

# CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDELINES

Oct 21 2008

## **PREAMBLE**

### **Our Customer and Citizen Feedback Policy**

The Corporation of the Town of Parry Sound exists to provide core municipal services to its residents and ratepayers. Mayor & Council decide what those services and what the levels of services will be. This document will set guidelines and assist in determining if services are being delivered effectively and according to Council's expectations.

Feedback from the public gives the Town of Parry Sound opportunities to learn and improve. We value feedback about our services and recognize the right of citizens and customers to request a service, file a complaint, compliment or suggestion about our services. We are committed to using feedback to refine our services and focus on the needs of our customers.

Parry Sound citizens and customers, like our staff, ought to be treated with dignity and respect.

### **Who are our Citizens and Customers?**

Definition of a citizen: A person who makes their permanent residence in the Town or who pays property taxes to the Town.

Definition of a customer: i) a citizen and/or ii) includes a person who is in Town as a visitor or makes use of a Town service, or is planning to use a Town service, or is planning or undertaking a project, event or commercial activity in the Town.

Each Town department in its Business Plan, has identified a specific list of customers, or citizens, served by that particular department which is updated annually.

### **Our Key Feedback and Communication Aims Are:**

- to encourage easy access – customers can give feedback online, in writing, in person, by fax, by email or by phone
- to collect data regarding complaints, compliments and suggestions and respond appropriately
- to use plain language in all communications
- to conduct all communications in a timely manner
- where we cannot resolve a complaint promptly, to give the customer a named contact person, phone number, e-mail address and a target date for a response
- when we cannot respond within our target time, we will advise them of a revised target response date.
- Inform customers about their right to escalate a complaint when dissatisfied with our response
- Review feedback to establish what lessons we can learn and if we can improve our services as a result

### **How do we inform customers about their rights under these Guidelines?**

We will publicize our Customer Service Guidelines by making information available:

- In our service information publications
- In all of our customer reception areas and local service points, such as the Library, Town Office, Stockey Centre, Operations Centre, Fire Hall, the BOCC
- On our web site ([www.townofparrysound.com](http://www.townofparrysound.com))
- In alternative formats on request
- Through use of links to other web sites as appropriate

### **How do we promote equality of access?**

We are committed to comply with the Accessibility Ontario Disabilities Act legislation making sure that as required, customers have access to the Customer Service Guidelines. To achieve this we will:

- work toward ensuring that those with disabilities are able to understand and work within the Policy
- provide information regarding access to advocacy services
- promote the Customer Service Guidelines so that as required, all sections of the community understand it and are confident to use it
- to treat people with respect and be open to ideas about how we can make access easier

### **Who can advise customers on how to provide feedback about our services?**

A customer can get advice from any employee, the Mayor or member of Council.

### **Who can advise employees on the operation of the customer feedback policy?**

Any employee can get advice from any member of the Cross Departmental Advisory Committee or of the Staff Management Committee.

### **Local Resolution**

Our aim to deal with all feedback at the point of service delivery. Our employees are encouraged, to the best of their ability and given the responsibility and support to deal with customer issues as they occur.

## **COMPLIMENTS**

### **What is a compliment?**

- A compliment is when a customer gives us feedback about how we met or exceeded expectations in delivering a service
- The Director will appropriately recognize to the manager and/or individual employee to thank them for providing an excellent service to the customer.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

### **What is a suggestion?**

A suggestion is when a customer comments in writing on how we can improve our delivery of a service.

How we will deal with a suggestion?

We will attempt to:

- Send a response to the customer within 10 working days that either explains how we will implement the suggestion, investigate it further or why we are unable to implement the suggestion.
- Keep the customer informed about any delays.

## COMPLAINT OR REQUEST FOR SERVICE

### What is a Request for Service?

A request for service is not a complaint as defined below.

### What is a complaint?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about our services, employees or policies.

A complaint may include one or more of the following problems:

- We **delay** in providing a core service *when it is out of our control*
- We **fail or refuse to provide** a core service
- We provide a **poor quality** core service or make a mistake
- We provide an **inappropriate** service
- We **remove** or withdraw a core service
- We charge an inappropriate cost for a core service
- An **employee's** behavior causes upset
- A **policy** unreasonably disadvantages a customer
- We unfairly **discriminate** against a customer
- A customer is unable to access a core service

### Stage 1: Complaint or Request for Service Resolution

We recognize that on occasion, customers will bypass the processes outlined in this policy by going directly to the Mayor and/or Councillor(s). *The intent of these Guidelines is for Mayor and Councilors to NOT have to deal with Stage 1 or 2 issues.*

The employee responsible for receiving the initial complaint or request for service will:

- Try to resolve the matter promptly
- Record details of complaint that cannot be dealt with promptly

If we cannot resolve the documented complaint promptly we will endeavour to:

- Contact the customer within 3 working days to inform them who is dealing with the complaint and give them a deadline for our response
- Respond to the customer within 10 working days unless legislation directs otherwise. If we have made a mistake, take appropriate action to correct it and as far as practical provide redress
- Keep the customer informed about any delays

- Inform the customer about their right to move to the next stage if they are dissatisfied with our response

### **Stage 2: Service Investigation**

The person taking ownership of the issue i.e. the CAO, Manager or Director, who was not involved at the local resolution stage, will arrange a review of the matter when:

- a customer indicates when they are dissatisfied with our Stage 1 resolution response
- we fail to reply at the Stage 1 resolution
- a senior manager requests a special investigation

The Person Who Is The Next Level Up Will:

- record details and acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days assuming the customer is available to be contacted
- respond to the customer within 15 working days
- if we have made a mistake, take appropriate action to redress the matter
- keep the customer informed about any delays
- inform the customer about their right to progress the matter to Mayor and Council if they are dissatisfied with our response

*Issues may have to be directed to Mayor & Council if it is obvious that Stage 2 Resolution will not be effective.*

### **Stage 3: Corporate Review**

The Mayor and/or Council with or through the CAO will arrange a corporate review of the complaint, independent of the Director, when:

- A customer complains when they are dissatisfied with a service investigation
- We unreasonably fail to carry out a service investigation
- The CAO or a Director requests an independent review

The steps to be followed in Stage 3 of the Corporate Review will be to:

- Record details and acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days of it coming to Council
- Respond to the customer within 15 days
- If we make a mistake, endeavour we take appropriate action to correct it and as far as practical provide redress
- Keep the customer informed about progress and any delays
- Inform the customer about their right to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with our response

### **What action can we take to put things right when things go wrong?**

*If we make a mistake, we will apologize and take appropriate action to correct it and as far as practical provide redress. We may ask the customer to suggest what they would like us to do. We will always try to put the customer back to the position that he or she would have been in but for our mistake. We will also try to ensure that the same mistake does not happen again. We may decide that one or more of the following can satisfy the parties*

- Provide or change a service to the customer

- Provide an explanation or information to the customer
- Review customer literature (leaflets, website, poster and so on)
- Review a policy or procedure
- Arrange training or guidance for employees
- Employee action (such as standards setting or change of key worker)
- Give a refund in appropriate circumstances

**How do we deal with customers who remain dissatisfied after we have fully responded to their complaint?**

We will advise any customer who has completed all stages of our Customer Service Guidelines to contact the Local Government Ombudsman.

If the customer complains again about the same issue, the CAO may write to them informing them that we will not respond to future correspondence about the complaint unless the customer provides new evidence or makes a complaint about a different issue.

**How do we deal with feedback about our contractors or partner agencies?**

We require any organization providing services on our behalf to comply with these guidelines and our tender documents will be amended accordingly. We will develop protocols with partner agencies to endeavour that feedback about a partnership organization's services is managed effectively.

**We require our contractors to:**

- Record and respond to customer feedback at the Stage 1 Resolution stage;
- Provide us with information when requested; and
- Assist us with complaint investigations where necessary.

**How do we deal with feedback received from elected representatives?**

We will use these Customer Service Guidelines to deal with feedback received from the Mayor or member of Council when made on behalf of a constituent.

**How do we learn from feedback?**

All feedback from the public will be reviewed carefully to establish what we can learn and if we can improve our services. Department managers and staff should make operational improvements based on this feedback wherever possible. Learning from citizen and customer feedback will be included on the agenda for Staff Management Committee meetings.

We will endeavour to monitor trends and performance in our handling of citizen and customer feedback by producing regular reports for our Staff Management Team. We will produce at a minimum, an annual report on the operation of our Customer Service Policy for Mayor & Council, staff and our citizens.

We will endeavour to use performance indicators to track the performance of the scheme in each department. Through SMC and XDAC, we will review the following:

- Type of feedback received (complaints, compliments, suggestions)
- Methods used to contact us (by phone, in writing, email and so on)
- Feedback from Mayor & Councillors
- Time taken to acknowledge and respond to customer feedback
- Responses completed in or outside of target time and outstanding responses
- Suggestion types and outcomes
- Complaint types and outcomes
- Complaint remedies
- Action taken to improve services (complaints and suggestions)
- Customer satisfaction with the process and outcome
- Quality of complaint responses

Every department will provide a representative to Cross Departmental Advisory Committee (XDAC) that will review the effectiveness of our Guidelines. XDAC and SMC will review the operation of the Customer Service Guidelines.

**What complaints are excluded from our policy?**

We recognize that some complaints will be handled using other processes, including:

- A complaint that is being dealt with or was previously dealt with through legal proceedings
- An employee's complaint about personnel matters including pay, pensions, disciplinary and grievance issues
- A complaint about a service where we have no responsibility, such as a DSSAB service
- A complaint about a decision where a statutory appeal body or tribunal has been established to examine the case, such as planning applications
- A claim for damages that should be handled as an insurance claim
- A complaint about contract-related issues where an arbitration procedure already exists