DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS POLICY

POLICY TYPE	DOCUMENT CONTROLLER	RESPONSIBLE MANAGER	POLICY ADOPTED	REVIEW DUE
Council	Customer Services Coordinator	Executive Manager	27 October 2025	October 2027

PURPOSE

Council is committed to the delivery of quality services to our customers.

At times, a customer's expectations may exceed Council's ability to deliver. This Policy explains how Council will manage difficult customers who:

- are rude, abusive or aggressive.
- cannot be satisfied;
- make unreasonable demands; and/or
- constantly raise the same issue with different staff.

SCOPE

All Council Officers with customer interaction.

POLICY

1. Customers who are rude, abusive or aggressive

Rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour may include offensive gestures, verbal abuse, threatening behaviour, physical violence against property or a person.

If in the opinion of any staff member, rude, abusive or aggressive comments or statements are made in telephone conversations or in person, the staff member may:

1.1. warn the caller, that if the behaviour continues, the conversation or interview/meeting will be terminated;

1.2. terminate the conversation or interview/meeting if the rude, abusive or aggressive behaviour continues after a warning has been given.

Where a conversation or interview/meeting is terminated, the staff member must notify the relevant Manager of the details as soon as possible.

If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer* any correspondence to Council contains personal abuse, inflammatory statements or materials clearly intended to intimidate, it will be returned to the sender and not otherwise acted upon.

Violence, damage to property or threatening behaviour may lead to a ban from those sites where the threatening behaviour occurred. Occurrences of such behaviour may be reported to police, depending on the severity of the incident.

2. Customers who cannot be satisfied

Customers who cannot be satisfied include members of the public or groups who do not accept that Council is unable to assist them, provide any further assistance or level of service than has been

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provided already, and/or disagree with the action Council has taken in relation to their complaint or concern.

If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, a customer cannot be satisfied and all appropriate avenues of internal review or appeal have been exhausted, and the customer continues to - contact Council, the following actions may be taken:

2.1. The Chief Executive Officer may write to the customer restating Council's position on the matter if necessary and advising that if the customer continues to contact Council regarding the matter. Council may:
  2.1.1. not accept any further phone calls from the customer;
  2.1.2. not grant any further interviews or meetings;
  2.1.3. require all further communication to be put in writing; and
  2.1.4. continue to receive, read and file correspondence but only acknowledge or otherwise respond to it if:
    - the customer provides significant new information relating to their complaint or concern; or
    - the customer raises new issues which in the Chief Executive Officer's opinion, warrant fresh action.

2.2. The Chief Executive Officer shall advise Councillors of a person who is deemed to be 'a customer who cannot be satisfied', the customer's concerns, and any proposed management strategy by Council Officers.

3. Customers who make unreasonable demands

Customers who make unreasonable demands include members of the public whose demands on Council start to significantly and unreasonably divert Council's resources away from other functions or create an inequitable allocation of resources to other customers.

Such demands may result from the amount of information requested, the nature or scale of services sought, or the number of approaches seeking information, assistance or service.

If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer a customer is making unreasonable demands on Council and the customer continues to write, email, telephone and /or visit the offices, the following actions may be taken:

3.1. The Chief Executive Officer may write to the customer advising them of Council's concern and requesting that they limit and focus their requests and that if the customer continues to place unreasonable demands, Council may:
  3.1.1. not respond to any future correspondence and only take action where, in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, the correspondence raises specific, substantial and serious issues; or

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	3.1.2. only respond to a certain number of requests in a given period. 3.2. If the customer continues to contact Council after being advised of Council's proposed course of action, the Chief Executive Officer may, after considering representations from the customer, advise the customer that either or both of points 2.1.1 – 2.1.2 above will now apply. **4. Customers who continually raise the same issue with different staff** If in the opinion of the Chief Executive Officer, a customer is constantly raising the same issues with different staff or Elected Members, the following actions may be taken: 4.1 The Chief Executive Officer may notify the customer that: 4.1.1. only a nominated staff member will deal with them in the future and Customer Service Staff are to be advised of the arrangement; 4.1.2. they must make an appointment with that person if they wish to discuss a matter; or 4.1.3. all future contact with Council must be in writing. The customer may wish to make a formal complaint in accordance with Council's Complaint Handling Policy. **5. Documentation and Reporting** Council maintains detailed records on file of every situation as it relates to the details of this Policy. If an Elected Member feels that a Council customer is being difficult in a manner specified in this Policy, they must notify the Chief Executive Officer who will consider taking action as per the procedures described above. Where the Chief Executive Officer determines to limit a customer's access to Council in any of the ways specified in this Policy, the Chief Executive Officer will advise Councillors as soon as possible of the relevant circumstances and the action taken and forward such advice, where appropriate, to the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Local Government Division for information. **6. Right of Review** If a person believes that this Policy has been enacted against them unfairly, they may make a complaint to the Tasmanian Ombudsman.
LEGISLATION AND RELATED DOCUMENTS	*Local Government Act 1993* *Personal Information Protection Act 2004* *Right to Information Act 2009* Customer Service Charter Staff Code of Conduct Policy Devonport City Council Strategic Plan 2009-2030

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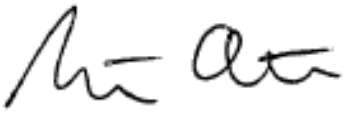
ATTACHMENTS (IF APPLICABLE)	N/A			
STRATEGIC REFERENCE	5.4 Council is recognised for its customer service delivery			
MINUTE REFERENCE	25/193			
OFFICE USE ONLY	Update Register	Y	Training/Communication	Y
	Advise Document Controller	Y	Advise HR / MCO	Y
	Management Sign Off:  Date: 27 October 2025 * Please note reference to the Chief Executive Officer means the General Manager for the purposes of the *Local Government Act 1993*, and all other legislation administered by or concerning the Devonport City Council.			

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