse, the Chief Executive Officer or the relevant Manager may advise the customer that they will be removed from the building
- (d) Where a conversation or interview is terminated in accordance with clause 10.1, the staff member must notify the Chief Executive Officer or the relevant Manager of the details as soon as possible.

## 10. General

- 10.1 Many of the types of behaviours outlined in sections 6, 7, 8 and 9 can be considered as harassment. If a member of the public, Council employee or a Councillor believes they have been discriminated against or harassed, while conducting business with Council or assisting a member of the public to conduct business with Council, they have legal right to complain to the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland.
- 10.2 If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer any correspondence to Council contains personal abuse, inflammatory statements or material clearly intended to intimidate, it will be returned to the sender and not otherwise acted upon.
- 10.3 In all of the situations referred to in this policy, adequate documentary records must be made and maintained on the appropriate Council file.
- 10.4 Where the Chief Executive Officer determines to limit a customer's access to Council, in any of the ways specified in this policy, the Chief Executive Officer where appropriate will advise the Mayor and Councillors, as soon as possible of the relevant circumstances and the action taken. This advice, where appropriate, should be forwarded to the Queensland Ombudsman or Crime and Misconduct Commission.

## 11. Legal action

Council notes that despite its commitment to quality service and improved communications, there are occasions where conflict between Council (including staff and Councillors) and members of the public may escalate to the point where parties resort to legal action.

- 11.1 Council is committed to improve service and communication with the community, the speedy and cost effective resolution of disputes involving Council and to minimise any impact on the rights of members of the public to participate in the affairs of Council. Council also considers that legal action should be considered only when all other reasonable and appropriate alternatives to resolving disputes have been attempted.
- 11.2 To this end, Council will encourage and assist the parties to resolve these disputes through other means including, where appropriate, by engaging appropriate external mediators. In the case of action taken against Council or its staff, Council may contribute towards the cost of any mediation.



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Team Leader Service Quality