

**CUSTOMER
SERVICE
HANDBOOK**



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CEO'S MESSAGE

CUSTOMER SERVICE IS CRITICAL TO THE CITY OF ALBANY - WITHOUT RESIDENTS AND CUSTOMERS THERE WOULD BE NO NEED FOR OUR SERVICES.

A focus on providing the best possible customer service is critical to the City of Albany, as it provides the foundation for ongoing high quality services to our community. Customers and residents are the reason we are here.

We will strive to meet and exceed our community expectations and where we fall short, reflect on what we can do better or differently next time. Continuous improvement based on feedback and contemporary best practice means we will stay relevant and ultimately increase our job satisfaction for a job well done.

Please take the time to read this handbook and understand the expectation on all staff across the organisation regardless of position or location. It also complements the City of Albany customer standards and what our customers want and expect, when we provide a service to the community.

This handbook has been developed as a guide for current and future reference as a constant reminder of your important role in delivering services, which embody our organisational values.

Actions speak louder than words and good customer service is critical to our business service delivery. Together we can continue to provide excellent customer service.

ANDREW SHARPE

Chief Executive Officer

The City of Albany acknowledges the support of City of Melville and use of their reference material and resources in developing this handbook.

The City of Albany respectfully acknowledges the Menang Noogar people as the traditional custodians of the land on which the City conducts its business, and pays respect to elders past and present.

OUR VISION

“To be Western Australia’s most sought-after and unique regional City to work, live and visit.”

OUR VALUES

- **Focused:** on community outcomes;
- **United:** by working & learning together;
- **Accountable:** for our actions; and
- **Proud:** of our people and our community.

In everything we do, we seek to adhere to our values that guide our attitudes and behaviours.

We believe that great customer service is based on a great work place where our values and behaviours are reflected in our actions and decisions.

It’s also where we provide equitable access to quality customer service to ensure great service is delivered to people of all abilities.

WHAT CUSTOMER SERVICE MEANS?

What customer service means?



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Customer service is providing a quality product or accessible services in an equitable manner that meets or exceeds the needs of a customer. Customer Service is not a department - it’s an attitude.

WHO IS A CUSTOMER?

A customer is any person or organisation we have dealings with.

Most definitions of customer service refer to how an organisation treats and interacts with external customers. However, when we extend customer service to inside our organisation, it leads to even greater success.

QUALITIES IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

While there are a multitude of customer needs, five basic needs stand out:

- **Friendliness:** the most basic quality associated with courtesy and politeness.
- **Empathy:** take the time to listen and appreciate your customer's feelings.
- **Competence:** is crucial for the customer to get their issue resolved.
- **Knowledge:** customers want to feel confident they are getting the correct information.
- **Accessibility and inclusion:** equal access to people living with a disability, language or cultural barriers or diverse communication needs is a basic right and a key goal in all of our service interactions.



Remember: In order to support customers who have trouble hearing or speaking, utilise the services of the National Relay Service:

www.relayservice.gov.au

Hearing/speechimpaired call **133 677 (TTY)**

Speech relay call **1300 555 727**

OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING LEVELS.

In order to exceed the expectations of both internal and external customers, the City of Albany aims to provide customer service training at three levels:

LEVELS

Level One

Our commitment (online module). **The employee will:**

- Understand the City of Albany Customer Service Standards and Charter.
- Know how to represent the City of Albany in letters and emails.
- Know how to represent the City of Albany during face-to-face interactions with customers.

Level Two

Our City (training calendar). **The employee will:**

- Understand the image and ethos the City of Albany wishes to present to its customers and community.
- Understand their role in customer service and process improvement.
- Understand freedom of information and privacy legislation.
- Know how to use the appropriate tools for customer interactions.
- Understand feedback.
- Know how to deal with complaints.

Level Three

(for Managers, Supervisors and those in relevant positions) Challenging Behaviour. **The employee will:**

- Know how to deal with challenging behaviour.

OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

When customers contact us, we are committed to providing:

- Polite, helpful and respectful service.
- Our time and attention to address their enquiries.
- Services that are consistent and promptly delivered.

- Accurate information about our services, decisions made and the resources available to our community.
- Accessibility for all community members.
- Easy to use feedback and complaint processes.
- Assistance to connect with other services within our community.



We aim to:

- Answer phone calls promptly during normal business hours.



- Attend to customers personally within five minutes.



- Complete all of customer business during first contact.



- If customer's request a call back, we will respond by the end of the next working day.



- Respond to correspondence (email, letter or Customer Service Request) within ten working days.



Presentation

Many events or occurrences may influence a person's perception of the City. Creating a visual perception plays a vital role in people's impressions and reactions.

In order to produce the desired level of customer satisfaction, these simple actions are expected from all employees:

- Everything in public view should be clean and tidy, and professionally presented.
- When meeting people face to face staff need to be suitably and professionally presented. Office staff should wear neat and clean clothing appropriate for an office environment.
- All staff representing the City in a face to face capacity should wear a name badge.
- Food should not be consumed at desks within sight of the public.
- Smoking is not permitted inside at entries or within 10 metres of City of Albany buildings or vehicles*.
- All signs should be typed and proofed for ease of reading, professionalism and to convey a polite and positive message.
- In addition to presentation, there are other factors that will produce the desired level of customer satisfaction, such as a smile, eye contact, shaking hands, being attentive and the tone of voice.



Telephone

The telephone is often the first or last place a customer comes in contact with an organisation. Being telephone friendly is a free and cost effective way to deliver better customer service:

- The way you answer the telephone should be consistent.
- Your telephone greeting should include welcome and your name. For example 'Welcome to the City of Albany this is (your first name). How may I help you?'
- If you are unable to answer a call, your phone should be forwarded to another staff

member or have the facility for the caller to leave a voice message.

- When transferring calls, let the person know the customer's name and the issue in brief.
- Attempt to pick up within three rings. More than three rings can signal chaos or inattentiveness in the office.
- Ending a call is the final step in good telephone etiquette. End the call on a positive note, repeating any actions agreed to be taken and what is going to be done to help or serve the customer. It is also best practice to end your call by asking: 'Is there anything else I can help you with? Thanks for calling us today.'



Out of Office Message

It is essential to set up an "out of office" message on your telephone if you are out of the office and not be able to return a call by the end of the next working day. Your message should include:

- Where the customer has called (the City of Albany and/or work area).
- Who they have called.

- What to do (i.e. leave message or who else to contact).
- If they leave a message, when it will be responded to.

All City phones allow messages to be left on voicemail. Alternatively, you can redirect your phone to a colleague's phone or alternate work mobile number.



Meetings

If you are the organiser of a meeting or invited to attend a meeting, it is important you conduct yourself in a respectful and professional manner.

- Be on time: being ready on time, shows respect for others.
- Be prepared: as the organiser you should set an agenda which is shared well in advance. Participants should come prepared and be aware of the

objectives of the meeting.

- Silence your mobile phone: ensure that your phone is out of sight.
- Be a good listener and active participant: show respect by being professional, attentive and engaged. Be courteous and listen when others are speaking.
- Unless you are taking notes of the meeting, don't engage in other activities at the meeting.
- Don't eat during meetings: you can drink beverages, but avoid

eating, unless it is a working lunch, breakfast or dinner.

- Don't distract others by demonstrating nervous habits. For example: mindlessly tapping a pen or tapping your feet on the floor. These actions make you appear nervous or bored, neither of which are good for your image.
- Say thank you: at the end of the meeting thank the organiser or customer for their time and the opportunity to meet.

Non-verbal communication

During interpersonal communication, a great deal happens without a word being spoken. Non-verbal aspects of communication include body language, eye contact, use of personal space, choice of incidental items and physical environment.

Body language

Communication is enhanced if you can use your body to present a relaxed, non-threatening but confident image to conversation partners. People to whom you are speaking may perceive crossed arms and legs as indications that you are withholding something or are an unwilling partner in the communication. Constant glances at your watch signify impatience and a desire to be elsewhere. Hands on hips, leaning forward and pointing or shaking a finger can be perceived as dominating and aggressive.

Instead, keep your hands relaxed and in view, and do not cross your legs. Lean slightly forward with your chin projected a little and maintain eye contact with the person you are talking to.

Eye contact

Maintaining eye contact with our conversation partners is generally a good idea. In many Australian contexts, it conveys honesty and encourages the other person's engagement in a conversation. However, some cultures avoid prolonged eye contact; averted eyes signify respect.

Personal space

Requirements for personal space vary between cultures and between individuals.

Be sensitive to the reasons other might appear to invade or back away from our personal space, and be prepared to accommodate their preference.

Physical environment

Consider the needs of your conversation partner. If they need a more private space for your conversation, make the effort to provide one. Consider the comfort of your customer: people with mobility impairment and some frail older people would appreciate somewhere to sit to have their enquiry dealt with.

If you have more control over a physical environment, consider issues such as ambient sound, lighting, temperature, seating and sight lines. In each case, make choices that help your conversation partners relax and focus on your message.

City of Albany Customer Service recommends all meetings lasting more than a minute or two should be held in a meeting room to avoid congestion in the Reception area at North Road.

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is affected by the non-verbal influences described above. Our listeners hear our spoken words in the context of a stream of non-verbal messages. Consistency is important. It is useless to say 'I am listening to you' when your conversation partner clearly sees that you are preoccupied (fiddling with papers) or resistant to their message (arms crossed, eyes wandering). Make your non-verbal messages consistent with your words.

CUSTOMER SERVICE HANDBOOK

Clear thinking is essential for clear expression. If you are in any way uncertain about what you need to say in verbal communications, clarify your message by thinking it through, jotting down summary notes or discussing issues with colleagues.

First impressions count

- The first five to 15 seconds are critical in establishing the tone of our interaction.
- Present yourself with a smile, look the person in the eye, give a warm, clear greeting and an immediate offer to help.

- For front counter staff: if you are busy on the phone or with another customer, acknowledge the new customer by making eye contact and, if possible, advise that you will attend to them as soon as possible.

Build rapport

- Listen actively.
- Take ownership.
- Be courteous and show respect.
- Show interest in what the customer is saying by keeping eye contact, smiling and using their name.
- Empathise, show that you understand.
- Show appreciation by thanking the customer, for example 'thank you for the call and taking the

time', 'thank you for bringing this issue to our attention - often we don't know about an issue until a customer alerts us.

This is an especially useful technique as our customer maybe expecting you to defend, and you surprise them by thanking them. The break in the pattern that they are expecting often reduces their emotional reaction and gains their attention.

Establish the nature of the enquiry;

- Listen to what the customer has to say without interruption.
- Frustrated or angry customers expect you to interrupt them, so leave a pause between when they have finished talking and when you begin to speak.
- Leaving an obvious pause in our conversation breaks any

'broken record' routine.

- If customers talk over you when you try to speak, this often means that they are not yet confident that you understand their concerns.
- If the customer cannot get past the emotion, arrange for a break such as calling them back or searching for a document.

Remember the 3 C's - Check, Correction and Confirmation.

Check that you have understood by summarising the facts back to your customer "let me just make sure I'm on the right track".

will correct you and you have prevented solving the wrong problem.

Wait for the correction or confirmation:

- If you get it wrong, they

- If you get it right, the customer will agree with you, and you've made a connection.

Either way, it allows the conversation to progress.

Listening and feedback

Concentrate on the other person's words and show them you are engaged with the conversation. Do this by adopting the open body posture described and giving brief encouragements by nodding, reacting with facial expressions or offering a brief 'Hmm' or 'Yes'.

Give your conversation partner feedback that shows your understanding of their speech. If you don't understand, of course, ask clarifying questions until you are sure you have understood their message. Check your understanding by paraphrasing what they have told you, that is, tell it back to them in your own words.

In the course of a conversation, you are likely to receive feedback from the other person. If the feedback is negative or shows a lack of understanding of your

message, do not blame the other person for not understanding. Take the negative feedback as an opportunity to improve your part in the conversation.

If the feedback is positive, do not assume that this necessarily shows understanding. Your conversation partner's feedback might arise from politeness rather than comprehension. Listen for other signs of understanding such as statements that rephrase your message, or questions that build on understanding rather than revealing misunderstanding.

At the end of a conversation it is often useful to offer a short summary of the content, especially when the conversation has covered actions to be taken by either party. Be sure to include an agreed deadline for any actions.

Tone and culture

Adopt a tone of appropriate assertiveness in your conversation. Avoid the extremes of aggression and submission by building a secure knowledge of your own rights and being prepared to accept your responsibilities. Asserting your rights and acknowledging your responsibilities encourages

conversation partners to treat you with respect and minimises defensive or aggressive reactions.

Be aware of cultural differences. Use of the English language varies according to cultural background. When speaking to someone of different cultural origins, try to use words that are widely understood.

Boundaries

Set boundaries for your conversations with members of the public. As a City of Albany employee, you may be asked to pass opinions on issues of public interest. You are entitled to your own opinions and you are entitled to express them freely in private. However, when you are acting as a representative of the City of Albany, you should refrain from expressing personal opinions

on issues. Instead, confine your conversation to matters that fall within your professional competence and focus on the facts.

These principles apply to general conversation in daily dealings with colleagues and with members of the public as part of your duties for the City of Albany.

CONFLICT

Sometimes conflict arises in the course of normal dealings with members of the public. Conflict is not always a negative process; as long as it does not get personal, it can lead to better understanding of different points of view. When there is unresolved disagreement about an issue, inform the person

of the City's Complaints Management Policy. Their use of the complaint form might help to define the issue and lead to a solution.

When confronted with an angry person, remain calm and do not take their comments personally. Avoid defensive or aggressive body language, and focus on understanding the source of the person's anger. Showing empathy and giving careful feedback can often calm angry people. Going through this process also helps you to understand exactly what the person needs from you.

First it is important just to listen and give feedback without trying to offer solutions. Phrases such as "I can see you are upset..." or "So this is stressful for you ..." show you are listening and give the person the opportunity to say "Yes". Even this small element of agreement can reduce the sense of being on opposing sides of a conflict; rather, you are jointly tackling a difficult situation.

Next, name the person's need, but not in terms of a solution to the problem they are complaining about. Instead, focus on the emotion they are feeling: "I can see you are upset and you need some reassurance" or "So this is stressful for you and you need to feel calmer."

Continue this until the person begins to calm down and you can start to offer practical solutions. In the calming process, the person might have revealed other needs that can be addressed and would have been missed had you simply tried to impose solutions from the outset. However, if a member of the public delivers personal verbal abuse, do not retaliate but politely inform them that you are entitled to end the conversation if the personal abuse continues.

If the abuse continues, end the conversation. If the conversation is taking place on City property, advise the person that you will ask your line manager to continue the conversation. If that is not possible at the time or is not acceptable to the person, you are entitled to ask them to leave the property.

If you feel unsafe or threatened in a conversation that involves verbal conflict, politely excuse yourself and refer the person to your line manager. When you need to attend a meeting with someone who you know to be angry and potentially aggressive, inform nearby colleagues or ask a colleague to attend the meeting with you.

If you use the small meeting rooms at North Road or other meeting rooms, familiarise yourself with the emergency buttons in the rooms, mostly located next to the light switch. In the event of aggression from a member of the public, using the emergency button will summon the police.



Discuss solutions

- Find out what the customer would like to achieve.
- Look for win-win solutions.
- Think realistically – your promises must be delivered in an appropriate timeframe and within the resources available.
- Summarise the solution. For example:
 - What action is to be taken?
 - Who will be involved?
 - When will it be done?
 - Where will it be done?
 - Are all parties aware of what will happen next?

Customers speaking or behaving inappropriately

When people are upset or emotional they can lose track of what is normal, reasonable behaviour. In many cases being supportive, respectful, and giving them time to recover will be all that is required, but this isn't always the case. So what do you do if it continues?

- Bring attention to the unacceptable behaviour and refocus the customer on the end result and moving forward. 'I can see this is upsetting - how can I help sort this out for you?'
- Firmly and respectfully request the behaviour to stop, allowing the customer time to recover and save face. This may require a short silence from you afterwards as the request sinks in. 'Mr Smith, I really want to help you, however if you continue speaking like this I will have to walk away/hang up'.
- If the behaviour continues, repeat the request and the consequence if they do not stop. 'Mr. Smith, I am requesting that you stop or I will have to walk away'.
- If the behaviour continues, walk away and brief your supervisor on the matter. Record what happened so that there is no dispute as to why the contact was terminated.
- Take a moment to recover from the interaction.

Remember

Never be rude in return – it is better to walk away if you feel you may not be able to behave appropriately. At no point is a staff member expected to tolerate ongoing poor behaviour as part of their job.

For more information see the City of Albany Managing Challenging Behaviours Guideline with Customer Service Charter, and the Code of Conduct.



Written Correspondence

Every day, we dispatch a large amount of correspondence to our customers and it is essential that this reflects our image by keeping it professional, concise and friendly.

In brief:

- Ensure that correspondence is easy to read and understand. Avoid using jargon.
- Always keep the tone respectful and professional.
- The latest corporate templates are to be used for all correspondence. These

Unfortunately, it is not. When you speak, you edit and correct as you go, and your voice tone and body language enhance your listener's understanding of your message. You usually gain some form of feedback about whether or not you are being understood and you can repeat or rephrase your message on the spot.

Written words must work with fewer supports. Because less feedback is available, written words work better when they are simple and unambiguous. Because you cannot add intonation or body language to a written message, it is important to use correct punctuation to indicate pauses, rhythm, emphasis, quotes, questions, headings and lists. Because City of Albany employees are part of a team, it is important to use a common style in written communication.

The Australian Government adopted a policy of using plain English in official documents. Complex, bureaucratic language is

can be found on the City's intranet – ask administrative staff if you need help.

- Always advise the reader where they can get more information.
- Proof read the correspondence before you send it, remembering to run a spell check.
- All correspondence that is defined as a corporate record must be registered in Synergy in line with the Record Keeping procedure, which is available on the City's intranet.

If you know how to say something, it should be easy enough to write it down, shouldn't it?

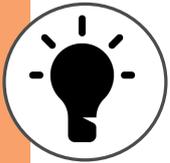
unnecessary and inefficient. Plain language is efficient and effective, simply because more people understand more of the message in a shorter time.

Federal and State laws oblige City of Albany employees to use inclusive language in official documents. It is generally unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of race, religion, gender, national or ethnic origin, or physical or mental capabilities.

When referring to groups of people, choose words that include rather than exclude, unless the exclusion is essential in the context of your message. For example, gender-specific job titles have disappeared from the City's workforce. Years ago the City might have employed a 'foreman', and there might have been consternation about the job title had a woman applied for the position. Now the City employs 'coordinators' or 'team leaders' to do the same job and the gender of the applicant is not an issue.

With a little practice, gender-neutral language is simple to use. Sometimes a writer becomes anxious about his or her text becoming forced and unwieldy because of having to use 'his or her'. Sometimes writers relax because their text doesn't have to use unwieldy language.

In the first sentence, using the singular 'a writer' created a problem with gender-neutral language. In the second sentence, using the plural 'writers' got rid of the problem because the sentence could use gender-neutral 'their' instead of 'his or her'.



Here are some tips for inclusive word choices:

- Use 'people with disability' rather than 'the disabled' or 'paraplegics' or 'deaf people'. The intention is to emphasise the person rather than the disability.
- Noongar is the term for Aboriginal people whose family history connects to the South West corner of WA. Use Noongar when you are referring specifically to Aboriginal people

with this local connection. Use 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' for Indigenous people in general in the national context, and bear in mind that not all Aboriginal residents are Noongar people.

- Australia's population is ageing, but many people will fiercely resist being called 'old' or 'elderly'. Use the term 'seniors' or 'older Australians' except in contexts where specific cause exists to identify people as retirees.

Local government language

Sub-cultures such as local governments tend to create their own jargon. An example is the use of 'Council'. Most people outside of local government refer to 'the Council' while the insiders use 'Council', as if naming a person: Council decided to...; we will ask Council to... Try to avoid this use of jargon by always referring to 'the Council', using the definite article 'the'.

The term 'the Council' refers narrowly to the elected Mayor and Councillors and should be used when you refer to meetings, policies and decisions. Use 'the City' to refer to administrative or operational activities carried out in the name of the Council. In other words, don't write 'the Council will mow the lawns in the park'. We don't expect to see the elected members in the park mowing the lawn; we expect to see the work carried out by City of Albany staff implementing the Council's decision.

Note: that 'the Council' should be considered a singular noun. Do not write 'the Council are meeting...' but write 'the Council is meeting...'

The terms 'the City of Albany' or 'the City' can hold various meanings according to context, and embrace a range

of usages. Use 'the City of Albany' or 'the City' when you are referring to the:

- Corporate entity comprising the Council and staff together;
- Corporate entity acting on behalf of the Council, in administration or operations;

and

- Geographical area within the municipal boundaries.

Do not use 'the City of Albany' to refer to the people who live in Albany; they may be referred to as Albany residents or as the Albany community.



Emails

Best method - Consider if email is the best method. Not all people check emails regularly. For example, an email about a meeting change in half an hour may not reach everyone. Also, negative news is best handled with a face-to-face or telephone conversation and followed up with an email.

Subject - Limit each email to a single topic. This makes it easier for recipients to understand the email, find it at a later time and is also helpful when you are registering the email in Synergy.

Use descriptive subject lines so that your reader does not have to guess the content of the email. If the subject changes during an email interaction, change the subject line to reflect the new material to help people search for messages and to easily register in Synergy if required. Set a clear time or date that a response is required by, if needed, and place in the subject line.

Keep emails brief and to the point while still explaining properly.

Grammar - use grammar and fonts including punctuation as would be written in a letter and as described in the City's Style Guide.

Acknowledgement - if it is implied that you need to do something or a result is expected, always acknowledge when you have completed the requirements.

Privacy - remember that email is not private. Work related and personal emails you send using the City's email environment are City of Albany property.

Confidentiality - emails marked clearly. But, please be aware that emails are not really 'Confidential' - they can be forwarded to people you do not know or can be released under Freedom of Information. Freedom of Information (FOI) - Every email you send is subject to FOI.



Standards

- Corporate email signature - in order to maintain consistency of communication to all customers, stakeholders and the community, it is essential that you

use the approved corporate signature. This is arranged by IT automatically to our emails.

- Do not use backgrounds/customised stationery - ensure readability and legibility by adhering to the Style Guide.

Out of Office

If you are not able to attend to your emails within two working days, then it is essential to set up an automated 'Out of Office' message. This message should include:

- What to do for example, leave a message or who else to contact (ensure that you have

confirmed with contact person that is okay).

- If they leave a message, when it will be responded to.

Example: "I am out of the office until Monday, 19 October 20XX. Please contact XXX on XXX. XXX@albany.wa.gov.au or 08 6820 XXXX."



Social Media

Social media is a good thing when used responsibly. Social media is for everyone and no one should be discouraged from taking part in it, but they should be encouraged to use it wisely. The lines between personal comment and comment as an employee of the City of

Albany can easily get blurred.

If other people think you're speaking as a City of Albany representative, you are - even if you think you're not. Remember, once something is said online, it's public and can't be unsaid so think carefully before commenting.

Please refer to the City of Albany Social Media Policy & Guidelines for more information.



Providing Elected Members' contact details

If customers specifically request an Elected Member's contact details, provide them with the Elected Member's public contact details. You must then brief the relevant Executive Director so they can contact the Elected Member if necessary, to explain the

issue and provide them with information to assist the Elected Member with the matter.

Remember that we should always attempt to resolve the matter at the customer's initial contact. Follow the usual customer service response and ensure the customer is satisfied with the service and in a good state of mind to discuss the matter further with an Elected Member.



Communication with Elected Members

At times, an Elected Member may contact staff directly by telephone or email. If you receive a phone call, please ask them to put their query in writing to **councilliaison@albany.wa.gov.au** to ensure that the response can be responded to appropriately and distributed to all elected members for their information, and that the correspondence is registered.

If you receive an email from an elected member, please forward their email to **councilliaison@albany.wa.gov.au** to ensure that the email is directed to the appropriate officer/s for a response, distributed to all elected members and registered.

If an elected member contacts any of the Executive Management Team, it is up to the individual to use their discretion as to how they respond, but they may choose to use the established protocol as detailed above.

SUSTAINABLE

