



CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY 2017-2020

Ready, Set, Go!

A Quality Rural Lifestyle -
in a vibrant, caring and sustainable community



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INTRODUCTION

Local government is experiencing a period of significant change. Community expectations for services are increasing and there is a general desire for people to be more involved in decisions affecting the area in which they live. In response to these challenges Upper Hunter Shire Council is re-examining the way we deliver services to our community.

Upper Hunter Shire Council has always prided itself on delivering excellent customer service, but understands that the needs of both customers and the organisation are ever evolving and require constant review and modification. Council wants to embrace and invest in the technology and strategies that will allow us to manage and deliver improved services to our customers. To enable us to manage this process of customer service improvement Council has put together this **Customer Service Strategy**.

By developing this Strategy, Council seeks to improve on existing levels of customer service to our current and future customers, while simultaneously working more efficiently and effectively through expanding delivery of online services. This will ensure that Council will continue to meet the needs of our customers both now and in the future.

The Customer Service Strategy supports Council's Customer Service Charter and aligns with the key strategic planning documents for the Shire.

This Strategy represents a significant organisational commitment to customer service and will guide us to further improve customer service in the Upper Hunter Shire over the next four years.

The release of this document began with a conversation with Council's customers to ensure they had a say in improving customer service.

Council sought feedback on the draft strategy through a public exhibition period to ensure that the final plan genuinely reflected the needs of our customers.

The Customer Service Strategy will explore the following:

Ready

• WHERE ARE WE NOW?
Set

• WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?
Go

- HOW DO WE GET THERE?
- HOW DO WE REPORT PROGRESS?

PURPOSE:

To provide a plan of action to achieve ongoing improvements in customer service delivery across Council.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Further develop a 'Customer Centric' culture throughout our organisation to enable staff and Councillors to work together across service units and teams to deliver seamless high quality, efficient and appropriate customer service.
2. Ensure continual improvement in the delivery of quality customer service and to maximise customer service satisfaction levels.
3. Create a consistent and connected customer service experience.



Council's customer service approach is supported by the organisation's Vision, Mission and Corporate Values which set out the way staff will work together and describe the behaviours that are encouraged.

These values reflect the attitudes and beliefs of the Councillors and staff and will guide the implementation of the Customer Service Strategy.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

VISION:

A QUALITY RURAL LIFESTYLE IN A VIBRANT, CARING AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

MISSION:

- To enhance the quality of life of all Shire residents by the provision of appropriate services and facilities through effective and efficient management of resources
- To serve the community through equality of opportunity and involvement
- To build a prosperous environmentally sustainable future
- To foster sustainable, economic and social growth

CORPORATE VALUES:

Council's corporate values are the foundation for the performance of Council's Charter in the achievement of its mission and vision.

These values reflect the attitude and beliefs of the Councillors and staff.

We are and will continue to abide by these corporate values:

- Accessibility and equity
- Openness and accountability
- Courtesy, honesty and integrity
- Competent, efficient and effective service
- Teamwork
- Environmental responsibility

SNAPSHOT OF COUNCIL

Council’s annual expenditure and revenue is approximately \$66 million. Council’s assets including infrastructure, property and plant and equipment are valued at almost \$500 million.

Some of the services and facilities Council manages include:

- 3 Visitor Information Centres
- 8 Community Halls
- 5 Public Library Branches
- 3 Public Swimming Pools
- 3 Council Branch Offices
- 2 Community Technology Centres
- 3 Youth Centres
- 1 Long Day Care Centre
- 17 Independent Living Units
- 1 Aged Hostel
- 2 Low Income Units
- 3 Animal Shelters
- 5 Waste Depots
- 5 Water Supply Areas
- 4 Sewer Service Areas

4,300 residences are serviced by a kerbside garbage collection.

4,292 residences are connected to our sewerage system.

4,642 water connections that on average consume 1899ML of treated water per year.

Each year Council receives approximately 216,000 emails, 13,000 counter enquiries, and 72,000 telephone calls.

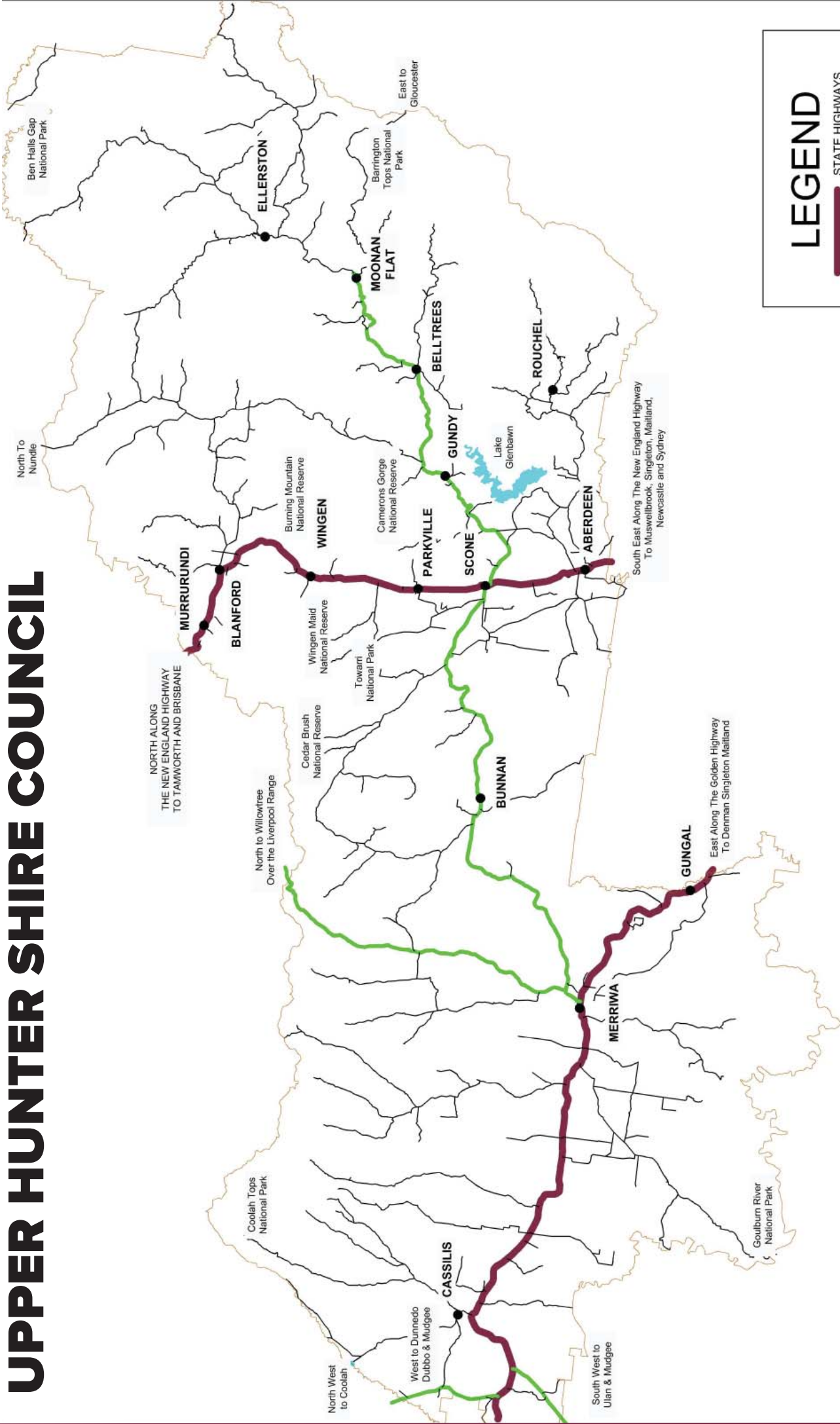
Upper Hunter Shire Council maintains 119 hectares of public space and parks.

There are 94 bridges within the Upper Hunter Shire - 25 of these are timber bridges.

Upper Hunter Shire Council has responsibility for 1,790km of local and regional roads, 21.6km of footpaths and 118.8km of kerbs and gutters



UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL



LEGEND

- STATE HIGHWAYS
- REGIONAL ROADS
- LOCAL ROADS

WHAT DO WE PROVIDE TO OUR COMMUNITIES AND CUSTOMERS?

Council provides a diverse and extensive range of services that support and enhance the lives of our community and customers including:

ROADS & TRANSPORT

We provide and maintain transport routes for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians through planning, construction and management.

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

We plan and manage land use to ensure the sustainable growth and development of our Shire.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

We support and enhance our community through active planning partnerships and provision of quality accessible services such as childcare and libraries.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

We deliver a range of programs to enhance community health and safety.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

We manage our waste and recycling by collection, recovery and disposal including annual bulk waste kerbside collections.

ASSET CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE

We plan, build and manage community assets including roads, footpaths, water/sewer and drainage, recreation facilities and cemeteries to meet our customers' needs.

WATER & WASTE WATER SERVICES

We are the local water authority that provides a potable water supply and reticulated sewerage services.

APPEARANCE OF TOWNS

We deliver a range of activities that contribute to the appearance of our towns including street trees, parks, signage, street cleaning and graffiti removal.



LEADERSHIP

We aid in the development of a desirable community through the leadership of our elected Councillors. Together with our staff and groups representing our community interest, we make decisions, set policies and deliver services.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We contribute to the growth of our community through marketing and tourism, as well as supporting events and services promoting our tourist attractions.

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WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?

Our customers come from a diverse range of backgrounds and interests, therefore their needs and expectations regarding customer service will also be diverse. We at Council need to recognise these needs and deliver a high quality customer service in order to maximise customer satisfaction.

Upper Hunter Shire Council's customers include:

- People who pay rates.
- People who live within the Upper Hunter Shire or who wish to live here or visit people who do.
- The citizens' elected representatives (our Councillors).
- People who visit our Shire such as tourists or people who work or attend schools here or who travel through our towns.
- People who invest in our Shire such as developers and businesses.

- People who seek products or services or information from Council.
- Council staff.
- Other individuals and organisations who have a stake in the Shire including all levels of government, our local members of parliament and community agencies that deliver services to our community.

Everyone at Council has a customer, whether they are serving an external customer directly or providing products and services to other staff to assist them in delivering services to an external customer.

Our customers' backgrounds and interests are diverse and changing. So are their needs and expectations regarding customer service.



INVESTIGATING OUR CUSTOMERS' NEEDS

Our first step in developing our Customer Service Strategy was to draw on feedback from our Community Survey, Employee Opinion Survey and the Community Strategic Plan 2013+.

We then conducted workshops with staff and Councillors to determine levels of commitment to customer service and gather feedback on how we perceive what Council is getting right and opportunities for improvement in terms of customer service delivery. From the workshop a smaller working group was formed to continue work on creating the Strategy and will lead its implementation over the next four years .

Additionally, we have looked at the legislative drivers around inclusivity and diversity which will shape the way we try to improve services for customers with special needs in our community.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Council conducts community surveys periodically to examine community attitudes and perceptions towards current and future services and facilities provided by Council. Our last survey was conducted in October 2015 by Micromex Research with more than 400 respondents from across our communities.

Some key points from the survey were that the community's overall satisfaction with Council has significantly increased in comparison to the 2013 survey with 82% of residents overall stating that they were at least 'somewhat satisfied' with the performance of Council in the past 12 months. This satisfaction score is above the 'regional' and 'overall' NSW Local Government Area scores.

Residents said their most valued aspect of living in the Shire was the 'community spirit', specifically in relation to the community being nice, friendly, caring and safe.

Residents believe the biggest issue facing the Shire in the next five years is 'the effect of coal mining in the area'.

Although satisfaction has increased, Council wants to continually improve. The Survey identified the following top 10 areas for improvement:

1. Road maintenance
2. Delivery of value for money services
3. Responsiveness to complaints and requests
4. Comprehensive planning for the future
5. Promotion of new business
6. Provision and cleanliness of public toilets
7. Support for current business
8. Tip operations
9. Community involvement in Council decision making
10. Accurate, consistent and timely provision of information by Council.

What are we doing about Community survey feedback?

Many of the top 10 areas for improvement are directly related to customer service. Improving how we respond to our customers' needs will go a long way to addressing the gaps in Council's performance and that is the purpose of this Customer Service Strategy.

Council also understands the importance of continued improvement in supporting a strong community spirit and dealing with issues that are important to the community such as the effect of coal mining in the area. These priorities are being addressed in Council's updated Community Strategic Plan and Sustainability Action Plan currently under development.

Key recommendations from Micromex as a result of the survey were:

1. Clarify and monitor residents' needs, aspirations and expectations across all drivers of satisfaction, especially road maintenance, public toilets, public lighting, supporting local/current businesses and youth services.
2. Engage with residents who are highly concerned with environmental issues to understand their expectations with a focus on the environmental impacts of the proposed RMS Scone Bypass and future infrastructure development.
3. Explore community concerns regarding coal mining, infrastructure and unemployment.

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY WORKSHOP AND COUNCILLOR BRIEFING

The main questions asked of the groups and key quotes from staff and Councillors are grouped by theme and listed below.

1 IN YOUR AREA OF WORK AT COUNCIL WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE INTRODUCED OR CHANGED TO MAKE YOUR CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY MORE EFFECTIVE?

IMPROVED INFORMATION SHARING WITHIN COUNCIL

“Have a clear and up to date list of responsibilities so Customer Service Officers know where to direct enquiries or access information to resolve issues – less time wasted chasing wrong person.”

“Better communication between departments. Forms to be the same throughout each office.”

“Frequently asked questions – FAQ’s, standard responses.”

“Access to staff calendars at other offices, rural road numbers for all Shire, consistency and over the phone credit card payments.”

THE RIGHT TRAINING

“Better training of staff and more resources. IT Department often do not have adequate resources to follow through with implementations.”

“Forms available for completion online. Training for frontline staff – ‘first response’, collation of customer and community feedback.”

“Staff training in dealing with public (client) and how they should represent Council in all dealings.”



A CUSTOMER ORIENTED CULTURE

“Be more proactive instead of reactive.”

THE RIGHT TOOLS AND SYSTEMS FOR THE JOB

“Improve Customer Request Management (CRM) System.”

“Well defined common focus/goals/procedures for Customer Service, improved CRM system and improved booking system.”

“Automated/online CRM system or app so people can submit complaints online rather than writing to us on Facebook and a better website capability to process applications and make payments.”

“Measurable, reportable & KPI around CS delivery.”

“Update mobile phone system which is suitable for photo evidence. Suitable phone network (Satellite).”

“In a heavy season of rain – more staff availability.”

“Improved cemetery management systems. CRM directed at first point of contact to responsible supervisor.”

“Library: A faster computer system between applications and faster speed between transactions within an application.”

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FROM A CUSTOMER'S PERSPECTIVE WHERE DO YOU THINK WE:

A) GO 'RIGHT' AT COUNCIL?

"Most Council officers are genuinely concerned about resolving issues in a timely and effective way."

"Most staff understand and sympathise with customers."

"Good customer service - consultation/ communication has improved in recent years."

"Provide offices in each township."

"Front counter."

"We have the technology and ability to effectively and efficiently complete customer requests."

"Positive helpful approach to all our customers."

"Respect for customers."

"Face to face communication."

"Offering services/officers in each major township."

B) GO 'WRONG' AT COUNCIL?

"Too much effort on reporting on issues and not enough resolving issues."

"Ensure consistency of service is provided in all areas of Council. A lot of time reporting not enough time left to actually do."

"Sometimes too slow to get back to people."

"Response to requests/grievances. Not being kept informed about progress/action of request. Perceptions of customer not being consulted."

"Antiquated computer systems, phones etc. More understanding of tasks performed – communication."

"Customer being transferred to other staff and not being able to get people to answer the phone."

"Not enough feedback if a customer complains."

"No credit card facility."

"Responding in a timely manner."

"History, changing roles. Too much reliance on Facebook etc. Knowledge sharing does not happen. Them and us."



EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY

In 2015 Council engaged Insync Surveys Pty Ltd to conduct an Employee Opinion Survey (EOS) to help us identify opportunities to improve our organisation.

Some of the best practice performance factors covered in the survey included Leadership and Innovation, Strategy and Planning Process, Data, Information and Knowledge, People, Customer and Market Focus, Processes, Products and Services and Business Results.

Valuable information was collated from the survey and focus groups were formed to explore staff opinions in more detail to provide some context around the survey results and assist in the planning of actions for improvement in the organisation.

The Focus Groups are currently working on the most critical improvement opportunities as highlighted in the 2015 survey, being:

- Cooperation across work areas
- Keeping skilled employees
- Valuing and trust amongst people in the organisation
- Providing incentives and rewards
- Being listened to by Senior Management

Each of these priorities is addressed in this Strategy.

Set...

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WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

WORKING TOGETHER

Upper Hunter Shire Council is committed to becoming a high performing organisation where every employee understands the important role they play in responding positively to the needs and expectations of our customers.

We want to:

- Focus on customer service
- Keep it simple
- Empower, develop and guide our people
- Introduce a Customer Service Charter to advocate the standard of service that Upper Hunter Shire Council will deliver
- Develop a Customer Service Strategy that offers the flexibility to engage and adapt to changing customer needs and priorities
- Provide consistent service standards
- Encourage a customer centric organisation

The goal of our Customer Service Strategy is to provide excellence in service and ensure efficient, effective customer service within Council's Vision, Mission, Charter and Community Strategic Objectives.

Staff



Councillors



Community



HOW DO WE GET THERE?

We have taken what we have learned from wide consultation with our customers and staff to develop this Strategy. Over the next four years we will act on what we have learned - implementing the Customer Service Strategy and checking our progress regularly with our customers. To achieve success we will continue to develop a customer-centric culture, we will improve the communication flow within Council and between Council and our customers, we will empower our staff to deliver excellent customer service and we will provide them with the right resources, systems and tools to do the job.

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

After listening to and assessing what our external customers (Community) and internal customers (colleagues and Councillors) want, and in consideration of Council's long term strategies, we have set three main customer service objectives:

1. Further develop a 'Customer Centric' culture throughout our organisation to enable staff and Councillors to work together across service units and teams to deliver seamless high quality, efficient and appropriate customer service.
2. Ensure continual improvement in the delivery of quality customer service to maximise customer satisfaction levels.
3. Create a consistent and connected customer service experience.

The plan to deliver this strategy is set out in our Improved Customer Service Roadmap contained within this document.

Some of the initiatives set out in the strategy are complex and will require long term cultural change, capacity building and the testing and procurement of new systems. Such initiatives will be implemented over the coming one to three years.

Other changes are simpler and don't require significant resources. Council aims to address this 'low hanging fruit' in the first six months of the implementation of the Strategy.

OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

Council has a dedicated customer service team with specific responsibility for managing the service counters of our three Administration Offices. The customer service team has a key role in delivering excellence in customer service.

However, customer service excellence is not just the responsibility of the frontline staff, and must receive commitment at all levels within Council.

Therefore, to guide us in providing excellent customer service we have developed a Customer Service Charter. Our Charter is a core element of the Strategy and sets out Council's commitments to its customers.

The Charter applies to all areas of service to the community and will help to continue to instill a customer centric culture throughout Council.





CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

Service Standards

Council shall take care to provide the highest quality customer service at all times.

We will ensure customer service is delivered in a courteous, inclusive and professional manner.

Our Vision for Customer Service

“Council will provide excellence in customer service by actively managing each customer’s experience”

We will provide

Friendly professional service by:

- Treating you politely and with respect.
- Using plain english and eliminating jargon, acronyms and abbreviations.
- Providing general advice and guidance on all Council services and where necessary refer inquiries to specialist staff.
- Dealing with your comments, suggestions and complaints positively.
- Responding to your enquiries promptly and efficiently.
- Acting with integrity and honesty.
- Focusing on solutions for customers where possible.
- Respecting your personal information by maintaining your confidentiality.
- Adapting the way we respond to meet individual needs.

We will provide

Access to timely and efficient services by:

- Providing a range of ways to contact Council.
- Ensuring staff are available and have an appropriate knowledge of the services we provide.

- Providing current and accurate information in person at Council offices or on Council’s website and social media pages.
- Providing after hours emergency service.
- Providing online Development Application tracking.
- Providing online property inquiries.
- Referring you to alternative service providers if your request is not something we do.

- All complaints will be registered into Council’s Customer Request Management System;
- Staff will endeavour to resolve complaints at the first point of contact;
- Where complaints can not be resolved at the first point of contact it will be tasked to the appropriate Council Officer;
- Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days.

How we aim to serve you better

In Person:

- Our Council Administration Centres are staffed between 8:30am and 4:30pm, Monday to Friday;
- We identify ourselves by wearing a name badge;
- We endeavour to attend to you as quickly as possible in a professional and helpful manner.

Telephone:

- We will endeavour to answer all calls promptly and efficiently;
- We identify ourselves by name;
- If your request is to be transferred to another staff member we will only transfer you if that staff member is available, otherwise we will personally take a message for you;
- If you call a staff member direct, they will aim to return your call within one business day.

Correspondence – letters, fax, email

- We will strive to respond to all correspondence received within 14 days;
- Council will record correspondence in Council’s records system.

Complaint Handling:

All complaints will be dealt with according to Council’s Complaint Handling Policy;

Help us help you

We want to provide you with the best possible customer service - you can help us by doing the following:

- Provide accurate and complete information.
- Treat our staff with courtesy and respect.
- Work with us to reach a resolution.
- Advise us if your details change.
- Give us feedback
- Advise us if you need special assistance for a disability

Contact Us

For more information please visit our website or contact us using the details below.

Upper Hunter Shire Council
PO Box 208, Scone NSW 2337

Scone Administration Centre
135 Liverpool St, Scone NSW 2337

Merriwa Office
34 - 40 Vennacher St, Merriwa NSW 2329

Murrurundi Office
47 Mayne St, Murrurundi NSW 2338

Phone: 02 6540 1100

Fax: 02 6545 2671

Email: council@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au

After Hours: 02 6540 1199

Web: upperhunter.nsw.gov.au

 facebook.com/upperhunter.shirecouncil



CUSTOMER SERVICE AUDIT

As part of the process to develop this Customer Service Strategy, Council had an independent audit of its Customer Service systems, processes and tools. This audit, conducted by The Engagement People in November 2016, confirmed the feedback provided by the community, staff and Councillors through activities such as the Community Survey and the internal Customer Service Workshops. Interviews conducted with senior staff across Works, Water and Waste, IT, Communication, Community Services, Environmental and Customer Services revealed more 'low hanging fruit' in terms of opportunities to improve customer service for a relatively small investment. These priority activities are outlined below.

Priorities identified through earlier research

Customers and Council staff had previously identified the following 'quick wins' that can be delivered within the first six months .

Culture

- Include Customer Service and Communication Headers in all reports to get staff thinking at all times about the implications for the customer

Communication

- Set up protocols for staff absences so phone calls don't go unanswered
- Develop FAQs so staff have easy access to information

Training and empowering staff

- Provide staff with training in customer service and make it clear how they should represent Council

Resources

- Provide a system to enable staff to take credit card payments over the phone
- Provide access to staff calendars in all offices
- Keep a list of Justices of the Peace at the front desk

Priorities identified in audit

The following briefly summarises the additional opportunities identified during the recent audit.

Culture

- Use the Internal Newsletter to acknowledge and report on excellent customer service and follow this up with small incentives for staff

Communication

- Provide all staff with contact cards to help direct community enquiries if in the field
- Provide an organisational chart on the UHSC Intranet which clearly identifies the services provided by each team / individual to assist in channeling enquiries more efficiently

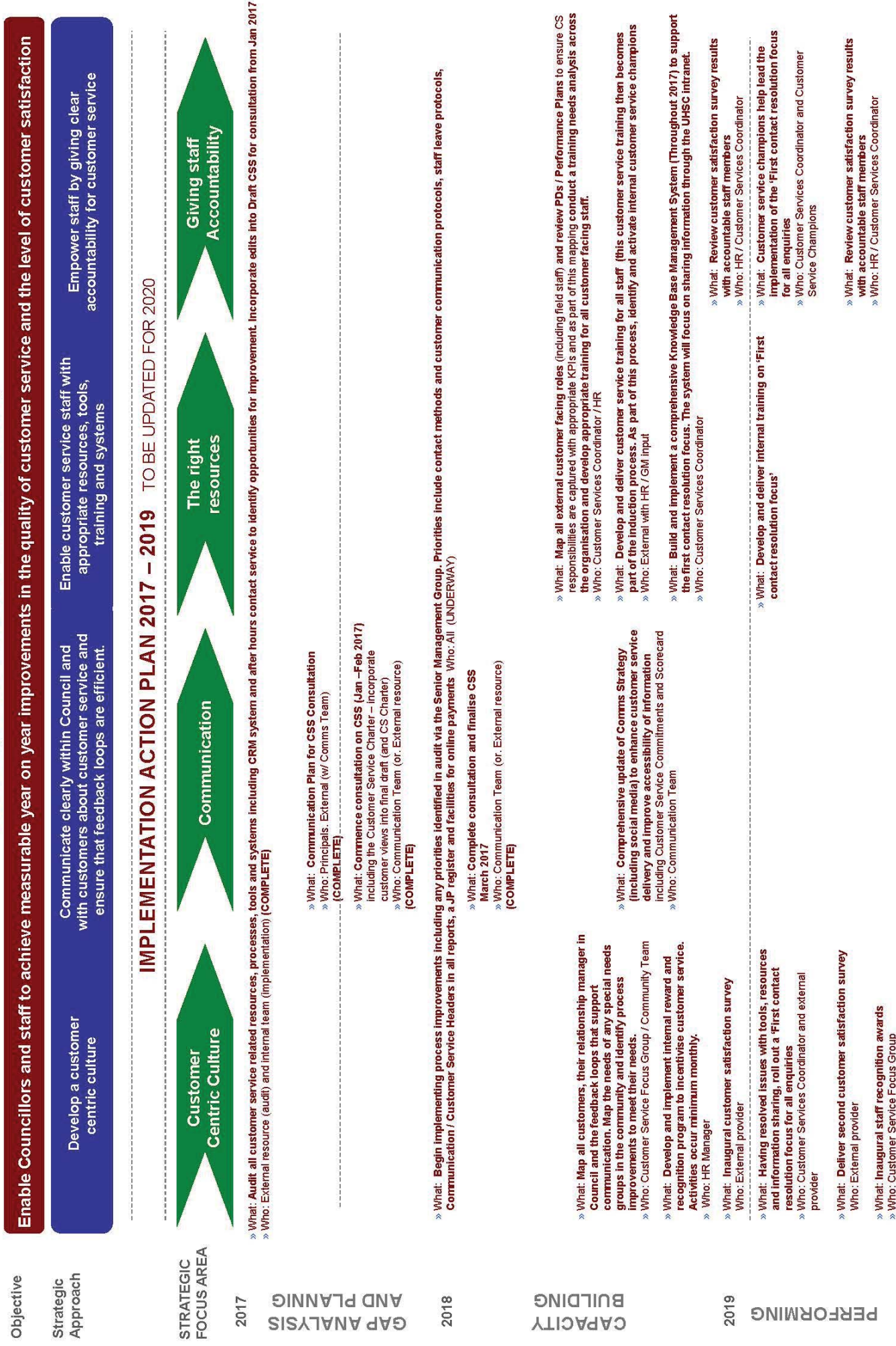
Training and empowering staff

- Provide Field Team Leaders with Customer Action Request Forms to give to community members who have works requests.

Resources

- IT to investigate Paypal as an online payment option for all Council invoices such as rates
- Immediately scope what resources are required to provide online customer request tracking through Council's website
- Also investigate what resources would be required to allow customers to generate their own requests directly into Civica via the UHSC website
- Look at placing at least one shared computer in each depot to give field staff easier access to the UHSC intranet, email etc so they can quickly share customer requests and feedback

UHSC Improved Customer Service Roadmap



Objective

Strategic Approach

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA

2017

GAP ANALYSIS AND PLANNING

2018

CAPACITY BUILDING

2019

PERFORMING

» What: Audit all customer service related resources, processes, tools and systems including CRM system and after hours contact service to identify opportunities for improvement. Incorporate edits into Draft CSS for consultation from Jan 2017
 » Who: External resource (audit) and internal team (Implementation) (COMPLETE)

» What: Communication Plan for CSS Consultation
 » Who: Principals: External (w/ Comms Team) (COMPLETE)

» What: Commence consultation on CSS (Jan -Feb 2017) including the Customer Service Charter – Incorporate customer views into final draft (and CS Charter)
 » Who: Communication Team (or: External resource) (COMPLETE)

» What: Begin implementing process improvements including any priorities identified in audit via the Senior Management Group. Priorities include contact methods and customer communication protocols, staff leave protocols, Communication / Customer Service Headers in all reports, a JP register and facilities for online payments Who: All (UNDERWAY)

» What: Complete consultation and finalise CSS March 2017
 » Who: Communication Team (or: External resource) (COMPLETE)

» What: Map all customers, their relationship manager in Council and the feedback loops that support communication. Map the needs of any special needs groups in the community and identify process improvements to meet their needs.
 » Who: Customer Service Focus Group / Community Team

» What: Develop and implement internal reward and recognition program to incentivise customer service. Activities occur minimum monthly.
 » Who: HR Manager

» What: Inaugural customer satisfaction survey
 Who: External provider

» What: Having resolved issues with tools, resources and information sharing, roll out a 'First contact resolution focus for all enquiries
 » Who: Customer Services Coordinator and external provider

» What: Deliver second customer satisfaction survey
 Who: External provider

» What: Inaugural staff recognition awards
 » Who: Customer Service Focus Group

» What: Map all external customer facing roles (including field staff) and review PDs / Performance Plans to ensure CS responsibilities are captured with appropriate KPIs and as part of this mapping conduct a training needs analysis across the organisation and develop appropriate training for all customer facing staff.
 » Who: Customer Services Coordinator / HR

» What: Develop and deliver customer service training for all staff (this customer service training then becomes part of the induction process. As part of this process, identify and activate internal customer service champions
 » Who: External with HR / GM input

» What: Build and implement a comprehensive Knowledge Base Management System (Throughout 2017) to support the first contact resolution focus. The system will focus on sharing information through the UHSC intranet.
 » Who: Customer Services Coordinator

» What: Review customer satisfaction survey results with accountable staff members
 » Who: HR / Customer Services Coordinator

» What: Develop and deliver internal training on 'First contact resolution focus'
 » Who: Customer service champions help lead the implementation of the 'First contact resolution focus for all enquiries
 » Who: Customer Services Coordinator and Customer Service Champions

» What: Review customer satisfaction survey results with accountable staff members
 » Who: HR / Customer Services Coordinator

HOW DO WE MONITOR AND REPORT PROGRESS?

At an organisational level, Council will monitor feedback in its Community Survey and through all regular Council communication channels.

Council will report the progress against the plan annually through Council reporting systems including customer satisfaction surveys to measure success and monthly reports to the Senior Management Group.

At an individual level, directors, managers and staff across the Upper Hunter Shire Council have a responsibility for implementing the various initiatives in this Strategy. These responsibilities will be included as part of the position description for each customer facing role and monitored as part of the annual performance review process.

Review of Strategy

This strategy will be reviewed in 2020.



Upper Hunter Shire Council

PO Box 208, Scone NSW 2337

Phone: 02 6540 1100

Email: council@upperhunter.nsw.gov.au

Scone Administration Centre: 135 Liverpool Street, Scone

Merriwa Office: 34 - 40 Vennacher Street, Merriwa

Murrurundi Office: 47 Mayne Street, Murrurundi

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