



Customer Service Strategy

2016 - 18



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Introduction

Swan Hill Rural City Council is committed to providing efficient and responsive services to the residents, property owners and visitors of our municipality and dedicated to improving the way we work with the community. Council provides services and facilities directly to residents, works in partnership with others and advocates to State and Federal Government for residents, property owners and visitors to the municipality.

We recognise our role to provide quality customer service and services to our customers, and we are dedicated to continuously improve the way we operate through employee training, new technology, innovative thinking and communication.

We value community input and feedback and encourage you to utilise opportunities to communicate with us via Council Meetings, community planning groups, formal submissions, Council website and open forums.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out the organisation's commitment to customer service excellence, both external and internal and outline the key actions that we will take to help achieve our Strategic Objectives as set out in our Council Plan. The Strategy sets out a vision and actions that can be expected and provides a focus for the whole organisation to improve our performance in order to meet the community's expectations. The action list details how we plan to achieve this.

The creation of a Customer Service Strategy is part of a wider ongoing program of projects to help reach our vision of providing excellent customer service and developing and maintaining a good relationship with all our customers. The Strategy brings together these projects to create a comprehensive plan on how Swan Hill Rural City Council will improve our service to our customers.

This Strategy has been created after receiving feedback from the community satisfaction survey, our staff via the Employee Satisfaction Survey, our Executive Leadership Team, and our Councillors . The main objectives of the surveys are to assess the performance of Swan Hill Rural City Council across a range of measures and to seek insight into ways to provide improved or more effective service delivery. The consultation has been integral in determining what is important to our customers when it comes to customer service and to our staff in being able to determine the current barriers to delivering excellent customer service.

Related Council documents

Council Plan 2013-17

Customer Service Charter

Staff Code of Conduct

Councillor Code of Conduct

Social Media Policy, Directive and Procedure

Communication Policy

The Swan Hill Rural City Council Communication Strategy 2015-2018

Public Participation Policy and Procedure

Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

Aboriginal Partnership Plan

Disability Action Plan

Message from the Mayor

Together with my fellow Councillors, it gives me great pleasure to present the Swan Hill Rural City Councils Customer Service Strategy for 2016-2019.

The Customer Service Strategy guides our actions over four years, and focuses our resources and efforts on the strategic direction that we have set for the organisation. The strategy has been created to complement and continue the intent of our Council Plan 2013-2017. In particular, our Customer Service Strategy focuses on our aspiration of providing the best possible response for people who access Council services.

Each year the Strategy will be reviewed, ensuring we continue to meet the diverse needs of our community and address areas of importance to our residents and the region.

This living document supports our strategic direction, while providing a clear outline on how we, as a Council, are going to serve our community.

We have many challenges ahead, but more importantly, many opportunities. Like you, we are passionate about the Municipality of Swan Hill and we are committed to working in partnership with our community to build a positive future for all.

Message from the CEO

The process of creating Swan Hill Rural City Council's Customer Service Strategy 2016 – 2019 was a collaborative exercise undertaken by senior staff, the Executive Leadership Team and Councillors, and has been produced with a view to achieving outcomes within the current available resources.

This strategy is based on a detailed knowledge of the community we serve.

The 2015 Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey, Swan Hill Rural City Council Research Report shows that our Customer Service rating had an index score of 68, up three points on 2014.

This strategy aims to continuously improve what we do and how we interact with each other both internally and externally.

All employees of Swan Hill Rural City Council will apply themselves to assisting Council in reaching its goals and targets. To ensure that this is achievable, the strategy has been prioritised and resources allocated to the various initiatives.

Council Plan Direction

Our Values

Community Engagement

We will ensure that our communities are engaged and informed.

Leadership

We will lead with integrity and encourage innovation.

Fairness

We will value and embrace the diversity of our community and ensure that all people are treated equally.

Accountability

We will be transparent in our activities and we value feedback.

These values underpin the way we interact with each other internally and determine how we behave in providing services to our community. Service is ultimately what Council exists to do – to provide services to our community. Service is a function provided by all of us in our everyday roles across Council. Customer service is not just the responsibility of front line employees; it is the responsibility of all.

Strategic Direction

In addition to our ongoing provision of services and facilities to our community, the Council Plan identifies a number of strategic objectives, initiatives and actions that commit our organisation to continuously improve our customer service. These strategic objectives and initiatives are summarised below.

Key Result Area – Governance and Leadership

Strategic objective 1 - Positive community engagement and inclusiveness

- Review and implement actions from the Communication Strategy
- Produce and distribute a Community Newsletter three times a year
- Developing Council's systems and processes to improve our customer service
- Investigate new technologies and the way we can implement them to communicate with our community
- Progressively develop easy read Council communication documents

Strategic objective 2 – Effective and efficient utilisation of resources

- Introduce measures to continually improve workplace safety and staff health and wellbeing
- Identify opportunities to nominate Council for industry recognition
- Review results of community satisfaction surveys to identify and implement changes in services demand
- Review Rating Strategy
- Review municipal office layout to improve efficiency and customer service outcomes

Strategic objective 3 – Effective partnerships and relationships with key stakeholders

- Engage with community organisations to increase co-operation and avoid duplication of resources
- Ensure regular dialogue with neighbouring NSW municipalities to assist in reducing cross-border issues

Strategic objective 4 – Community leadership through effective strategic planning

- Assist with the review and implementation of Community Plans

Key Result Area – Community wellbeing

Strategic objective 1 – A sense of belonging, ensuring that all people have a place in our community

- Promote the development of a strategy to enable communication of emergency management plans and activities to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities
- Review and implement identified actions following the review of the Aboriginal Partnership Plan

Customer Services Charter Vision

Council is committed to providing excellent customer service and to developing and maintaining a good relationship with all our customers. This will allow us to provide the best possible response for people who access Council services.

Swan Hill Rural City Council is committed to providing leadership for our community. Therefore, our commitment to our customers is to:

1. Make it easy and convenient to contact us and use our services
2. Treat our customers with courtesy, honesty, respect and understanding
3. Take whatever time is necessary to explain issues and outcomes
4. Actively listen and respond in a clear and simple manner
5. Provide correct information and resolve issues fairly and efficiently
6. Make decisions that are consistent, equitable and reflect Council policies and any relevant legislation
7. Be accountable for our decisions and the reasoning behind them
8. Make sure every customer is informed of the result and/or status of their inquiry
9. Convey to you the name of the Council officer attending to your inquiry
10. Cater for your special needs to help our customers access our services

The commitment extends to our internal relationships between departments. Good customer service between departments is a key driver for both improving efficiency and service to external parties.

Our services

Swan Hill Rural City Council provides a diverse range of services and facilities such as:

Looking after essential infrastructure

Roads, parks and public works, including:

- Road maintenance and street beautification
- Footpaths
- Providing and maintaining community centres and other public facilities
- Caring for parks and gardens
- Swan Hill Regional Livestock Exchange
- Buildings
- Recreational facilities including reserves, playgrounds and swimming pools

Looking after our people

Community development, including:

- Community Care Services and Packaged Care
- Maternal Child Health
- Childcare
- Youth Support Services
- Community planning
- Internal services (human resources, finance, information technology)

Recreational and cultural development, including:

- Art Gallery
- Library and Bookmobile services
- Performing Arts program
- Museum operations and visitors services

Public Health and Safety, including:

- Animal registration and management
- Immunisation programs
- Local Laws
- Building and development compliance
- Environmental Health
- Hygiene inspections
- Built and natural environment, civic compliance and planning services

Promoting economic growth, including:

- Encourage and attract businesses and jobs
- Regional tourism
- Caravan parks
- Pioneer Settlement
- Swan Hill Region Information Centre

Looking after the environment

Land use, including:

- Control and regulate how land is used
- Drainage systems

Waste management, including:

- Arrange for waste to be collected and recycled
- Landfill management
- Clean streets, footpaths and other public areas

Control of declared pest plants and noxious weeds, including:

- Declared pest plants and noxious weeds program

Building control, including:

- Development, assessment and approvals of all new buildings and alterations

Who are our customers?

Our Municipality is home to such a diverse community, who are provided with a wide range of services, Council's customer base is vast and with varying needs.

From residents and ratepayers, to government departments, agencies, visitors, suppliers and Council's departments and employees, it is our goal to ensure that our customers are well informed, listened and responded to, treated fairly, efficiently and effectively.

The information below details our different customer groups and some of the ways in which we strive to meet their needs and expectations.

Residents, ratepayers and community members

- Easy to understand rate notices and debtor invoices
- Opportunity to have valuations and charges reviewed and corrected promptly (as appropriate)
- Ensure we use rate revenue effectively and efficiently to deliver value for money

- Inform and educate our reasoning for the allocation and use of funds
- A Debt Collection Policy that is fair and equitable
- Opportunity to be consulted on key projects or decisions
- Ensure our community is well informed
- Provide opportunity for feedback
- Maintain transparency in our decision making
- Help facilitate a safe, affordable and an economically strong municipality
- Cater for people who have special needs
- Provide services and facilities that our responsive community needs

Other levels of government

- Align with State and Federal vision, where possible
- Continue to advocate strongly on behalf of our community and region
- Develop productive and professional relationships with neighboring councils and State and Federal Members of Parliament and departments
- Work collaboratively with local agencies where relevant

Suppliers and local businesses

- Utilise local business where possible
- Make purchasing decisions based on best value to the community, not just price
- Ensure accounts are settled promptly
- Have fair trading terms and conditions
- Procurement processes that are transparent
- Provide business owners and their staff with access to relevant and practical training via workshops and seminars
- Continue to consider the social and economic benefit to region by using local business through Council's tendering process
- Continue to promote economic activity in our region by assisting business development and investment
- Ensure appropriate land is available for development

Visitors

- Facilitate and provide services that are attractive, enjoyable, useful and encourage visitors to stay
- Provide relevant, up to date information about our Municipality and its attractions through our Visitor Information Services

Our employees and departments

- Provide service to other Council departments that are respectful, considerate, efficient and effective
- Maintain a safe work environment
- Meet internal deadlines and provide information and advice that is of high quality
- Encourage cross functional input and communication
- Provide employees with opportunities to up-skill and develop within the organisation
- Reward good performance
- Promote and encourage work/life balance
- Succession planning

Benchmarking

Each year Local Government Victoria (LGV) co-ordinates and auspices a State-wide Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey.

The main objectives of the survey are to assess the performance of councils across a range of measures and to seek insight into ways to provide improved or more effective service delivery. The survey also provides councils with a means to fulfil a number of our statutory reporting requirements, as well as acting as a feedback mechanism to LGV.

Local Government Performance Reporting Framework

The Victorian Government established the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF) in 2014 to ensure that all Councils measure and report on their performance in a consistent way.

The LGPRF and the reporting format for indicators and measures are prescribed by the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act) and the Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2014.

The LGPRF Indicators have been aligned with the Council's Best Value Reporting.

Super 11 Bench Marking Group

The purpose of the Super 11 Benchmarking Network is to facilitate compliance with the Act by supporting the identification of best practice across large rural Councils through sharing knowledge and information and comparing data and processes.

Outcomes from benchmarking include:

- Changed systems & processes (process mapping)
- Increased efficiencies (continuous improvement & cost savings)
- Greater knowledge of services
- Higher effectiveness
- Sharing of information (network)

Action Plan

Improving Customer Service is seen as a key task in introducing further efficiencies and increasing the effectiveness of service delivery. Council has developed the following action plan to help improve Customer Service. The Action Plan has the following four key themes:

1. Red Tape reduction and process improvement
2. Easier Access to Council Services
3. Better Communication
4. Improve Responsiveness

1. Red tape reduction				
Action	Benefit	Who*	When	Resources
Train staff in Continuous improvement methodology	Increase ability to achieve improved processes which are customer-focused and provide cost and time efficiencies	CEO, ELT,LT	2016	Existing training budgets and a new initiative
Conduct Service reviews Investigate software and use of consultancy for Council Service review	Continually improve our service delivery for the benefit of customers and cost efficiencies	Governance, all Directorates	Ongoing	Existing program budgets
Conduct process reviews Service reviews will be regularly undertaken across Council, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audits • Council plan quarterly KSI reports • Best Value reporting • Local Government Performance Reporting Frame work • Quality assurance program/ accreditation • Home Care • Family Day Care • Out Of School Hours Care • Depot ASNZS 4801:2001 	Continually improve our service delivery for the benefit of customers and cost efficiencies	Governance, all Directorates	Ongoing	Existing program budgets
Recruitment Recruiting people with the right attitude is essential to building a successful customer service approach. Our recruitment process will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Analysis and specification • Behavioral interviewing - questions that determine attitude as well as skills • Cultural fit 	Internal and external customers	ODM	Ongoing	Recruitment budget

Red tape reduction continued

Action	Benefit	Who*	When	Resources
<p>Retention Staff retention is crucial to Council in improving customer service excellence. Council's dedication to retention of staff will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development programs • Recognition programs • Provide regular reporting to the Leadership Team to support skill retention and succession planning to maximise performance and minimise the potential for negative impacts on service provisions 	Internal and external customers	ODM	Ongoing	Existing budgets
<p>Reputation Build Council's reputation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a long-term strategic plan • Be committed at the top • Involve and trust our people • Be customer-centric • Listen to our staff and customers • Measure the right things 	Continually improve our service delivery for the benefit of customers and cost efficiencies	Councillors, CEO, All Staff	Ongoing	Existing budgets

2. Easier access to Council services

Action	Benefit	Who*	When	Resources
<p>Service availability and information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent Council branding and documents - update Council's style guide to include consistent use of branding and communication • Review existing fact sheets, brochures, community information, and standard correspondence for consistency, removing overlap and ensuring standardisation. Reflect standards in Council's Communications Strategy • Review the range of information available. Develop and implement protocols for how customer information, service and access is presented and in what format – eg fact sheets on how to apply for planning or building approvals • Update website content and features 	Create a professional image, external and internal customers, our diverse community	Media and PR Coordinator	2016/17	Existing staff and budget

Easier access to Council services continued

Action	Benefit	Who*	When	Resources
Centralised front end customer services	Easier access to services as well as improved levels of consistency and efficiency of service	ELT, LT	2016	Existing staff and budget
Improve e-business capabilities Making systems valued, easy to use, reliable and secure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronic delivery of rate notices • Improved after hours call out service • Lodgment of service requests via website • Expanded over the phone payment services and animal control • Introduce SMS reminders and alert messages to customers 	Satisfy customer demand for this service	DCS ITM, CSRC	2016/17	IT budget and Customer Services
Review communication Strategy	External and internal customers	ODM, Media and PR Co-ordinator	2016 -18	Existing staff and budgets
Use new technologies to engage and inform social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook • Twitter 	External and internal customers	ODM, Media and PR Co-ordinator	Ongoing	Existing staff and budget
One brand Work with the Art Gallery, Performing Arts, Library and Youth Inc to produce templates that are consistent with Council's style, but maintain individual identity	Create a professional image, external and internal customers	Media and PR Co-ordinator, Web Design Officer	2015/2016	Existing staff and budget

3. Better communication

Action	Benefit	Who*	When	Resources
Develop a Customer Services Charter	Internal and external customers	DCD, CSRC	2015 complete	Existing staff and budget
Monitoring system Invest and develop a system to monitor and ensure customer service statistics are being met	Internal and external customers			New initiative
Complaints Develop a Complaint Handling Guide, Policy and Procedure	Internal and external customers	ODM, CSRC	2016	Existing staff and budget
Service standards Ensure we provide a service in accordance with our service standards	Increase ability to achieve improved processes which are customer-focused		2016	Existing staff and budget
Customer Request system stage 1 Review current processes and work flows, to identify potential process improvements, efficiencies, productivity gains and cost savings.	Increase ability to achieve improved processes which are customer-focused and provide cost and time efficiencies	DCS ITM, CSRC	2016	New initiative
Customer Request System stage 2 Develop a functional specification for the system. The functional specification will outline what Council needs to have in its Customer Request System and how we want it to operate.	Internal and external customers	Corporate Services ITM, CSRC	2016	New initiative
Customer Request System stage 3 Develop a technical specification that considers customers needs, business processes and organisational reporting requirements.	Will identify what systems are on the market	Corporate Services ITM, CSRC	2017	New initiative
Customer Request System stage 4 Select and implement the Customer Request System in line with industry best practice. Ensure training is provided and undertaken by affected staff across Council.		Corporate Services ITM, ODM	2017	New initiative

4. Improved responsiveness

Action	Benefit	Who*	When	Resources
<p>Standardise Council's website Increase electronic accessibility to Council information and services by promoting Council's website and social media platforms as primary sources of community information incorporating accessibility elements</p>	Customers will be able to easily access information as well as access services such as making payments, lodging applications and submitting and tracking service requests	ITM	2016	Existing staff and budgets
<p>Consistency Provide consistent customer service across all of Council by sourcing training providers to deliver specific customer service training to create and maintain a 'can-do' culture within the directorates, with an emphasis on excellent customer relations and quality service delivery. This will develop staff collectively and as individuals for the benefit of Council and the individual, to enhance customer service and our capacity to value add.</p>	External and internal customers	ODM	2016	Training budget
<p>Decision making We provide our staff with the right decision making tools, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly check the levels of delegation afforded to staff through policies and procedures enable them to provide positive customer experiences More regular feedback from staff to determine whether they feel supported and aptly skilled to service our customers 	External and internal customers	CEO, ELT, LT	2016	Existing staff and budgets
<p>Problem solving Encourage staff to take a flexible approach to solving customer issues</p>	External and internal customers	All staff	2016	Existing staff
<p>Values Support the management team to promote and support staff to uphold accountability, community engagement and fairness as values integral to providing excellent customer service</p>	Continually improve our service delivery for the benefit of customers	CEO, ELT, LT	2016	Existing staff

Improved responsiveness continued

Action	Benefit	Who*	When	Resources
Understanding Help our customers understand the service they can expect from Council and what options they have if they feel we have not met these expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make available the Customer Services Charter on the Council website and at the Customer Services Areas at each facility • Educated staff to educate the community on our handling of customer complaints 	External and internal customers	ELT, LT	2016/17	Existing staff
Continuous improvement Identify opportunities to improve processes and information and we act on them by Update internal systems to ensure staff have access to the most recent information	External and internal customers	ELT,LT, Web Design Officer	2016-2019	Existing staff and resources
Procedures Ensure our processes and procedures are built with our customers at the forefront	External and internal customers	All staff	Ongoing	Existing staff and resources
Opportunity Take every customer experience as an opportunity to improve services and processes	External and internal customers	All staff	Ongoing	Existing staff and resources

Who*: ELT Executive Leadership Team, LT Leadership Team, DCS Director Corporate Services, CSRC Customer Service and Revenue Coordinator, ITM Information and Technology Manager, ODM Organisational Development Manager.

Measuring Progress

- Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey for Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Our Customer Charter is readily available in hard and soft copy to our customers
- Our Customer Services Strategy is readily available in hard and soft copy to our customers
- Staff indicate, through our staff survey, that they feel empowered
- Customer Request System project completed and customer information held in one system
- Complaint Handling reporting has visibility at Executive Leadership Team and is made available to the Leadership Team
- Internal and external communication standards developed
- Customer service and cultural awareness training provided to Council staff
- Links to Interpreter services, (Australian Multi Lingual Services www.amls.com.au)

Contact us

We welcome and encourage our customers to contact us via any of the following:

Personal visit: Council Offices at either
45 Splatt Street, Swan Hill Vic 3585 or
68-72 Herbert Street, Robinvale Vic 3549

Post: PO Box 488, Swan Hill Vic 3585

Telephone: Swan Hill (03)5036 2333
Robinvale (03)5051 8000
(03)9895 0068 (emergency after hours)

Email: council@swanhill.vic.gov.au

Website: www.swanhill.vic.gov.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SwanHillCouncil

Twitter: www.twitter.com/SwanHillCouncil

A full list of Council contact points is available on our website.