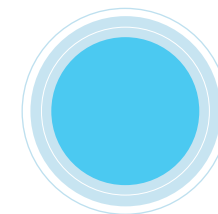
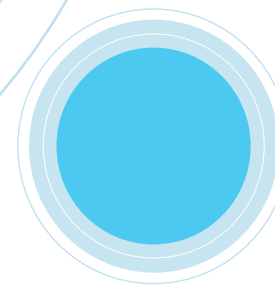




CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

DELIVERING CUSTOMER
SERVICE EXCELLENCE



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AUTHORISATION

Authorised By	Position
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DISTRIBUTION AND CONTROL

The Customer Service Strategy is available to all who have an involvement in the activities of Council. The master copy will be placed in Council's Electronic Document Management System. Any changes to the Strategy will be reviewed and authorised by the General Manager. Changes will be logged in the Amendment Register above. Changes to the Strategy will be reflected in the version number and date in the document footer.

Executive Summary

Cessnock City Council is committed to being a customer focused organisation which delivers customer service excellence at all levels. We recognise we are in the service sector and our role is to provide quality customer service and services to all of our customers.

The Customer Service Strategy summarises the actions Council has committed to undertake, provides a clear statement of the current customer service priorities and provides a roadmap for continuous improvement to achieve excellent customer service.

There are three priority areas for the next three years which are summarised in the themes Invest, Build, Extend.

These areas of priority incorporate several specific Business Excellence projects and actions which aim to address:

- Processes
- Communication and Customer Engagement
- Resourcing
- Training
- Induction
- Performance measurement
- Cultural change
- Innovation and technology

Strategic Planning

Alignment

The Customer Service Strategy aligns with the key strategic planning documents for the Cessnock local government area. Achievement of this Strategy's objectives will make a significant contribution to these organisational commitments.

The primary plan guiding Council in the community's aspirations is the Cessnock 2023 Community Strategic Plan: Our Community Plan for Our People, Our Place – Focusing on Our Future. This plan refines the visions, outcomes, aspirations and objectives of the Cessnock 2020 Community Plan. The 2023 Community Strategic Plan confirmed five key desired outcomes within the following areas as still being relevant:

Our Community

Relates to community wellbeing, connectedness and safety. During the community engagement program participants expressed the desire for a healthy, active, engaged and cohesive community that maintained its unique local identity and friendliness into the future.

Our Economy

Identifies the need to attract a diverse range of businesses, industries and services together with improved access to education, training and employment opportunities to ensure we have a sustainable and prosperous economy in Cessnock in 2020.

Our Environment

Focuses on the conservation and preservation of the natural environment whilst balancing the impact of development to ensure a sustainable and healthy community.

Our Services

Identifies the local, state and federal infrastructure, services and facilities needed to serve the current and future community of Cessnock while ensuring there is adequate access to these facilities and services.

Our Leadership

Focuses on the need for strong civic leadership and effective governance with an engaged community actively participating in decision making processes affecting their future.

Our Community's Vision

Our Community's Vision for the Cessnock Local Government Area was confirmed in the adoption of the Cessnock 2023 Community Strategic Plan which states:

Cessnock will be a cohesive and welcoming community living in an attractive and sustainable rural environment with a diversity of business and employment opportunities supported by accessible infrastructure and services which effectively meet community need.

This vision is summarised as: Thriving, Attractive & Welcoming

Council's Vision

Council's Vision, which supports the Community's Vision, states:

A safe, healthy environment where residents can enjoy a high quality of life.

Our Cessnock City of the future will offer quality lifestyle and security, local services and shopping, local jobs, an unspoilt environment, safety, convenience, comfort and confidence in the future.

Council's Mission

Council's Mission is articulated through five goal statements which represent the focus of its purpose:

- To promote and provide quality services and facilities which focus on the needs of the community
- To protect, enhance and promote our natural, developed and cultural environment
- To actively foster the creation of employment and sustainable development opportunities acceptable to community and environmental standards
- To be a professionally managed and customer focused organisation which provides leadership through partnerships with the community
- To identify needs, share information and provide opportunities for active participation and community consultation

Council's values

Integrity

- We are open, honest and transparent
- We build trust

Respect

- We treat people fairly and consistently
- We respect others' views, ideas and opinions

Teamwork

- We work as one to get the job done
- We work together with our community

Accountability

- We are committed to safety in all we do
- We take ownership of our decisions and actions
- We are accountable to our community

Excellence

- We strive to do it once and do it right
- We take pride in our work
- We strive for efficiency and innovation

Operating Environment & Context

Location & Size

Cessnock is a sub-region of the Hunter Valley and the Cessnock township developed from 1850. Located approximately 150 kilometres north of Sydney, 40 kilometres west of Newcastle and 30 kilometres from the coast it is home to the Darkinjung Aboriginal people. The Cessnock local government area (LGA) of 1,950 square kilometres is a city of rural, town and village areas.

Commerce

Coal mining was the principal industrial base of the Cessnock area for the first half of the nineteenth century, but since the 1970s the primary economic driver of the area has been the Hunter Valley wine growing districts and the associated tourism attractions. The vineyards are primarily located within the Cessnock LGA, and constitute Australia's oldest commercial wine region, with around 4,500 acres under vine.

Today the Cessnock LGA attracts 2.5 million visitors per year and has become the second most popular tourist destination in NSW. In the 2015 Travellers' Choice Awards, Cessnock was recognised as one of the top 10 Australian cities to visit.

Population

As at June 2017 the population of Cessnock LGA was estimated to be 57,527 with a density of 0.28 people per hectare. The average household size is 2.6 people per dwelling.

Age

From the 2011 Census data the Cessnock LGA (when compared with Regional NSW) reports:

- a relatively young population, with the median age being 37 years (compared with 41 years)
- a higher percentage of younger population in the age groups 0-11 years and 18-34 years
- a lower percentage of population within the older age group 60-85+ years.

Income

In the 2011 Census the Cessnock LGA (when compared with Regional NSW) reports:

- a larger proportion of high income households (earning more than \$2,500 per week) - (13.8% compared with 11.3%)
- a lower proportion of low income households (earning less than \$600 per week) - (25.5% compared with 27.2%).

Employment

Small Area Labour Markets Data from September 2015 showed:

- Cessnock unemployment rate was 14.4% which is higher than neighbouring Councils, compared with 7.0% in Singleton, 6.9% in Lake Macquarie, 7.6% in Newcastle and 9.3% in Maitland.

Socio-economic Index

Whilst the Cessnock LGA socio-economic index of 936.42 is on the low side, it is variable across the LGA, ranging from 868.8 up to 1,089.1.

Forecast

The Department of Planning forecasts that, by 2031:

- Cessnock LGA population is projected to be 66,400 – an increase of 24% upon the 2011 Census population
- people aged 65 years and over will increase by 100% (equating to an additional 7,250 people).

Workforce Plan & Implications

The Cessnock City Council workforce plan highlights a need to retain existing employee and attract new employees with relevant skills, experience and capabilities. Of significance:

- the average age of employees in the organisation is 43 years
- there are 33% of employees in the 45 – 54years age bracket
- with 49% of employees in age brackets where they are more likely to consider retirement options in the next five to 10 years, Council will be faced with an increased number of employees leaving the workplace, potentially taking with them their valuable skills and corporate knowledge.

Community Priorities

The community's priorities are articulated in the Community Strategic Plan Cessnock 2023. Community research has found the condition of the road network is consistently identified as the highest priority issue for the LGA. The most recent research found that employment opportunities and, to a lesser extent, access to quality health services were also priority issues for individuals and families.

Local Government Reform

Local government within New South Wales is experiencing a period of significant reform and Cessnock City Council is committed to taking the necessary steps to ensure that we are Fit for the Future. Councils who are unable to demonstrate that they are Fit for the Future are likely to be forced into amalgamation with other Councils.

A Council that is Fit for the Future needs to be:

- sustainable
- efficient
- an effective manager of infrastructure, who can deliver services for communities
- of appropriate scale and capacity to engage effectively across community, industry and government.

Fit for the future

As part of the reform process Cessnock City Council lodged a submission with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART), a government appointed Expert Panel. IPART has assessed Cessnock as being a Fit Council.

Another key reform is that Cessnock City Council will be moving forward as a member of a Joint Organisation, being established to provide three core functions:

1. regional strategic planning
2. working with State Government
3. regional Leadership and advocacy

The Minister for Local Government will be responsible for making determinations as to proposed Council mergers and Councils that continue to function in their current structure. In the most recent announcement Cessnock City Council is not required to amalgamate with any other Council, regardless of this decision, Cessnock City Council will continue on a path to strengthen itself within the areas of sustainable, efficient and effective governance and responsive service delivery for our community.

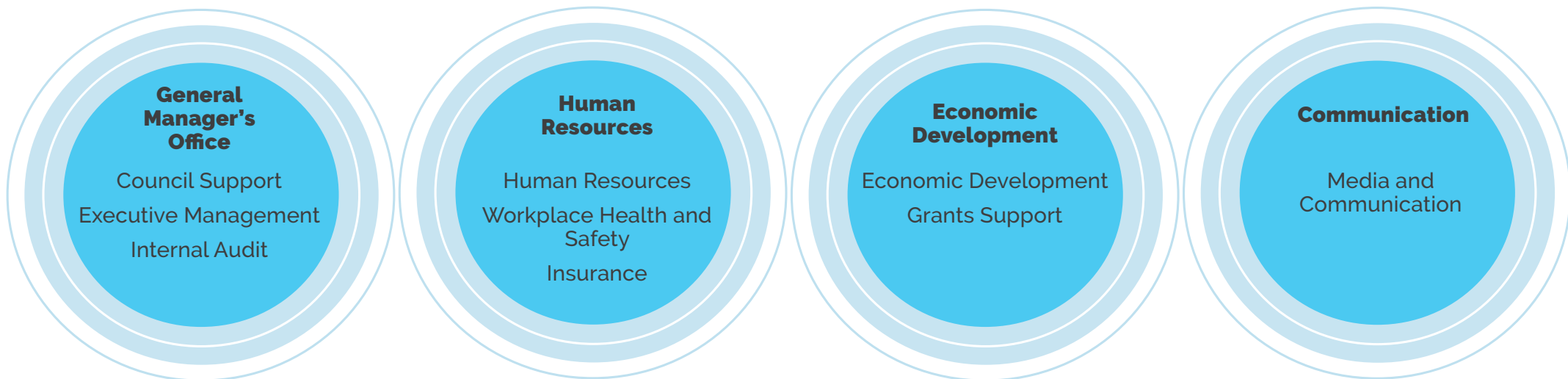
Strategy Background

Community expectations for services continue to increase and there is a general desire for people to be more involved in decisions affecting the area in which they live. A previously adopted Interim Customer Service Strategy document committed to broaden the scope of the Strategy to include all operational service areas. This Customer Service Strategy represents a more comprehensive view of Council's strategic plans and delivers on this commitment from the Interim Strategy.

Services

Local government organisations provide an extremely wide and diverse range of services. Cessnock City Council's areas of functional responsibility include:

GENERAL MANAGERS OFFICE



PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT

Development Services

Development Assessment
Development Engineering

Health and Building Services

Building Assessment and
Certification Services
Environmental Health
Ranger Services

Business Support and Customer Relations

Business Support
Customer Services

Strategic Planning

Strategic Land Use Planning
Section 94
Planning Proposals
Environmental Planning
Natural Resources
Strategic Property and
Land Development

CORPORATE & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Finance and Administration

Procurement/Contracts
Finance
Governance
Corporate Planning (IP&R)
Corporate Administration
Property (Leases and Licencing)

Community and Cultural Engagement

Libraries
Cessnock Performing Arts Centre (CPAC)
Youth Services (CYCOS)
Seniors Services
Early Childhood
Community Services
Arts and Culture
Social Planning

Information Technology

Information Technology
Records Management
Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

WORKS & INFRASTRUCTURE

Works and Operations

- Roads
- Bridges
- Drainage
- Footpaths
- Fleet/Plant/Workshop
- Airport Operations
- Depot Management

Open Space and Community Facilities

- Parks and Open Space
- Sport and Recreation
- Recreation Planning
- Swimming Pools
- Cycleways
- Cemeteries
- Asset Management - Buildings
- Building Maintenance

Infrastructure Management

- Asset Management
- Strategic Asset Management
- Design

Environment and Waste Management

- Waste and Environmental Management
- Noxious Weeds

Objectives & Process

Objectives

The Customer Service Strategy seeks simultaneously to improve on existing levels of customer service to an expanding population base, whilst working more efficiently and effectively through expanding service delivery via multiple service channels for customer convenience.

The key objective of the Strategy is to ensure that Council services maintain service relevance and Council positions itself to have the right people with the right skills, training, knowledge and adequate resources to be able to deliver services that meet or exceed our customer needs both now and into the future.

This Strategy guides the entire organisation, with the adoption of a new approach to customer service which focuses on both internal and external customers. It contains a number of actions which will result in changes to procedures and processes, putting the customer at the forefront of Council's activities.

The Strategy will deliver improvements to customer service during the period, building on the initiatives that have been commenced with the previous interim strategy.

Process

During the preparation of this strategy consultation was undertaken across a wide range of Council staff through a number of workshops.

The information resulting from this consultation was collated, analysed and categorised based upon common groupings.

These groupings were refined to eight main areas of strategic importance within which opportunities for improvement to service delivery were evident, these are:

- Processes
- Communication and engagement
- Resourcing
- Training
- Induction
- Performance measurement
- Cultural change

Themes & Phasing

Themes

Themes to address deficiencies within these eight areas were identified and were classified as Invest, Build and Extend. In determining how to invest, build and extend in service for the Cessnock Community there are three significant areas for Council to focus efforts, these areas being People, Systems and Engagement: In a systematic approach each phase listed below is a prerequisite for the next:

Phasing



INVEST



BUILD



EXTEND

Phase One

Invest

- INVEST IN OUR PEOPLE
- INVEST IN OUR SYSTEMS
- INVEST IN OUR ENGAGEMENT



INVEST

There are four main areas of focus within the theme of invest:

- 1) invest in staff induction and training
- 2) invest time and resources into reviewing service channels and streamlining Council's administrative workflows and procedures
- 3) invest in technology and performance measurement
- 4) invest in reviewing service level agreements and standards.

These four focus areas primarily support the following Charter promises:

- provide efficient and effective customer service to you
- provide information about a wide range of services which can be accessed

- have professional and well-trained staff assist you
- provide you with clear, accurate information that is consistent and easy to understand
- actively pursue continuous improvement and understand the needs of our customers now and into the future
- respect your privacy

Staff Induction and training

It is important that all staff have a clear understanding of their role in the organisation and how they contribute to the provision of services, both within the Council and to the community. This can be achieved by a comprehensive induction program for all new staff.

Council is committed to becoming a more customer focused organisation. A key component of this focus will be the delivery of customer service training to all our staff.

Review and streamlining of service channels, administrative workflows and procedures

It is important to have efficient and effective business processes. Operating in this manner provides the customer with a sense of confidence and ensures Council is delivering services to the community which represent good value for money.

Council has an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. We commit to investing the necessary time and resources to make the ongoing streamlining of workflows and procedures a high priority within the organisation. The return on investment from this commitment can have far reaching benefits including

improved service delivery outcomes, reductions in service delivery costs and higher levels of customer and employee satisfaction and engagement.

Council also needs to review service channels and operations to work toward optimising the customer experience. This will ensure we are providing customers with best practice services that are consistent, secure and convenient.

Review service level agreements (SLAs) and standards

Service requests vary from simple to very complex and vary considerably in the time and resources that may be required to satisfy and complete the request. The level of engagement and feedback expected by the customer also varies considerably. Council will review and evaluate its current SLAs and standards to achieve an acceptable balance between customer expectations

and achievable outcomes based on the availability of Council resources. The SLAs will clearly set out the responsibilities and timeframes for tasks required to complete common customer requests. The assessment of Council's performance in adhering to its stated SLAs and standards will be achieved through the development of appropriate performance measures, which will be reported on a regular basis.

Investing in further developing, documenting and training staff in corporate service standards will result in improved service provision. A 'whole of Council' approach is to be taken to the development of standards. Service standards provide clarity in relation to Council's expectation of staff and enhance Council's ability to deliver consistent customer service.

Technology and performance measurement

To be viewed as a progressive, responsive and best practice organisation, Council must change the way it delivers some

services. Council must embrace and invest in the technology that will allow it to manage better and deliver improved services and to be able to measure this service delivery in terms of quality and quantity.

Investment in technology can be expensive. However, managed well, this investment can yield great returns and has the capacity to improve our level of service whilst reducing operating expenses.

A key aspect of this investment is in meeting the community's expectation that Council will be able to service and engage with them via a range of technology platforms. The emerging best practice in this regard is for systems that are designed to meet the customer's needs on an individual basis.

These commitments relate to Objective 5.3 in Council's Operational Plan – Making Council more responsive to the community.

Phase Two

Build

- **BUILD ON OUR PEOPLE**
- **BUILD ON OUR SYSTEMS**
- **BUILD ON OUR ENGAGEMENT**



BUILD

There are four main focus areas within the theme of build:

- 1) build an organisation which has a focus on the customer, putting the customer at the forefront of everything we do
- 2) build our website to deliver information and services clearly and simply
- 3) build performance measurement tools and systems for ongoing monitoring of customer service
- 4) build Council's internal knowledge management system to facilitate the delivery of customer service

These four focus areas primarily support the following Charter promises:

- provide efficient and effective customer service to you
- provide information about a wide range of services which can be accessed
- have professional and well-trained staff assist you
- provide you with clear, accurate information that is consistent and easy to understand
- actively pursue continuous improvement and understand the needs of our customers now and into the future
- respect your privacy

Focus on the customer

The Customer Service Strategy seeks simultaneously to improve on existing levels of customer service to an expanding population base, whilst working more efficiently and effectively through expanding service delivery via multiple service channels for customer convenience.

Website

Building on our website is essential for Council to meet the ongoing needs of our customers. There is a vast amount of information contained within Council's website. In order to keep this information current and well ordered, there needs to be a structured approach to managing the content and layout. The Council website is an important business tool, which can efficiently and effectively deliver information to our customers, on a 24/7 basis. If well managed, the website can reduce telephone and face to face customer contact which will enable staffing resources to be focussed on other aspects of customer

engagement. Council will review the allocation of resources used for website maintenance, management and future development.

As part of this process Council will periodically and routinely examine:

- a) what information our customers are seeking
- b) determine if this information is being presented in the best way possible
- c) seek feedback from customers about their online experience
- d) forms of advanced website service options, such as web-chat; to have trained staff offer online assistance in directing customers to find the information they require, or other applications that can be deployed to make the website information present as being tailored to the individual customers' needs.

Knowledge management systems

It is important that our customer service delivery and initiatives

are regularly and appropriately monitored and assessed. This allows us to gauge, at any given time, areas in which we are performing well, areas that need our attention and any patterns or trends which are emerging. This will enable us to be increasingly responsive to our customers' needs. Council will build a more extensive range of key performance indicators to provide the required information to better manage the customer service aspect of our business. In some areas this relies on Council ensuring the appropriate investment is made in technology to enable valuable data about our business activities to be obtained. This data can then be analysed and utilised to drive further improvements in the way we deliver services to the community.

Performance measurement

It is important our customer service delivery and initiatives are regularly and appropriately monitored and assessed. This allows us to gauge, at any given time, areas in which we are performing well, areas that need our attention and any patterns or trends which are emerging. This will enable us to be increasingly responsive to our customers' needs. Council will build a more extensive range of key performance indicators to provide the required information to better

manage the customer service aspect of our business. In some areas this relies on Council ensuring the appropriate investment is made in technology to enable valuable data about our business activities to be obtained. This data can then be analysed and utilised to drive further improvements in the way we deliver services to the community.

Communication

Council will focus on two main areas of communication in the implementation of this strategy. Externally, we will commit to the adoption of standards for responding to incoming requests and correspondence within agreed timeframes. This will build on our existing levels of engagement with customers and focus on providing a written acknowledgement when requests and correspondence are initially received, and where appropriate the provision of periodic status reports for those requests which require longer time frames in order to be finalised.

Internally, protocols will be established to improve communication and information dissemination regarding staff, allocation of tasks and progress on project delivery.

Extend

- **EXTEND OUR PEOPLE**
- **EXTEND OUR SYSTEMS**
- **EXTEND OUR ENGAGEMENT**



EXTEND

There are four main focus areas within the theme of extend:

- 1) extending our focus to undertake a benchmarking exercise to determine the success of the changes of the improvements implemented in the first two years of the strategy and to identify any remaining service areas where we have not reached the accepted best practice standard and to determine what is required to achieve best practice in that particular area
- 2) extending our capacity to deliver customer service in those areas where a service or function is maintained by a sole member of staff with a specialist qualification or skill set for example, property and administrative support, enabling Council to ensure business continuity for key areas
- 3) extending our commitment to improved customer service by the identification of customer service champions across the organisation—these champions will assist in raising awareness

and maintaining the organisational commitment to the implementation of this strategy

- 4) extend our service commitment to seek out innovation in the field of customer service

These four focus areas primarily support the following Charter promises:

- provide efficient and effective customer service to you
- provide information about a wide range of services which can be accessed
- have professional and well-trained staff assist you
- provide you with clear, accurate information that is consistent and easy to understand
- actively pursue continuous improvement and understand the needs of our customers now and into the future
- respect your privacy

Benchmarking

In the delivery of this strategy it is our intention that a customer service ethos will prevail in all roles and at all levels of the organisation. In part, this will be achieved through reference in all position descriptions and annual performance reviews to customer service.

We commit to undertake a benchmarking exercise with other local government service organisations to gauge its degree of achievement in reaching its objective to become a customer focussed entity.

We also commit to undertake customer service surveys throughout the period of this strategy to gauge customer satisfaction levels across a range of services that we provide.

The outcomes of service benchmarking and survey exercises will

be reported back to Council and the broader community.

Business continuity for specialist roles

There are a number of specialist areas within Council where only one or two staff may have the requisite skills and experience to maintain and deliver a particular service. This can apply in areas of professional expertise as well as equipment operators such as in a roads maintenance team. We undertake to identify these areas of operation and establish appropriate procedures and protocols to enable these services to be maintained when the permanent staff are absent or when an officer leaves the organisation.

Council commits to providing the necessary staff, resources and training to enable this objective to be accomplished.

Customer service champions

It is critical to the success of delivering the objectives of this strategy to recognise that a number of staff will need to be instrumental in driving the implementation. Council sees the Customer Service Strategy as a whole of business undertaking and not one that simply sits with the Customer Service Centre.

Council is fortunate to recognise there is a significant proportion of staff whom are passionate about working for an organisation that is focussed on providing excellence in customer service.

To facilitate the implementation of this strategy Council will establish a customer service improvement team. These officers will be charged with the responsibility of actioning the strategy, monitoring its progressing, evaluating its success and identifying service improvement opportunities.

Commitment to innovation

It is essential that Council is regarded as a progressive and service-oriented organisation by our customers and the wider community. To be successful in this regard, it is imperative we not only keep pace with emerging best practices, but also actively foster a culture which encourages staff to be innovative and to maintain awareness of best practice through participation in professional networks. A customer focus needs to be at the core of this innovation to ensure that as we invest in, build and extend our services in a way that they meet (or exceed) the needs and expectations of our customers and community.

Action planning

Reporting & reviewing

A detailed list of action plans emanating from the strategy are attached in the schedule marked appendix "A". These action plans ultimately become part of the Council's Delivery and Operational Plans for implementation.

A key means of assessing our performance for many of the initiatives outlined in this strategy is through our Delivery and Operational Plans. Each business unit within Council has objectives specified within these plans. Progress on the implementation on these plans is reported to Council on a quarterly basis.

The strategy will also be reviewed annually to ensure any significant changes which impact Council operations, customer needs and expectations are appropriately identified, captured and provided for.





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