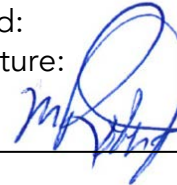


Customer Service

Effective Date: October 27, 2020

Last Revised: April 29, 2024

CAO Signature:



Policy Statement

1. The City of Pitt Meadows is committed to exceptional, equitable and accountable customer service that is responsive to the needs of the community.

Purpose

2. This Policy establishes standards for customer service delivery and outlines the City's complaint handling process. These procedures will help to ensure accountability to our customers and consistency in our delivery model. This Policy also outlines protocol for updating Council and the CAO on complaints that originate through their correspondence.

Scope

3. This Policy applies to all customer service touchpoints and complaint inquiries managed by City staff in all departments.

Policy

4. Roles and Responsibilities

- (a) All City staff will familiarize themselves with, and abide by, the customer service guidelines and standards established by this Policy.
- (b) All City staff are responsible for providing fair, equitable, and respectful customer service when responding to inquiries, requests, and complaints.
- (c) During the Departmental orientation, the Supervisor is responsible for informing Employees of the nature and extent of the risk of abusive, threatening or violent customers. This information will include details on

past experiences within the department and suggestions for handling these types of situations.

5. **Customer Service Guidelines**

In every customer interaction, Staff will:

- (a) Be courteous and helpful;
- (b) Hear and acknowledge all comments, inquiries, complaints, and requests;
- (c) Be sensitive to the customer's concerns;
- (d) Treat customers in a fair and equitable manner, with an honest intention to strive for resolution;
- (e) Ensure fairness in our process, decisions and service;
- (f) Be honest, transparent, and accountable.

6. **Customer Service Standards**

(a) **Email**

- (i) Staff will endeavour to acknowledge all customer emails, including those from the CAO and Council members, within three (3) business days (excluding weekends and holidays).
- (ii) Depending on the nature of the inquiry or request, the full response or resolution may take time. Staff will keep the customer informed on a regular basis as the process proceeds, to avoid unreasonable and prolonged gaps in communication.
- (iii) An initial response email when further time is required to gather information or resolve a situation, will include acknowledgement of the customer's email and the anticipated date by which the staff member expects to respond with further information. For example:
"Thank you for your email dated XX regarding XX. I will gather that information for you and respond no later than XX."
- (iv) If a staff member is out of the office for two (2) or more business days, they will put an absence message on their email account,

including the name and contact information for a co-worker who will be available to help with customer requests in their absence.

(b) Mailed Correspondence

- (i) Staff will endeavour to acknowledge mailed/paper correspondence within 10 business days (excluding holidays and weekends) of receipt, if a response is requested or required.

(c) In Person Interactions

- (i) Staff will promptly and courteously acknowledge all customers who enter a City facility and will greet them with eye contact and/or verbal greeting.
- (ii) Staff who have scheduled appointments with customers will be punctual to their appointments. If an unavoidable delay occurs, the Staff member will arrange for the customer to be kept informed as to their estimated time of arrival.
- (iii) Staff will make every effort to answer a customer's questions, or find the right staff member to help. If a staff member from the required department is unavailable to assist at that time, the customer will be offered the option to schedule an appointment, request a call back, or if available, speak to an alternate staff member who may be able to assist.
- (iv) Residents will be encouraged to book appointments whenever possible to allow staff the necessary time to prepare for the discussion and best serve the public.

(d) Telephone and Voicemail

- (i) Whenever possible, reception phones at various City facilities will be answered promptly instead of going to voicemail.
- (ii) In the case of multiple incoming calls, the callers will be placed on hold and addressed in the order in which the calls are received.
- (iii) Staff will endeavour to respond to all customer voicemails within three (3) business days, excluding weekends and holidays.
- (iv) If a staff member is out of the office for two (2) or more consecutive days, an "out of office" voicemail greeting will be

recorded and will include a return to work date and alternate contact information.

(e) Social Media

- (i) Social media posts and inquiries will be managed as per the Social / Digital Media & Website Management Policy A005.
- (ii) Staff will endeavour to respond to social media inquiries within one (1) business day (excluding weekends and holidays).

(f) FIPPA

- (i) Requests related to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) will be responded to within the timelines set out in the Act.

(g) Repetitive Complaints

- (i) If staff receive numerous inquiries from a customer on a particular matter, and no further or new information can be provided to the customer, or continued interaction with the customer will impact departmental productivity, staff may provide a brief and final response to the customer confirming that answers to their questions have already been provided (provide dates of correspondence), and that staff will no longer be responding to further questions on that particular matter.
- (ii) For files or complaints that have garnered Council's or the CAO's attention, or are sensitive in nature, staff will seek verbal approval from the CAO before closing the file and responding as above.

(h) Exclusions

- (i) City staff may choose not to respond to correspondence or messages that are deemed to be partisan, unsolicited marketing, or training materials.

7. No employee is expected to deal with verbally abusive, threatening, or violent individuals when such behaviour is excessive, persistent or prolonged, or gives the employee reasonable cause to believe they are at risk of injury. Refer to Appendix A for response guidelines.

8. Complaint Resolution Standards

- (a) Although the City of Pitt Meadows is committed to enhancing customer service throughout its operations, a customer may not always be satisfied with a service provided and should have the ability to express their issues or concerns to frontline staff providing the service.
- (b) Complaints or concerns received by City staff will be taken seriously and handled sensitively.
- (c) Staff's goal when handling a complaint is to resolve the issue fairly, equitably and in a respectful and helpful manner, reflecting the standards of fairness for public service delivery as outlined by the Office of the Ombudsperson in their Fairness in Practice publication located at <https://bcombudsperson.ca/assets/media/OMB-FairnessInPractice-ForWEB-Feb18-5.pdf>.
- (d) If the service we provide does not match our standards, the customer deserves an apology. The staff member helping the customer will offer a sincere apology and work with the customer toward a resolution.
- (e) **Exclusions**
 - (i) The following complaints will not be managed through this complaint handling process:
 - (1) Bylaw related complaints - complaints associated with bylaws-related issues or infractions will be managed through the Bylaws Enforcement division as per the Complaints and Bylaw Enforcement Policy C014;
 - (2) Vexatious complaints - complaints that are made for retaliatory or bad faith purposes, or otherwise form part of a pattern of conduct by the requestor that amounts to an abuse of the complaint process;
 - (3) Frivolous or nuisance complaints - complaints that are deemed to be frivolous or nuisance in nature, where an individual repeatedly requests staff time to present a



complaint or topic, with no foreseeable, reasonable outcome;

- (4) Complaints by employees - alternative procedures are available to employees to initiate complaints within the organization;
- (5) Appeals - legislated appeal processes will be dealt with through the regulations established through legislation;
- (6) Anonymous complaints.

(f) Departmental Complaints and Resolution Process

- (i) Complaints should be resolved by the department with which the complaint originated. Examples include:
 - (1) Complaints received by Operations and Parks that are entered into OMS, assigned, and resolved;
 - (2) Complaints submitted through social media that are responded to and addressed by Communications;
 - (3) Complaints submitted to the Pitt Meadows Family Recreation Centre that are responded to and addressed by Recreation staff;
 - (4) Etc.
- (ii) Each department is responsible for developing and maintaining an effective process for handling complaints that works for their department and is appropriate and responsive to the type and quantity of complaints received. This might include a tracking system for departments that manage a large volume of complaints, or where complaints are of a sensitive nature.
- (iii) Escalation of a complaint from a frontline staff member to an area supervisor or manager may be required and effective for finding an equitable and responsive solution to the concern.
- (iv) If a department determines that a complaint is unsubstantiated, or if the request of the customer is unreasonable or beyond the City's ability to accommodate, resolution may not be possible. Staff will:
 - (1) take special care to demonstrate that they took the person's

complaint seriously;

- (2) outline the steps taken to look into the issue and provide details of the final decision; and
- (3) be sensitive to the fact that the customer will be unhappy with the response.

(g) Formal Complaint Investigation

- (i) If a complaint is not resolved through normal channels as described above, the Director of the department involved or the CAO may elevate the complaint and initiate a formal complaint investigation.
- (ii) The Director of the respective department, or their delegate, will be responsible for leading the investigation (the "Lead").
- (iii) The Lead will thoroughly investigate the complaint, including a review of the facts, issues, previous communications and correspondence, and other relevant details, to determine the best possible resolution to the situation.
- (iv) The Lead will keep the CAO informed as the formal investigation proceeds, and will provide them with a summary report of the final resolution.

(h) Council Involvement

- (i) Complaints or concerns received through Council correspondence will be forwarded to the CAO for distribution to the appropriate staff for resolution.
- (ii) Staff who are assigned complaint investigations that originated from Council or CAO correspondence will provide an initial response within three (3) business days (excluding weekends and holidays), and then provide regular updates throughout the complaint investigation process, including a summary of the final resolution.

9. Respectful Workplace

- (a) Members of the public, visitors to City facilities, or individuals conducting business with the City are expected to adhere to the City's Respectful



Workplace Policy A056. This includes refraining from inappropriate behaviour or the use of profanity towards employees, other customers, elected officials, and persons acting on behalf of the City of Pitt Meadows.

- (b) If inappropriate behaviour occurs, staff will take appropriate action to ensure a respectful workplace. This may include: asking a customer to refrain from yelling or swearing; warning a customer that they will be asked to leave the premises if they cannot lower their voice/stop swearing/etc.; and barring a customer from a City facility or discontinuing business with a disrespectful contractor or supplier.
- (c) In the event that inappropriate behaviour or profanity is communicated on the telephone, staff will name the inappropriate behaviour and request that it to stop immediately, or else the phone call will be ended. If the customer does not comply, the staff member will hang up the phone.
- (d) Further to sections 8(b) and (c), if remedial action is taken due to disrespectful behaviour, staff will document the incident and report it to their Supervisor.

10. Related Policies

- (a) Complaints and Bylaw Enforcement Council Policy C014
- (b) Social / Digital Media & Website Management Policy A005
- (c) Respectful Workplace Council Policy A056
- (d) Violence in the Workplace Policy W03
- (e) Whistleblower Policy A039

APPENDIX A – Response Guidelines

The purpose of this section is to provide basic guidelines on how to respond to different levels of threatening statements or behaviour, up to attempted or actual violence.

It is recognized that each Employee is unique in terms of their tolerance for and comfort level in dealing with the angry, abusive or threatening customer. As a result, there are no hard and fast rules as to how to deal with such a client. There are no specific procedures, for example, as to when an Employee may hang up on a client who swears on the phone or walk away from a client who swears. However, attempts should be made to diffuse the situation and deal with the customer prior to hanging up, walking away, or referring to the Supervisor.

Some suggestions for diffusing situations are as follows:

- Employees do not have to tolerate abusive or threatening behaviour. If you feel you are no longer able to handle or resolve a situation, seek help from the designated person(s) in your department, usually a Manager or Supervisor.
- If unable to resolve a situation on the telephone, take the information you have gathered, determine and locate who is to handle the call, and briefly describe the situation to the person taking the call before transferring the call.
- In the event that help is not readily available and an abusive or threatening behaviour persists you may hang up or refuse to deal with the abusive (swearing) customer once having warned the person that you will hang up or walk away if the behaviour persists. Record details of the incident and advise your Supervisor immediately.
- All Employees should make a point to be aware of counter activity and be prepared to offer or find assistance for the Employee involved.
- If attempted or actual violence occurs call for help and remove yourself from the situation immediately. Tell a co-worker to phone police. Write a detailed description of the person and the incident.
- If you are not successful with diffusing the situation, and the person refuses to leave, activate the panic button if one is available.
- Each department is to ensure there is a designated contact person available at all times to handle problem situations, both in person and on the telephone.



ALL INCIDENTS MUST BE REPORTED PROMPTLY TO YOUR SUPERVISOR