

# CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY

2018 - 2022



# VISION

Providing a customer service experience that is effortless, accurate and friendly.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Campaspe Shire Council's customers have many different needs and expectations. Changing ways of working and communicating are altering the way people seek information, leading to increased demands for faster, flexible, personalised customer focused service.**

Customer service is everyone's responsibility and is the way we all respond to our customers. It is everything we say and do for the customer. It is the whole experience the customer receives. It is the agreed standards that we as an organisation strive to deliver when dealing with a customer.

Customer service is the responsibility of everyone at Campaspe Shire Council, staff and councillors. Everyone contributes to the experience the customer has when dealing with council, and your contribution may only be part of that experience.

Customers can be both internal and external users of our services. Our customers are individuals or organisations that have contact with or receive a service from council.

This strategy has been developed taking into account the Customer Service Delivery Review completed in 2008 and a review of comments and responses from customer satisfaction surveys.

**The purpose of this strategy is to put the customer at the centre of service delivery to ensure an enhanced service experience that exceeds expectations. It aims to put the customer at the centre of what we do and captures our commitment to using their feedback as a stimulus for ongoing service improvement.**

**The strategy sets the vision and three objectives. An action plan will be developed with the organisation to support achievement of the objectives over the term of the strategy.**



# INTRODUCTION

**Campaspe Shire Council serves a population of more than 36,000, has five customer service centres, many individual work places, an organisational structure with four divisions, plus Office of the CEO, and has approximately 650 plus employees.**

The evolution of Campaspe Shire Council has led to a business environment where many customers measure council's performance relative to their perception of a past experience, or someone else's experience. Additionally new community members often have an expectation they can access services at a similar standard to what they have experienced in metro or other larger regional centres.

It is generally regarded that communities today have increasing expectations of public authorities and private enterprises. To meet these expectations, council is under significant pressure to do more with less. The community, as well as the state and federal governments, expect reliability and consistency of services without any significant cost increase. In this climate, council is also addressing its own long term financial sustainability through reviewing service levels, reducing the asset renewal funding gap and addressing ever increasing compliance standards and obligations.

In 2008 a Customer Service Delivery Review was completed with a number of recommendations to lift the customer service delivery across the organisation. Actions completed included the adoption of a Customer Service Charter, implementation of the networked call centre, decommissioning of individual customer service centre phone lines, establishment of community hubs (library, service centre and other services co-located), instalment reminder notices, automated payment methods and call centre reporting. The Customer Service Charter was more recently reviewed in 2016.

Recognising the need to lift the customer service focus, the Campaspe Shire Council identified that a Customer First Strategy was required. Today, many organisations are faced with significant challenges in the area of customer service and service delivery, both internally and externally. The constant changes in demographics, coupled with high customer expectations is making organisations rethink customer service strategies.



Strategies and tactics that worked in the past are less effective and require more effort to execute. In an era where service has become the defining factor for customers, organisations of all types struggle to find the unique balance between delivery of service, the cost of the delivery and customer expectations.

Campaspe Shire Council offers multiples services and in most cases, each department works independently with varied business processes. The customer views the organisation as a single entity and makes no distinction between departments or business process. Generally, having several contact points or multiple locations may cause a barrier to efficient service delivery for customers. As a result, service delivery strategies that worked in the past need to evolve to reflect changes in attitudes and expectations of customers. Local government as a whole is under pressure to deliver a higher level of service at no or minimal cost increase to meet the growing expectations of its community.



This strategy aims to put the customer at the centre of what we do and captures our commitment to using their feedback as a stimulus for ongoing service improvement. Through listening to our customers and having a structured approach to capturing suggestions, ideas, complaints and compliments, customers will have the prime opportunity to influence our future service delivery, and enable us to fully embrace a council-wide customer focused culture.

Having detailed record keeping to customer interactions in a centralised customer relationship management system (CRM) to ensure the customer is getting consistent and timely service is important. Good record keeping is paramount and it must be easily accessed and updated by all parties.

## **The top seven focus areas to providing an improved customer focused culture include:**

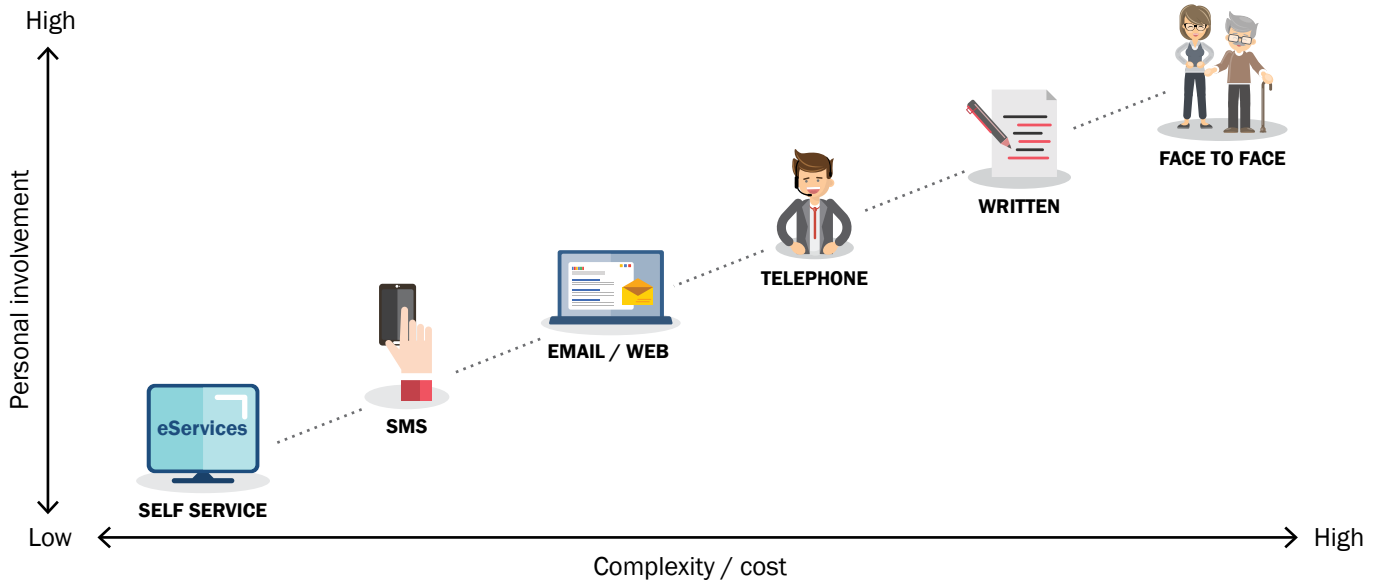
1. delivering quality, relevant services;
2. encouraging and developing a positive “can do” attitude at all levels;
3. achieving better corporate working and service coordination;
4. improving operational efficiency and reducing duplication;
5. exploiting the capabilities of our corporate systems;
6. providing structured opportunities for contribution and innovation; and
7. valuing the knowledge and skills of our staff.

By way of achieving the objectives of this strategy, we will not only meet customer expectations, but will exceed them through providing relevant services in a convenient, accessible, friendly and knowledgeable way.

# CUSTOMER INTERFACE TRENDS

Customers expect to be able to access different communication channels and receive a level of personalised, consistent and friendly service, regardless of their method of contact.

Increasingly customers want to access self-service options, the expectation of service availability at all hours with the use of newer technologies is rapidly expanding. Customers are looking to communicate and do simple transactions in time and cost effective ways.



Graphic 1: The cost of communication increases from self-service (lowest) through to face to face (highest).

Across the Campaspe Shire calls to the call centre (networked phone system) are fluctuating and face to face contact through customer service centres is declining by around 3,000 persons per annum.

## Incoming calls - annual

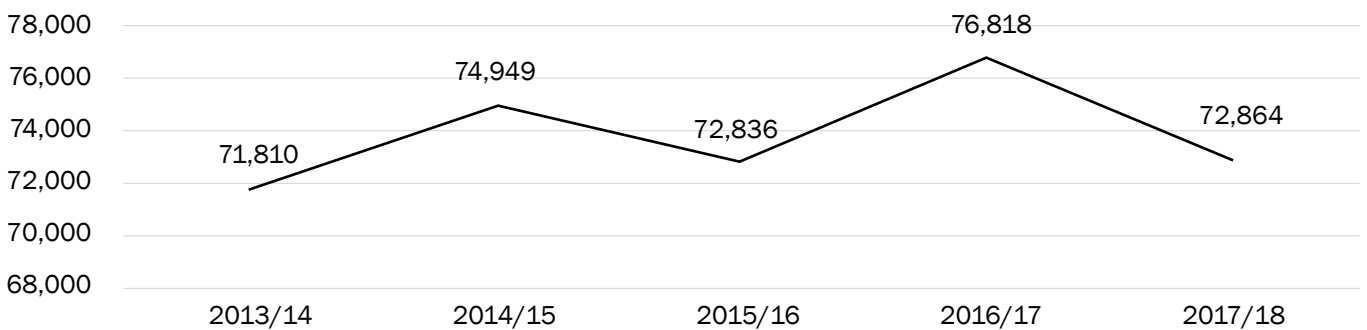


Table 1: The total number of incoming calls to the call centre (networked phone system) are fluctuating, between 72,000 to 77,000, across the past five financial years.



Some factors influencing peaks to calls include:

- July 2014 Implementation of pick n mix waste collection system, with new bins rolled out across the shire to all households.
- July - September 2016 Echuca business levy.
- October 2016 Council elections.

## Face to face contacts - annual

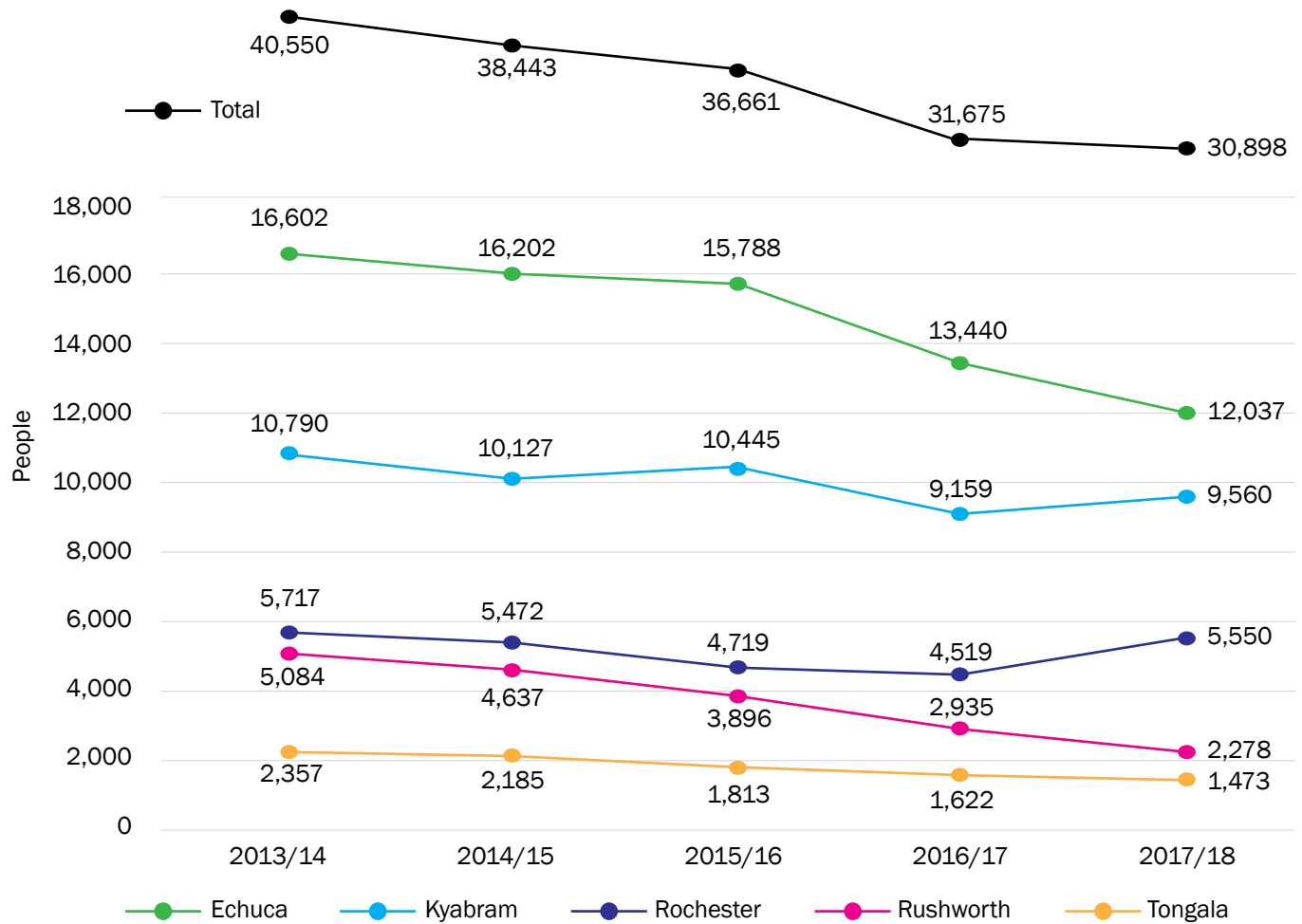


Table 2: Face to face contacts (people walking into a customer service centre) is declining by around 3,000 persons per year.



# CUSTOMER SERVICE

## What is customer service?

Customer service is everyone's responsibility and is the way we all respond to our customers. It is everything we say and do for the customer. It is the whole experience the customer receives. It is the agreed standards that we as an organisation strive to deliver when dealing with a customer.

## Who is responsible for customer service?

Customer service is the responsibility of everyone at Campaspe Shire Council (staff and councillors). Everyone contributes to the experience the customer has when dealing with council, and your contribution may only be part of that experience.

The Customer Contact team are primarily the initial contact point for most customers, either by phone or in person. The team focuses on first point resolution where possible, responding with clarity and confidence, referring onto subject matter experts for resolution where needed. The ability to resolve at first point of contact varies from business area to business area, depending on the complexity of the request.

Other teams that also have expertise in dealing with customers, include aged and disability services, Echuca War Memorial Aquatic Centre, Port of Echuca Discovery Centre and child care centres.

These teams can help set the levels for consistency and quality of customer service across the shire.

## Who are our customers?

Customers can be both internal and external users of our services. Our customers are individuals or organisations that have contact with or receive a service from council.

## Where are we now?

Campaspe Shire Council has historically participated in a number of local government customer satisfaction surveys to gauge how its services are performing, as well as benchmarking across the local government sector. The surveys provided scores and trends in the area of customer contact (interaction & responsiveness), as well as an overall performance score.

## Customer service rating - Community satisfaction survey

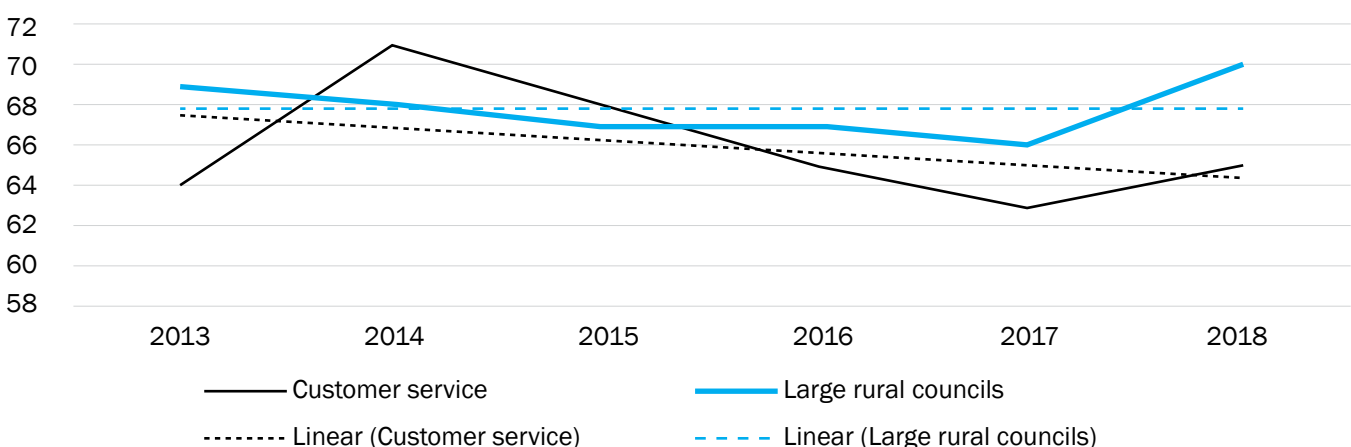


Table 3: The overall trend for Campaspe Shire (green) continues to show a steady or slight downward trend, with the trend the benchmark group, large rural councils of like size and structure, steady (blue).

Whilst such findings have helped guide the development of this strategy, future collation of customer feedback, complaint trends, mystery shopping surveys, and other survey results will further assist in measuring the outcomes of this strategy.



# STRATEGIC LINKS



This Customer Service Strategy aligns with the Council Plan goal of Responsible Management:

## Strategic Objective

**An organisation that is responsive, flexible, honest, accountable and consistent**

## Strategy

**Foster a customer centred approach**

It also links with council's values, to deliver quality, innovative and community focused services today that make a difference for tomorrow. With values:

### Respect

*We treat others as we expect to be treated...*

- We embrace each individual's unique talents and value diverse life and work styles.
- We operate in a spirit of cooperation and value human dignity.

### Customer focused

*We are here to help...*

- We listen to our customers and deliver services which meet their demonstrated needs.
- We focus on customer relationships that build trust, confidence and loyalty.
- We are responsible for both external and internal customer satisfaction.

### Continuous improvement

*We are a learning organisation...*

- We work with enthusiasm and intellect and are driven to build upon what has already been achieved.
- We improve productivity, processes and ourselves through measurement, analysis and review.

### Teamwork

*We support one another and work cooperatively...*

- We listen to and respect each other whilst working together to achieve mutually beneficial results.
- We help one another, value one another's views and make our work environment fun and enjoyable.
- We are not afraid to stand alone, especially when it is the right thing to do.

### Accountability

*We are responsible for our actions...*

- We conduct our business in accordance with the highest standards of professional behaviour and ethics.
- We are open, honest and ethical in all our interactions with employees, clients, customers, vendors and the public.
- We are responsible for and take ownership of our actions.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES



The focus of this strategy is to put the customer at the centre of service delivery to ensure an enhanced service experience that exceeds expectations.

An enhanced service experience should include, but not be limited to:

- efficient, friendly and knowledgeable staff
- accessibility of information, resources and services
- options for communicating both to and from council
- quick and efficient payment options, that do not necessarily require face-to-face contact
- convenient locations, open at times to meet community demand, where face-to-face discussions can take place
- enthusiastic, knowledgeable and empowered staff, who take ownership over your inquiry
- a friendly and professional interface with the council
- timely acknowledgement of written correspondence, with a consistent approach across the organisation
- clear timeframes for issue and request resolution, and confirmation when a request is complete
- proactive follow-up communications when timeframes cannot be met
- responsive actions, when unexpected events occur
- engaged staff, who seek feedback and look to improve
- managing customer requests versus customer complaints.

Achievement of high customer satisfaction is the aim and this will be regularly measured and reported on. Results and feedback will form the basis of ongoing improvement activities.



# VISION AND OBJECTIVES



## VISION

Providing a customer service experience that is **effortless**, **accurate** and **friendly**.

## OBJECTIVES

In reviewing the guiding principles, three key objectives have been developed to improve the customer focus. The objectives and their desired outcomes are:

### Effortless

No matter the demographic, the customer, both internal and external, can access information and engage with council quickly and easily.

- Customers can access service information and support easily through whatever channel they choose, whenever they choose.
- We have clear reporting mechanisms and feedback so that a customer never has to chase up on the progress of their issue.
- Well informed staff will be proactive and contact customers when there are issues and advise them when they will be attended to.
- Increasing our focus of the customer will be key to this objective, not just customer contact staff. Implementing a customer first focus as well as alignment to corporate values will form part of this objective.

### Accurate

With knowledge at hand, information provided is accurate.

- Customers are not expected to know or understand the complexities of council. As many services as possible should be capable of delivery through a single contact.
- When customers contact council, they can expect frontline staff to have access to comprehensive, accurate and real time information.

### Friendly

Whether in person, on the phone, or online, the information is easily understood and is in plain English.

- Once customers access a service, they are being met by polite and well-informed employees, who are eager and enthusiastic to help.
- Customer service standards are set, known and understood by all employees.
- Performance monitoring against the standards is reported regularly and used to improve delivery of customer services.

The objectives in more detail area:

OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME – CUSTOMER	OUTCOME - ORGANISATION
<b>Effortless</b>	The customer has a centralised service coordination, not multiple ones.	Systems and resources are maximised to full potential to support the outcome.
<b>Accurate</b>	Services are provided at a consistent level and are correct.	Staff do it right the first time with no need to rework for the customer. Information available is correct.
<b>Friendly</b>	Enhanced customer relations. Interactions with customers have constructive outcomes.	Builds rapport, reputation and trust from the customer.

# THE NEXT STEP



An action plan will be developed to achieve the three objectives. To support the objectives, the organisation needs to focus on:

<b>People</b>	Commitment of all staff with a high level of buy-in and necessary competencies supported by a program of ongoing training and development.
<b>Resources</b>	Commitment and realignment of adequate staffing, information and communication systems used and available.
<b>Culture</b>	A willingness to change and embrace a customer focused culture, looking at all we do from the customer's perspective, using customer insight to drive continuous improvement to deliver customer orientated outcomes.
<b>Financial</b>	A clear understanding of current costs and potential savings through changed business processes.
<b>Measurement and reporting</b>	Ongoing reporting across the organisation.





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