Service Quality Project

SURVEY EVALUATION REPORT

31 July 2008

“Our Customer Service Commitment”
Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 3

2. Community Contact — Purpose, Method and Rating .............................................. 3

3. Community Rating of Council’s Customer Service Standards .............................. 4

4. Community Expectations .......................................................................................... 5

5. Improvement Focus Areas ....................................................................................... 5

6. Summary ..................................................................................................................... 6-7
1. INTRODUCTION
The Coorong District Council is striving towards being known by its key stakeholders as an organisation committed to high levels of customer service. To emphasise the importance Council places on this commitment, Council has placed the following goal in the Strategic Management Plan 2008-2012:

“To continuously strive for quality, responsive customer service and enhancement of the image of Council”.

To facilitate this goal, Council’s strategy is to develop and implement a customer service charter which is supported by best practice service standards that aim to meet the needs of the community and Council.

To appropriately represent all service provision activities of Council, a cross departmental Service Quality Project Team has been appointed. The focus of the team is to conduct a transparent consultancy process, by engaging all key stakeholders to determine the required service standards and attributes, the current perception of Council’s customer service standards and to seek feedback on how Council can improve its customer service delivery.

As a key stakeholder, the community has been consulted by the distribution of a household survey to determine the above. The purpose of this report is to advise and respond to the findings of the survey, in conjunction with relevant responses from other key stakeholders – the elected members and staff of The Coorong District Council.

The survey was conducted in late April 2008, with results closing on 16 May 2008. A response rate of 9% was achieved at the close of the survey. This response was considered favorable when compared to the 2007/08 budget and business plan feedback response of 4% which was sent to the same target group.

Without having regard to specific questions and answers, each return was given a positive or negative rating based on comments or indications on the survey. On this basis a positive response rate of 86% was achieved.

2. COMMUNITY CONTACT— PURPOSE, METHOD AND RATING
Respondents were asked a series of questions in relation to the purpose, method and rating of their most recent contact with Council. The highest response in relation to the purpose of community contact with Council is:

- Payment 32%
- Information 30%
- Make a request 25%

When respondents do contact Council they are doing so on a personal level with 50% attending a Council office and 26% via a telephone call. This result has emphasised the importance of high standard face-to-face customer service delivery.

When considering their most recent contact, 83% of respondents rated the experience as either average, good or excellent.
3. COMMUNITY RATING OF COUNCIL’S CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS

Respondents were asked to rate their general opinion regarding four key attributes as determined by the Service Quality Project Team to be desirable for delivering high customer service to its stakeholders. The results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Rating Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>Good or excellent</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not rated</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below average or not acceptable</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Good or excellent</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not rated</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below average or not acceptable</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>Good or excellent</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below average or not acceptable</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not rated</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Good or excellent</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>below average or not acceptable</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not rated</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note - whilst 68% responded that knowledge was good or excellent, this attribute has been identified later in the report as an area for improvement. Council is striving to achieve excellence in customer service delivery in all areas and is committed to implementing strategies to achieve this result.

Notwithstanding their most recent contact, respondents were asked to generally rate their overall opinion regarding Council’s customer service standards. The following responses were recorded:

- Good 52%
- Average 18%
- Excellent 14%
- Below Average 7%
- Not Rated 6%
- Not Acceptable 1%
4. COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

Respondents were asked to rate their expectations in relation to response times to phone calls and emailed and written correspondence. Consistent with both staff and elected member responses, it was overwhelmingly expected that Council respond to email and phone contact within 24 hours and correspondence within 7 days.

This result has been strongly supported by comments and examples throughout a number of survey returns and by staff who also identified response times as an area for improvement.

Respondents were asked to list their five most desired personal attributes to achieve good customer service. The community expects Council to be:

Courteous – given that only 1% of respondents rated Council’s customer service delivery in this key personal attribute as below average, Council will continue to ensure this attribute is maintained at a high level.

Knowledgeable – it is noted that this attribute received a 21% average rating and that Council is striving to achieve good to excellent responses in all areas of customer service delivery. Several focus areas are included in the summary of this report with the intention of improving this attribute through a number of initiatives.

Responsive – other key words in this attribute category include action, promptness, solutions, timeliness and follow-up. The community response to this attribute is consistent with staff responses, being an area requiring improvement. A key issue which is represented in comments received in several areas of the survey is response times to correspondence.

Supportive – the community expects Council to show empathy, understanding, maturity and a willingness to assist in any instance it is requested to do so. Whilst it is acknowledged that Council cannot always assist, the ability to refer enquiries to an appropriate channel is expected. Initiatives in the staff knowledge area will assist future ratings in this area.

Communicative – the community wants to be listened to, communicated with and most importantly be engaged in regular consultation. This key attribute is indicative with 28% of respondents suggesting this is an area for improvement.

5. IMPROVEMENT FOCUS AREAS

Respondents were asked what Council could do to improve customer service delivery. The responses have been consistent with other issues already identified in this report, namely:

- Information, consultation and communication 28%
- Staff knowledge 16%
- Response times to correspondence 12%

Note – 27% of respondents made comments in relation to service delivery e.g. waste management, rural service delivery, website upgrade, outsourcing, staff and office accommodation issues. This feedback has been very valuable and will be taken into account when any service level assessments in these areas are conducted.
6. **SUMMARY**

Council has made a commitment to strive for quality and responsive customer service delivery. It has consulted its key stakeholders and is now preparing to respond and implement improvements which the consultation process has identified.

To ensure that best practice is achieved, Council will incorporate the principles of the Local Government Service Quality Framework which provides Local Government across South Australia a foundation to improve both internal and external service quality. Further, Council has included compliance with the framework in the Strategic Management Plan 2008-2012.

The framework comprises of five critical drivers upon which service quality in local government depend. Council has and will continue to refer to these service drivers when implementing the outcomes and findings from this project.

**PARTNERING:** Stakeholders and working together.
**SERVICE:** Customer standards measurement and results process.
**PEOPLE:** Learning, leadership, work environment knowledge, skills and attributes.
**STRATEGY:** Planning, vision and strategy, advocacy and representation.
**ENGAGEMENT:** Information and communication, feedback and consultation, participation and contribution.

In relation to the key issues that have been identified by Council’s key stakeholders as focus areas focus for improvement, the following service quality initiatives are proposed.

**INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION**
- Development and implementation of a communication strategy.
- Increase relevant content and frequency of community newsletter.
- Regular Council information column in newspapers circulating in the Council area.
- Regular radio communication broadcasts.
- Redevelop webpage.
- Review Council’s telephone.
- Review and implement identified improvements to Council’s RAA after hours standard operating procedures.
- Investigate and implement an integrated customer request management system, including potential ability to track customer requests on website.

**STAFF KNOWLEDGE**
- Development of an intranet page which will contain relevant and consistent service based information for reference by Council staff.
- Review Council induction process for new employees to ensure better developed understanding of Council’s services.
- Develop an internal information document for reference by all staff when answering community queries.
- Development of public information sheets on specific Council activities and educate staff in understanding the content.
- Review Council’s customer service policy in conjunction with customer service charter and service standards.
RESPONSE TIMES TO CORRESPONDENCE

- Review existing incoming correspondence procedure with the view to recommending process improvements and delegating response criteria.
- Review and report on the current performance of Council’s records management practices and software in relation to Council’s needs and legislative compliance.
- Engagement of a twice weekly inter-office courier service between offices to ensure timely delivery of correspondence and documents.

A key action in relation to achieving excellent service quality is the development and implementation of a customer service charter which is supported by measurable service standards. The charter will be developed using the best practice principles as defined in the Local Government Service Quality Framework. The findings of the consultation process undertaken with Council’s key stakeholders will be considered when defining expected service standards.

It is anticipated the charter and service standards will be available to the community in September 2008.

Any questions in relation to the Service Quality Project or this report can be directed to Manager Corporate Services, Nat Traeger, 85723611 or ntraeger@coorong.sa.gov.au

31 July 2008