



CUSTOMER RESPONSE POLICY

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND	3
2. SCOPE OF POLICY	3
3. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS	4
4. POLICY STATEMENT	4
4.1 Customer Service Principles	4
4.2 When is a response finalised?	5
4.3 Response Timeframes	6
5. RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLIANCE	8
6. REFERENCES / ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS	9
7. PRIVACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATION	9
8. CONTACT DETAILS	9

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1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

The Customer Response Policy provides the framework that supports how Council will respond to customers. The Procedure breaks down the Policy into a working format, providing guidance to staff and customers on the process and expectations of customer service delivery and timeframes for resolution.

East Gippsland Shire Council believes that the successful delivery of services and the operation of community facilities requires a customer service approach where customers and Council act in partnership.

Customers play an important role in the reporting of issues, damages and in notifying Council of services that need attention. This information allows Council to continually improve services for the community at large and helps us meet our customer service expectations. Council staff play an equally important role in ensuring that the way we manage customer interactions meets a high standard.

We have developed Customer Service Principles and Customer Service Standards that will guide our staff in delivering the best possible customer experience. This will also facilitate engaging with our customers and allowing them to understand the role that Council has in the community. Council is committed to working in partnership with the Community to deliver excellent service through dedication, innovation and continuous improvement.

This policy establishes the framework that supports how Council will respond to customer contacts within the limits of Council resources.

The purpose of the policy is to:

- Work in partnership with our customers through fostering mutual respect and effective communication;
- Ensure consistency and fairness in how Council responds to customer service requests;
- Make it easy and accessible for customers and staff to understand how we address customer service requests;
- Provide guidance for customers and Council staff when interacting and or communicating with each other;
- Ensure customers receive appropriate level of service within the bounds of available resources;
- Improve customer service based on feedback by ensuring ongoing staff training, best industry practice and consultation; and
- Improve the use of the relevant systems to ensure workflow efficiencies and accountability at Council.

2. SCOPE OF POLICY

This Customer Response Policy applies to all Council staff, volunteers and contractors who provide a service for the East Gippsland Shire Council.

This policy is available for public viewing at all Service Centres and Outreach Centres, and can be accessed online at www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au

3. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Meaning
Action Officer	Anyone allocated with the responsibility to complete a task or respond.
Verbal Contact	In person, real-time interaction such as over the counter or by phone.
Written Correspondence	Not in person, delayed or relayed interaction such as email, Australia Post mail, electronic or web-based engagement and social media.
Complaint	According to the Local Government Bill 2017 a complaint: “includes the communication, whether orally or in writing, to the Council by a person of their dissatisfaction with— (a) the quality of an action taken, decision made or service provided by a member of Council staff or a contractor engaged by the Council; or (b) the delay by a member of Council staff or a contractor engaged by the Council in taking an action, making a decision or providing a service;” A complaint should explain or describe where Council has failed to respond appropriately to a Request for Service or not followed relevant policies. A complaint does not include a Request for Service.
Compliment	A compliment is an expression of appreciation, praise, commendation or admiration.
Date of Receipt	Is the time and day when contact and/or correspondence is received by Council and is registered in Council's Customer Request Module (CRM) and/or EDRMS.
Council	East Gippsland Shire Council.
Feedback	A complaint, compliment, opinion or suggestion.
Council Response	Communication by Council staff to the customer.
Internal Ombudsman	Director Corporate, a member of Council's Executive Group, holds the office of Internal Ombudsman.
Task	Action required in responding and/or resolving a customer contact or correspondence within a defined period of time.
CRM	Customer Request Module
EDRMS	Electronic Document and Records Management System
Request for Service	Includes but not limited to a request to Council for; Service, enquiry, information, update or action in the first instance.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

4.1 Customer Service Principles

Council aspires staff to meet the following Customer Service Principles.

These principles have been introduced in line with the organisations vision to be recognised as a leader in regional Local Government. We strive to deliver customer focused services by demonstrating the following principles:

Customer Service Principles:

Know Your Customer Base	We have a good understanding of our customer base and the communities.
Focus on Customer Needs	We take into consideration our customers' needs and engage with customers when making business decisions that impact on them or their communities. We are focused on solution outcomes and provide alternatives where possible.
Use a Can-Do Approach	We have a Can-Do approach to service delivery, by not only trying to meet our customer expectations, but strive to exceed them, while still working within Council guidelines and government legislation.
Customer Friendly Staff	We are friendly, courteous and helpful. We display integrity, trust and respect, we have understanding and empathy. We are professional representatives of Council and the brand.
Timely Response	We will meet the response timeframes set out within this document. We will ensure our responses are concise and provide appropriate information, outcomes and timelines.
Professional and Knowledgeable	We are skilled and trained to ensure our knowledge and expertise is current and appropriate for our role. We are professional in our dealings with customers, we will listen to feedback and act in a positive manner.
Comprehensive Complaints Handling Process and Feedback opportunities	We provide various formats for customers to contact Council. Refer to our website or contact our Customer Service Team for assistance. We have a Customer Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure that provides customers with the process on how to make a complaint.
Continuous Improvement	We continually seek opportunities to improve services and reflect on customer feedback and complaints as a chance to improve services.
Human Rights Consideration	We take into consideration The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities when responding to customers.

4.2 When is a response finalised?

A Response is considered to be finalised when the Action Officer has:

- a) Responded to the customer and has taken the requested action; and
- b) The relevant documentation is noted and/or registered in CRM and/or in EDMS with a self-explanatory note detailing what action has been taken in response to the request; and
- c) The relevant information and/or decisions have been communicated to the customer irrespective of any delay, outcome or change within the response timeframes; or
- d) The Customer Service Unit has dealt with at the first point of contact.

4.3 Response Timeframes

Verbal Contacts

The Action Officer will attempt to respond to unresolved telephone or in person requests within the **two business days** from when the contact was made with Council.

Written Correspondence

A response to correspondence will be forwarded within **10 business days** of receipt. This can be either an interim (advising customer of current status and timelines for progress or delay) or a substantive response (advising final decision, resolution, completion or fulfilment).

Exclusions or Exemptions to response timeframes:

Some applications / permits / items of correspondence, forwarded to the Shire will require processing in various ways, and alternate timeframes exist as follows:

Building Certificates and Building Consent Reports	Correctly completed Building Certificate applications and Building Consent Reports will be finalised within 15 business days of being received.
Community Event Applications	Correctly completed applications for Community Events will be finalised within 35 business days of being received.
Freedom of Information Requests	Correctly completed Freedom of Information requests, which are received with the appropriate application fee, will be responded to within 30 days of the application being received.
Local Laws Permit Applications (Keeping of Animals, Community Signs, Domestic Animal Businesses, Fundraising, Itinerant Trade, Kerbside Numbering, Livestock Grazing and Goods on Footpath)	Applications for Local Laws permits will be finalised within 20 business days of a correctly completed application being received.
Planning Applications	The <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i> specifies processing requirements for correctly completed planning applications. Processing timeframes can vary dependent on the complexity of the planning permit applications and the need to address other legislation (e.g. <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i>). There are no specific timeframes in which Council is required to process planning applications. However, Council seeks to process 80% of planning applications within 60 *statutory days.
Planning Permits – Application to Amend	The <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i> specifies processing requirements for correctly completed applications to amend planning permits. Processing timeframes can vary dependent on the complexity of the application to amend a planning permit and the need to address other legislation (e.g. <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i>).

* The term 'statutory day' is defined by legislation and allows for the exclusion of business days by a 'stop the clock' process. In other words, the absolute timeline measured in business days may be extended if one or more of a range of specific factors arises.

	There are no specific timeframes in which Council is required to process applications to amend planning permits. However, Council seeks to process 80% of planning applications within 60 *statutory days.
Planning Permits – Extensions and Plan Revisions	There is no specified timeframe within the <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i> regarding processing of planning permit extensions or plan revisions. Processing timeframes vary dependant on the complexity of the request, changes to planning legislation since the grant of the permit, referral requirements and the need to address other legislation (e.g. <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i>). However, Council seeks to process 80% of planning permit extensions or plan revisions within 30 *statutory days.
Registered Premises Renewal Applications	Correctly completed Registered Premises Renewal applications will be finalised within 20 business days of the application being received.
Septic Tank Applications	Correctly completed Septic Tank applications will be finalised within 20 business days of the application being received, unless the application needs to be referred to EPA Victoria or East Gippsland Water, in which case a timeframe cannot be specified.
Subdivision Certification	<i>Subdivision (Procedures) Regulations 2011</i> specify processing timelines for correctly completed plans of subdivision for certification. Processing timeframes can vary depending on referral authority responses. Council seeks to certify 90% of plans of subdivision within 49 *statutory days.
Temporary Dwelling Permits	Temporary Dwelling Permits will be finalised within 40 business days of a correctly completed application being received.

* The term 'statutory day' is defined by legislation and allows for the exclusion of business days by a 'stop the clock' process. In other words, the absolute timeline measured in business days may be extended if one or more of a range of specific factors arises.

5. RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLIANCE

As a customer focused organisation, customer service is the responsibility of all Council staff and external service providers including contractors and volunteers.

The following table outlines key responsibilities and roles for implementation, compliance and monitoring of this policy:

Role	Responsibility
Customer	Customers have a responsibility to display an appropriate level of courtesy and respect to Council staff.
Executive Group	Ensure appropriate governance, training and compliance to the policy. Manage customer contacts that have been escalated or where the Customer Response Policy and Procedure have not been adhered to.
Managers	Ensure staff are provided with opportunities for training and development to be able to manage customer contacts, relevant systems and comply with the Customer Response Policy and Procedure. Manage customer contacts that have been escalated or where the Customer Response Policy and Procedure have not been adhered to.
Immediate Supervisor	Ensure staff are provided with training and development to be able to manage customer contacts and comply with the Customer Response Policy and Procedure. Manage customer contacts that have been escalated or where the Customer Response Policy and Procedure have not been adhered to.
Council Staff	Staff are to meet the requirements of the Customer Response Policy and Customer Response Procedure. Staff are responsible for the delivery of customer service, response management and the management of their data/record keeping using the appropriate policies and procedure.
Information Technology Unit	Ensure timely support is provided to mitigate and eliminate any system related issues causing delay.
Information Management Unit	Ensure timely registration of written correspondence received and task to the appropriate Action Officer. Ensure Council staff receive necessary training in Information Management and systems.
Action Officer	Ensure that the task is completed, relevant correspondence or response has been provided to the customer and all internal stakeholders. The Action officer must finalise the response or task to the correct action officer promptly, ensuring that the customer is aware of the change of ownership of the response or task. The Action Officer must register all written correspondence from customer in Council's EDRMS when received directly from customer in person or via email.
Customer Service Staff	Ensure timely input of contact (in person and/or over the phone) in CRM attempting to resolve at first contact, task to the appropriate Action Officer when contact requires further action and/or response.

6. REFERENCES / ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

Relevant Legislation:

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 200
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Freedom of Information Act 1982
- Information Privacy Act 2000
- Protected Disclosure Act 2012
- Local Government Act 1989

Related Policies and documents (internal):

- Customer Response Policy
- Information Privacy Policy
- Access to Information (Corporate Records) Policy
- Information Management (Records) Policy
- Media Relations Policy
- Protected Disclosure Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Engagement Policy
- Customer Response Procedure
- Complaints Management Policy and Procedure
- Unacceptable Behaviour by Member of Public Procedure

7. PRIVACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATION

All personal information collected by Council will be handled in accordance with all applicable privacy legislation and will be used only for the purpose of investigating the request.

When gathering information to respond to a customer, Council will only:

- use it to deal with the complaint or to address systemic issues arising from the complaint
- disclose it in a de-identified format when disclosing data to the public
- share it with Council Staff on a need to know basis

The Customer Response Policy has been assessed as compliant with the obligations and objectives of the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

8. CONTACT DETAILS

Mail: East Gippsland Shire Council
PO Box 1618, Bairnsdale Victoria 3875

Telephone: 0351539500 / 1300555886

Email: feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au

Website: <http://www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au>

Fax: (03) 5153 9576

In person at:

Bairnsdale Customer Service Centre
Business Centre
Corporate Centre
Lakes Entrance Service Centre
Orbost Service Centre
Omeo Service Centre
Paynesville Service Centre
Mallacoota Service Centre
Buchan Outreach Centre
Cann River Outreach Centre
Bendoc Outreach Centre

24 Service Street, Bairnsdale Victoria 3875
34 Pyke Street, Bairnsdale, Victoria 3875
273 Main Street, Bairnsdale, Victoria 3875
18 Mechanics Street, Lakes Entrance
1 Ruskin Street, Orbost
179 Day Avenue, Omeo
55 The Esplanade, Paynesville
70 Maurice Avenue Mallacoota.
6 Davies Street, Buchan
11 Genoa Street, Cann River
18 Dowling Street, Bendoc

National Relay Service:

133 677

Translating and Interpreting Service:

131 450 (within Australia)

+613 9268 8332 (outside Australia)

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