



# Customer Response Policy

Sutherland Shire Council

## Document review and approval

### This document has been approved by

	Name	Minute No	Date approved
1	Finance, Resources & Management Committee – FIN170-98	1053	16 March, 1998
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### Revision history

Version	Author	Date	Revision
1	Director Corporate Services	9 March, 1998	Original Version
2	Director Corporate Services	2 April, 2001	Policy re-confirmed.
3	Internal Ombudsman	27 April, 2004	provisions relating to dealing with difficult customers; the inclusion of a purpose and definitions; the consideration of council's limited resources; that civil issues will not be addressed by council; definition of the three tier process for responding to customers; consolidation of the finalisation and acknowledgment deadlines; prioritisation of enquiries or complaints; inclusion of confidentiality; inclusion of the need for the analysis of complaints; inclusion of timely review of the policy; inclusion of breaches of the policy; removal of all references to The Complaints Administrator and their responsibilities and duties; inclusion of procedures for staff, Councillors and the customer
4	Internal Ombudsman	26 September, 2011	A clearer definition of what are 'Service Requests' as opposed to 'Complaints'; Removal of instructions and advice for staff, including the appended Difficult Customers Procedure; Updated contacts and information relating to website addresses and the "report it" function of Council's website
5	Internal Ombudsman	14 January, 2013	Policy reviewed under annual review process. No amendment necessary
6	Governance Manager	15 July, 2013	Removed references to the Office of the Internal Ombudsman, due to the abolishment of this function.
7	Governance Manager	24 March, 2014	Removed references to the Office of the Internal Ombudsman, due to the abolishment of this function.

**SUTHERLAND SHIRE COUNCIL**  
**CUSTOMER RESPONSE POLICY**

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## 1. Foreword by General Manager

Sutherland Shire Council is a service organisation. We exist to improve lifestyles and we aim to meet your needs by providing good customer service.

We place a great emphasis on prompt, efficient and quality customer service. We welcome and appreciate feedback and use it to improve our services.

This policy outlines what you can expect from us.

To support this policy we constantly:

- listen to our community,
- monitor our successes and failures to improve the services we are providing,
- train our staff in best practice service delivery,
- address any complaints about our services in a prompt, professional, objective and unbiased manner, and
- report on our performance.

### **Our Commitments to our Community are:**

**Community satisfaction:** The highest priority is given to satisfying the needs and expectations of our community

**Management by fact:** Our analysis of problems, decisions, performance measurements and other actions is based on fact and sound judgement

**Continuous improvement:** Individually, in teams and as an organisation, we are committed to ongoing improvement.

**Ethics:** We will promote sound, legal and honourable practice in the conduct of Council business

JW Rayner  
General Manager

## 2. What you can expect from us:

To provide you, our customers, with a high standard of service we will:

- Provide 24 hours, 7 day a week service to the community. Simply phone us on (02) 9710 0333.
- Treat all customers fairly, respectfully, courteously and sensitively.
- Provide procedural fairness in our decision making.
- Apply a systematic process to receiving, analysing and managing enquiries and complaints.
- Provide up- to- date information on our website.
- Respond to phone calls, emails, faxes and written correspondence within our stated service standards.
- Provide a responsive frontline service and endeavour to minimise waiting times.
- Provide our documentation in “plain English” and ensure customers have access to a language interpretation service.
- Provide you details of alternative avenues for redress (if applicable) if you are unhappy with our response.
- Keep your personal details confidential when you lodge a complaint or enquiry, unless we are legally required to do otherwise.

## 3. Service Requests or Complaints – Is there a difference?

We value all contact with you and encourage you to contact us to discuss our services and facilities. As an organisation, we will categorise this information so we can respond to you and monitor how well we are meeting your needs.

### 3.1 Service requests

Service requests are contacts you make with Council to seek information about a Council service or facility, to report a problem or to request Council to assist you.

Typical examples of service requests are where you:

- Request general information about our services and facilities.
- Request to see Council documents or files or an explanation of policies or procedures or decisions of Council.
- Report damaged or faulty infrastructure (eg damaged footpaths, potholes in roads), including safety issues.
- Request Council assistance with matters concerning neighbouring property or neighbours (eg noise or unauthorised building works).
- Report hazards (eg a tree branch has fallen).
- Lodge an appeal on a Council decision in accordance with procedure or policy.

Where possible we will provide you with the information or service immediately. However, many requests will need to be referred to a particular work area for action. In these circumstances we will register your enquiry and refer the matter to an appropriate person to respond. A reference number will be provided to you so you can follow up on your request. We will advise you of the expected timeframe to deal with your matter.

### 3.2 Complaints

A complaint is where you are dissatisfied with:

- A decision that Council has made,
- The conduct of a Council employee or Councillor,
- A Council policy or procedure ,
- The information, service you received from Council after making an enquiry or service request on a matter, and/or

- The timeliness of Council’s response to your service request.

We treat complaints seriously and have established a ‘Complaints Handling Procedure’ which provides direction for staff and information about how we will manage complaints. This procedure sets out a three tier process for dealing with complaints.

#### 4. Our Service Standards

It is the policy of Council that all enquiries and complaints are acknowledged and finalised within the times set out below. Each division has in place timeframes and procedures with specific types of enquiries respective to the operations of their business units. These timeframes and how they are met forms part of regular performance reporting to Council.

When we call for public submissions, for example, on draft policies or planning instruments, we will advise whether acknowledgement of your submission, and /or advice on the outcome will be provided to you.

Council’s Service Standards are set out in the table below.

	SERVICE REQUEST		COMPLAINT	
REGISTER	in person or by telephone	in writing, by fax or email or via Council’s website	in person or by telephone	in writing, by fax or email or via Council’s website
	Request registered & reference number provided at time of lodgement	Acknowledged in writing, by telephone or email within 3 working days	Request registered & reference number allocated	Acknowledged in writing, by telephone or email within 3 working days
<b>FINALISE MATTER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety issues inspected within 5 hours.</li> <li>• Finalised in 30 days, or in accordance with service standard set by Manager</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety issues inspected within 5 hours.</li> <li>• Finalised in 30 days</li> </ul>	
<b>PROVIDE ADVICE TO CUSTOMER</b>	If the matter cannot be finalised within 30 days the customer will be advised (in writing, by email or telephone) of the expected time it will take to address the request or provide the service.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In writing or by email-</li> <li>• Name of officer handling complaint</li> <li>• Fortnightly updates of complaint handling process</li> <li>• At finalisation the customer is advised of the outcome and decision made in relation to the complaint, including reasons and provided with alternate avenues for review of decision</li> </ul>	

## 5. How to make an enquiry or lodge a complaint

You can raise an enquiry or complaint in the following ways:

**In person:** Visit the Customer Service Centre, Ground Floor Administration Centre, 4-20 Eton Street, between 8.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

If your enquiry or complaint relates to one of our centres (such as a Child Care Centre, Library, the Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sutherland Entertainment Centre or a Leisure Centre) you can approach directly the staff in that centre to discuss your concern.

Enquiries relating to building proposals may involve specific, technical and often complicated information. These enquiries should be directed to the Council's Duty Assessment Officers who are available by phone or at the Customer Service Centre from 8.30am to 1.00pm, Monday to Friday.

**By telephone:** Phone the Customer Service Centre on (02) 9710 0333.  
Rates specific enquiries can be directed to our Rates Hotline on (02) 97100585.

**By letter:** Address all correspondence, quoting a file reference number if available, to The General Manager, Sutherland Shire Council, Locked Bag 17, Sutherland NSW 1499.

**By email:** [ssc@ssc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ssc@ssc.nsw.gov.au)  
*Complaints received by email must include the sender's name and address, so correspondence between Council and the customer are directed appropriately and not through incorrect email channels.*

**On the Web:** [www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au) – you can lodge service requests directly on this site on the 'Report it' page

**By facsimile:** (02) 9710 0265

Each time you contact Council you should provide your name, address and contact details together with a brief description of your request or issue. You should bring with you or send copies of supporting documents, photos or evidence you refer to, including previous correspondence with Council on the subject.

If additional assistance is required we may be able to offer you the following:

- Language Aide Officers are multilingual employees who can provide basic assistance with general Council matters. Visit or contact by phone the Customer Service Centre during business hours.
- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) is available for people who do not speak English and for English speakers needing to communicate with them. TIS has services in over 75 different languages and dialects and are accessible from anywhere in Australia for the cost of a local call. For most general Council queries this service is provided free of charge. This service is available at Council's Customer Service Centre. Alternatively, you can contact TIS on 13 14 50 and ask them to contact council on (02) 9710 0333 on your behalf.

Further advice on who to contact or assistance in making your enquiry or complaint can be sought from our Customer Service Centre on (02) 9710 0333. Our Service Standards.

## 6. Our Three - Tier Approach to Complaints Management

Sutherland Shire Council has a three tier approach for processing requests for information or services, or reviewing a decision that has impacted on the customer. These three tiers respond to different types of enquiries and complaints. The three tier approach is outlined below:

### 6.1 Tier 1: Frontline Complaint Handling – Quick Resolution of Complaints

When an enquiry or complaint is raised with an individual staff member, that staff member will attempt to resolve the issue.

Immediate resolution may not always be possible as further information, advice or action may be required. If this is the case the officer will register the complaint and refer the issue to their supervisor or another appropriate officer. Where the receiving officer is the subject of a complaint, that officer will refer the complaint to their supervisor for action.

If the staff member cannot resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of the customer, or there are other mitigating factors, the issue will be referred to the appropriate Manager for resolution. In some cases a customer will be requested to put a complaint about a serious or complex matter in writing.

### 6.2 Tier 2: Alternative Resolution of Serious or Complex Complaints – Investigation or Internal Review

If a complainant is still dissatisfied, the complaint will be referred to a senior officer (usually the Divisional Director) for review and/or investigation. The Director will provide the complainant with the results of the review.

Issues concerning corruption, serious or substantial waste, or conflicts of interest should be directed to the General Manager. The General Manager has reporting responsibilities to external agencies such as the Division of Local Government (DLG) and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

### 6.3 Tier 3: Optional External Review

Members of the community are also able to make a complaint to an external agency.

If you feel that your complaint has not been satisfactorily dealt with by Council, or your complaint involves allegations of corruption, maladministration or is extremely serious in nature, you have the right to contact the following agencies:

<b>Nature of Complaint</b>	<b>External Agency</b>
Matters concerning maladministration or related to child abuse	<p><b>NSW Ombudsman</b>            Website: <a href="http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au">www.ombo.nsw.gov.au</a>            Phone Toll free: 02 9286 1000 or 1800 451 524            Email: <a href="mailto:nswombo@nswombudsman.nsw.gov.au">nswombo@nswombudsman.nsw.gov.au</a></p> <p>For reporting Child Abuse :  <b>NSW Department of Community Services</b>            Website: <a href="http://www.community.nsw.gov.au">www.community.nsw.gov.au</a>            Phone- Child Protection Helpline:            132111or 1800 212 936</p>
Matters or complaints concerning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a serious breakdown in Council's operations</li> </ul>	<p><b>NSW Division of Local Government</b>            Website: <a href="http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au">www.dlg.nsw.gov.au</a>            Phone: 02 4428 4100</p>



<b>Nature of Complaint</b>	<b>External Agency</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Council as a whole not operating satisfactorily</li> <li>pecuniary interests or political donations</li> <li>competitive neutrality (Where Council as a supplier of services, is alleged to use their public position to gain an unfair advantage over a private sector competitor in the marketplace)</li> </ul>	Email: <a href="mailto:dig@dlg.nsw.gov.au">dig@dlg.nsw.gov.au</a>
Matters concerning corrupt conduct, which is defined as dishonest or partial exercise of any official functions by a public official. (The ICAC Act requires the General Manager to report suspected cases of corrupt conduct to the ICAC.)	<b>Independent Commission Against Corruption</b> Website: <a href="http://www.icac.nsw.gov.au">www.icac.nsw.gov.au</a> Phone: 02 82815999 or Toll free: 1800 463 909 Email: <a href="mailto:icac@icac.nsw.gov.au">icac@icac.nsw.gov.au</a>
Matters in relation to discrimination, disability and/or harassment.	<b>Anti-Discrimination Board</b> Website: <a href="http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au">www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au</a> Phone: 02 9268 5555 or Toll free: 1800 670 812 Email: <a href="mailto:adbcontact@agd.nsw.gov.au">adbcontact@agd.nsw.gov.au</a>  <b>Australian Human Rights Commission</b> Website: <a href="http://www.hreaoc.gov.au">www.hreaoc.gov.au</a> Phone: 02 92849600 Email: <a href="mailto:complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au">complaintsinfo@humanrights.gov.au</a>
Breaches of the Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998	<b>Privacy NSW</b> Website: <a href="http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au">www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au</a> Phone: (02) 8019 1600 email: <a href="mailto:privacy_nsw@agd.nsw.gov.au">privacy_nsw@agd.nsw.gov.au</a>

## 7.0 Confidentiality and Anonymity

We protect information of our customers in accordance with our adopted *Privacy Management Plan*. It should be noted that Council will sometimes be legally required to disclose information about complaints. (For example, in response to a court order or subpoena)

Anonymous complaints made to Council can be difficult to investigate. Often staff need more information from the person making the complaint and this cannot be obtained if the source is anonymous. Council will not normally investigate anonymous complaints unless the issue raises a serious matter or is a threat to public safety, and/ or there is sufficient information in the request to carry out an investigation.

All submissions to Council on development applications are available for viewing by the applicant or any other person. It should also be noted that under legislation, persons making submissions to development applications or planning instrument proposals must disclose any political donation or gift made to any councillor or council employee. Further advice may be obtained from Planning NSW or may be found at the external website: [www.planning.nsw.gov.au](http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au)

## 8.0 Limitations to service

In providing services to you, we are required to meet many legislative and policy requirements. This means that we may not meet a request for one of the following reasons:

- You may be requesting a service that council does not provide. If this is the case, we will refer you to any appropriate agency that can assist you.
- Your matter may be subject to review by another authority (such as the NSW Ombudsman or the courts).
- We need to ensure our limited resources are distributed fairly throughout our community and your request is for a service outside our resource limits.
- Your complaint or request may relate to a matter which is old or may be determined to be frivolous, vexatious, not in good faith, or concerning a trivial matter.
- We have obligations to keep our staff and councillors safe from harm. This means that we may restrict the way we provide our services to individuals who display inappropriate behaviour or are unreasonable. We will only do this in extreme cases and in accordance with our *Procedures for Managing Unreasonable Customers*.

If your request is not met you will be provided with an explanation why it cannot be met in your case.

## 9.0 Other related policies and procedures

- Complaints Handling Procedure (including Procedures for Managing Unreasonable Customers)
- Privacy Management Plan
- Council Code of Conduct.
- Statement of Business Ethics.
- Access to Information Policy.
- Media and Public Comment Policy

The above policies and guidelines may be found on Council's website:  
[www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au)

Further information or feedback on this policy can be directed to Council's Public Officer on 9710 0190