



Raymond Mhlaba
Local Municipality

Customer Care Policy

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Part A – Preamble

1 Preamble

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Customer Care Policy is to guide the actions of staff when dealing with our customers.

1.2 Amendment to this Customer Care Policy

Raymond Mhlaba Municipality's Customer Care Policy may be amended by any ruling of the Municipality's Council.

1.3 Commencement

The Raymond Mhlaba Municipality Customer Care Policy comes into effect on 1 September 2016, and will be reviewed annually.

Part B - Introduction to Customer Care and Why it is Important

1 Introduction

It is a reality that if our services are not rendered properly, payment for services is unlikely to be forthcoming from our customers. It is a truism that improving customer services is about personal attitudes and acceptance of responsibility at every level.

1.1 Why Customer Care Policies Are Important

Customer experience informs judgement/perception of Raymond Mhlaba Municipality in its entirety, not the service received by customers/community members. Positive perceptions are orders of magnitude more difficult to create than negatives ones.

There are times when we need to be involved with people when they do not particularly want our involvement, and so in all our dealings with people, customers are treated with dignity, respect and courtesy, and this kind of behaviour must be habitual in every official.

2 Purpose, Scope and Structure of this Policy

2.1 Purpose

Given the importance of public perceptions in gaining public cooperation, the purpose of this document is to guide Raymond Mhlaba LM officials in their efforts to make every transaction that customers experience with the institution a positive one.

Further, the policy forms the foundation on which our Customer Service Charter is built.

2.2 Scope

While legislation governs the minimum we must do to serve our customers, Raymond Mhlaba LM's residents/service users (our customers) define the maximum that they are willing to afford.

2.3 Primary Scope

Raymond Mhlaba LM as the Electricity and refuse collection (in certain parts of the municipality), with its Electricity Providers, provides services necessary for life itself, so this document gives these services centre stage.

2.4 Secondary Scope

However, the general principles of customer care are widely applicable to all the LM's functions including fire fighting, community facilities, local economic development (tourism, promotion of SMMEs, agriculture), and heritage and environment management.

2.5 Structure Of This Document

The document incorporates the Batho Pele Principles and related Belief Set (Reproduced in appendix 1). This is necessary to ensure our customer care policies align with national policy and with those of most other service oriented organisations.

This document starts by establishing the foundations on which the policies are built, and flows through the policies themselves, to the systems, procedures and standards strategies that enable implementation of the policies and ends with the way in which performance is measured and continuously improved. A few final statements about what Raymond Mhlaba LM will and will not do in the course of conducting its business provide a conclusion.

Part C – The Customer Care Policy

1 Customer Care Vision, Objectives, Principles and Values

Our **VISION** of service culture embraces the belief that as a family “we belong, we care, we serve”; where employees are professional and efficient; where customers receive services in facilities that are appealing and close to where they live; where people are treated with friendliness, dignity, respect and courtesy; where systems and procedures are consistent across all municipal offices and demand as little time and effort of customers as possible.

To achieve this, Raymond Mhlaba LM's LM managers:

- Use the Batho Pele framework for making decisions about delivering services to residents of Raymond Mhlaba LM's who do not yet have access to them;
- Ensure that our customer care planning is thorough and thoughtfully prepared;
- Adopt best practice methods and standards in our customer care operations and management, and work to continuously improve on them;
- Listen to what our customers say about what they really need, observe the way they utilise the services we provide and adapt what we do and the way we do it to make our service more appealing and effective;
- Select staff carefully, train them well and provide conditions that will motivate them to become excellent in their service to our customers.

The following **OBJECTIVES** are the foundation for Raymond Mhlaba LM customer care policy:

- Be responsive to the needs and views of people in our constituency;
- Entrench equality of opportunities for customers and staff;
- Provide standards of customer services that are globally competitive.

Drawn from the mission and objectives are a set of guiding **PRINCIPLES**:

- Actively seek the views of customers and staff ;
- Consistent standards across the Municipality's various services departments;
- Extend services whenever this can be done within our objectives and values;
- Promote equal access for disabled people and children;
- Develop sensitivity to common courtesies due for disabled customers (**Appendix 10**);
- Respond quickly to requests for assistance ;
- Publish standards for services and the queries, compliments and complaints we receive;
- Deal with complaints openly and fairly;
- Uncover the base cause giving rise to each complaint and deal with it permanently;
- Foster a sense of belonging among employees through recognition, training and development, and well considered conditions of service;
- Review our customer and staff care commitments regularly;
- Share good practice.

The **VALUES** that underpin customer care are:

- Value for money;
- Integrity, fairness, courtesy;
- Effectiveness and efficiency;
- Provision of services within agreed standards; and
- Flexibility in the way services are provided.

2 Consultation, Information, Communication and Transparency

2.1 Consultation

Citizens are involved in the development of service standards. We use several methods of consultation to ensure comprehensiveness and representativeness, through customer surveys, interviews with individual users, consultation with groups, and holding meetings with consumer representative bodies, NGOs and CBOs. Further details may also be obtained from Raymond Mhlaba LM's Public Participation and Petition Policy.

We recognise the importance of early consultation in any matter, and provide feedback to inform people about any action being taken as a result of the consultation.

2.2 Information Gathering And Dissemination

We understand that access to information and services empowers citizens and creates value for money, quality services, and that it reduces unnecessary expenditure for citizens.

We actively gather information from customers about how we meet their needs, and have systems to enable staff to make suggestions about service change and service delivery.

We will continually work to make our bills simpler to understand and more informative so that customers can see how their account is made up.

We will keep our customers informed about the basic information on which our services are planned.

Where possible, we offer choices and in all cases give information about what is available, and if a service is not available an explanation is given.

Information about services is available by email, postal services, our website or via our administration offices in Fort Beaufort, Alice, Middledrift, Balfour and Customer Care & Service office at the Fort Beaufort Town Hall.

Up to date summaries of all services should be made available on our website and at Customer Care & Service offices that enable customers to go directly to the correct point of delivery the first time and receive assistance without referral to other places or people.

We utilise diverse methods to disseminate information, each designed to suit various sectors of our customer base, including billboards, posters, radio, seminars and meetings.

2.3 Communication

On an ongoing basis, we work to market our policies to our customers so that they remain aware of their rights and obligations relating to the use of the services we provide.

When delivering information we present it in a positive, clear and easy to understand way, customised to suit the target audience, and in the dominant language/s of the Raymond Mhlaba area.

We advertise our services, and have facilities for enquiries, complaints and reports.

2.4 Transparency

We make public all information relating to mistakes, omissions and wrongdoing that we discover in our organisation in a transparent and non-defensive manner.

We are committed to the highest standards of openness and accountability, and have systems that enable employees and members of the public to raise concerns about issues such as unacceptable behaviour, corruption, malpractice or fraud. Whistle-blowers are protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if disclosures are made in good faith.

3 Improving Customer Support

Courtesy goes beyond a polite smile, 'please' and 'thank you'. Our staff and service providers empathise with citizens and treat them with as much consideration and respect as they would like for themselves.

We behave in a way that says that we care because we are devoted to doing a job to the end, ensuring that we deliver beyond customer expectations.

When the opportunity arises, we inform our customers of the managers who are responsible for ensuring that services are provided to a high standard.

We continuously promote the notion that members of the public have a duty to report illegal dumping, environmental and water pollution as a result of illegal dumping, and we make it as quick and easy as possible for them to make such reports by displaying help line numbers as widely as possible, and by making our staff identifiable by their uniforms.

We diligently encourage customers experiencing financial difficulties to work with us to structure outstanding service payments to suit their ability to pay. Accordingly, we provide restricted service to customers only as a last resort and make every attempt to develop a mutually acceptable payment plan for those who are genuinely trying to pay.

We encourage the public to support our efforts to reduce the incidence of unlawful situations relating to our infrastructure and services (such as unauthorised connections – see appendix 13). The unlawful behaviour of the few affects our ability and the ability of our infrastructure to perform to standard, and we recognise that customers who live under poverty stricken and trying conditions feel the effects of poor quality of the service more than most. In view thereof, we encourage our citizens to report cases of vandalism and theft of infrastructure.

We have enacted by-laws, which we diligently police, that incorporate effective penalties for unlawful acts and omissions by any party, as a means of ensuring the integrity of our services.

4 Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions

We are a diverse organisation and sometimes things do go wrong. It is our responsibility to listen to customers and apologise and **take action** to ensure such issues do not reoccur. Similarly, we listen when people say things are going well or make suggestions about the way we deliver services, and use the information to highlight problem areas and identify areas of good practice that can be shared with other areas and parts of the organisation.

Conducting surveys and encouraging customers to give us feedback will show customers that the Raymond Mhlaba Municipality is committed to listening to them.

4.1 Complaints and Redress

Complaints about an individual member of staff are a reflection of Raymond Mhlaba Municipality, **not** the individual officer, and it is management's duty to correct.

Complaints are an **extremely** valuable source of information for improving customer service, and are recorded, investigated and the causes removed. Staff and service providers are encouraged to welcome complaints as an opportunity to improve service.

Analysis of complaints records reveal trends that are symptoms of larger issues requiring corrective action, and the complaints records system is designed to facilitate easy analysis.

The Municipal Manager personally reviews complaints reports monthly, and ensures that suitable redress has been accorded to people who have received service below the promised standard.

The detail of dealing with complaints is contained in **Appendix 8**.

4.2 Compliments

Members of the public do not often feel moved to take the time to offer compliments. So when customers and colleagues do, compliments are recorded on a log similar to the complaints log. As with complaints, the Municipal Manager reviews compliments reports monthly, and recognition is accorded to employees or units who have gone the extra mile.

4.3 Suggestions and Comments

Comments and suggestions are seriously analysed, shared and used to formulate our own best practice, and to identify customer preferences. The Municipal Manager's Office ensures that strategic planning utilises the information to the benefit of customers.

4.4 Angry Customers

Angry customers **believe** that they have been wronged. They must be dealt with as such, and they must be listened to in a dignified and respectful manner (see appendix 9 which details specifically how to deal with the situation).

That said, there are rare instances when individuals express their anger through abusive language, harassment or bullying or violent behaviour. Employees are trained to deal with such situations. (**Appendix 9**)

5 Facilities, Systems, Procedures and Standards

Processes are in place that enable citizens to be involved in the development of service standards as we progress along the journey of continuous improvement.

5.1 Facilities

Facilities of Raymond Mhlaba Municipality are well signposted and conveniently situated. They are well maintained, pleasing business premises that are kept clean and tidy. The external areas are kept litter-free at all times. We strive to comply with the Occupational Health & Safety Act.

Raymond Mhlaba has the following administration offices:

RAYMOND MHLABA ADMIN OFFICES:

Fort Beaufort: 046-645-7400

Middledrift: 040-657-3075

Hogsback: 045-962-1010

Seymour: 040-863-0072

Alice: 040-653-1214

ALICE OFFICE

Services offered in these offices

*Rates & Refuse Payment
Bookings for Hall, learner's and drivers licenses
Registration for Free Basic Services (FBS)*

MIDDLEDRIFT, SEYMOUR, & HOGSBACK OFFICES

*Rates & Refuse Payment
Bookings for Hall
Registration for Free Basic Services (FBS)*

Municipality Normal working office hours: 0800 – 17h00

5.2 Systems

Our front line staff and call centre staff are equipped with computers that enable them to view both the debtors system that contains information relating to customers.

5.3 Procedures And Standards

To promote consistency, much of the interaction between officials and customers is written into standard procedures in which officials are trained, and to which they must refer.

All media contact takes place through the Raymond Mhlaba LM Communications Unit. Media enquiries must be referred to the Communications Unit.

The standards define what customers can expect. These standards should be set following appropriate consultation with customers.

Customer Care Standards (presented in appendices 2 to 5 and 10 to 12) include:

- Waiting, response times, styles, use of plain language, reliability and punctuality relating to telephone calls, postal correspondence, email, callers and meetings;
- Location and aesthetic appeal of walk-in facilities;
- Switchboards, call centres and walk-in facilities staffing capacity;
- Compulsory training and development of staff to ensure consistent and effective communication and resolution of issues;
- Commitments and service standards are appropriate to the service and context;
- Customer services available online to internet users;
- The Corporate Identity Manual details use of Raymond Mhlaba LM's image, brand and specific terms.

6 Measuring Performance and Continuous Improvement

Improved customer service is a Key Corporate Objective, and as such is articulated in the business plans and balanced scorecards of each department, and these are translated into individual "Accountability Agreements / Performance Promises".

Standards are benchmarked against those set by central government, and also (where applicable) those used internationally, taking into account ADM's current level of development, and with a view to making our district globally attractive.

While the number of benchmarks used may feel overwhelming, the aim is to ensure that local people receive value for money when they use public services.

Our systems measure the extent to which the service or products citizens receive from departments conform to our Customer Service Charter.

The Municipal Manager takes personal accountability for assuring conformance to customer service standards, through quarterly reports relating to Service Delivery Improvement Plan/customer care indicators that he/ she receives from Heads of Departments.

Heads of Departments use Service Delivery Improvement Plan/customer care indicators to control customer service day to day and through the normal performance management system, and each manager is responsible for achieving targets within his own effectiveness area.

Managers and staff participate in regular reviews of customer care targets and standards so that new standards and targets can be set which continuously improve services to local customers.

We scan the market on an ongoing basis and harness evolving technology to improve performance particularly in the fields of communication, responsiveness, and information accessibility.

7 What We Will Not Do and What We Will Do

We are not defensive in the face of criticism no matter how unjustified, but we are committed to truthful and accurate reporting and will 'put the record straight' with verifiable facts when necessary.

We will not tolerate fraudulent acts and omissions in our organisation, but we are flexible in the application of our policies and procedures where the interests of our customers are at stake.

Appendix 1 - The Batho Pele Principles

Eight Batho Pele principles were developed to serve as acceptable policy and legislative framework regarding service delivery in the public service. These principles are aligned with the Constitutional ideals of:

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of professional ethics;
- Providing services impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias;
- Utilising resources efficiently and effectively;
- Responding to people's needs; the citizens are encouraged to participate in policy-making; and
- Rendering an accountable, transparent, and development-oriented public administration

The Batho Pele Principles Are As Follows:

1 Consultation

There are many ways to consult users of services including conducting customer surveys, interviews with individual users, consultation with groups, and holding meetings with consumer representative bodies, NGOs and CBOs. Often, more than one method of consultation will be necessary to ensure comprehensiveness and representativeness. Consultation is a powerful tool that enriches and shapes government policies such as the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and its implementation in the Local Government sphere. For more on the Raymond Mhlaba LM's public participation initiatives, please consult the municipality's Public Participation and Petition Policy document.

2 Setting Service Standards

This principle reinforces the need for benchmarks to constantly measure the extent to which citizens are satisfied with the service or products they receive from departments. It also plays a critical role in the development of service delivery improvement plans to ensure a better life for all South Africans. Citizens should be involved in the development of service standards.

Required are standards that are precise and measurable so that users can judge for themselves whether or not they are receiving what was promised. Some standards will cover processes, such as the length of time taken to authorise a housing claim, to issue a passport or identity document, or even to respond to letters.

To achieve the goal of making South Africa globally competitive, standards should be benchmarked (where applicable) against those used internationally, taking into account South Africa's current level of development.

3 Increasing Access

One of the prime aims of Batho Pele is to provide a framework for making decisions about delivering public services to the many South Africans who do not have access to them. Batho Pele also aims to rectify the inequalities in the distribution of existing services. Examples of initiatives by government to

improve access to services include such platforms as the Multi-Purpose Community Centres and Call Centres, now known as Thusong Service Centres, where a variety of government services are housed in a central area.

Raymond Mhlaba LM also has satellite offices in all its four towns within the Raymond Mhlaba area in order to bring services closer to consumers where they live.

Access to information and services empowers citizens and creates value for money, quality services. It reduces unnecessary expenditure for the citizens.

4 Ensuring Courtesy

This goes beyond a polite smile, 'please' and 'thank you'. It requires service providers to empathize with the citizens and treat them with as much consideration and respect, as they would like for themselves.

The public service is committed to continuous, honest and transparent communication with the citizens. This involves communication of services, products, information and problems, which may hamper or delay the efficient delivery of services to promised standards. If applied properly, the principle will help demystify the negative perceptions that the citizens in general have about the attitude of public servants.

5 Providing Information

As a requirement, available information about services should be at the point of delivery, but for users who are far from the point of delivery, other arrangements will be needed. In line with the definition of customer in this document, managers and employees should regularly seek to make information about the organisation, and all other service delivery related matters available to fellow staff members.

6 Openness And Transparency

A key aspect of openness and transparency is that the public should know more about the way national, provincial and local government institutions operate, how well they utilise the resources they consume, and who is in charge. It is anticipated that the public will take advantage of this principle and make suggestions for improvement of service delivery mechanisms, and to even make government employees accountable and responsible by raising queries with them.

7 Redress

This principle emphasises a need to identify quickly and accurately when services are falling below the promised standard and to have procedures in place to remedy the situation. This should be done at the individual transactional level with the public, as well as at the organisational level, in relation to the entire service delivery programme.

Public servants are encouraged to welcome complaints as an opportunity to improve service, and to deal with complaints so that weaknesses can be remedied quickly for the good of the citizens.

8 Value For Money

Many improvements that the public would like to see often require no additional resources and can sometimes even reduce costs. Failure to give a member of the public a simple, satisfactory explanation to an enquiry may for example, result in an incorrectly completed application form, which will cost time to rectify. It is therefore essential that Raymond Mhlaba LM officials respond timeously and accurately to consumer queries and complaints.

Raymond Mhlaba LM will endeavour to ensure value for money for all its projects and programmes, to avoid duplication of services.

Value for money also necessitates good governance, strict budgetary controls, and ensuring that key performance area targets are met as stipulated in the Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plan and Organisational Scorecard.

Belief set

In order for the revitalisation of Batho Pele to succeed, organisational culture has to be changed to accommodate Batho Pele as a way of life. This means that departments should take stock of their values, as well as behaviours and attitudes of employees. Departments would then be able to take necessary steps to prepare public servants for the revitalised Batho Pele Culture of responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness in delivering services to the public.

The New Belief Set namely "we belong, we care, we serve" clearly captures the revitalised Batho Pele culture. The Belief Set is intended to endorse the eight Batho Pele Principles. A belief set is a value system, which serves as a relatively permanent ideal that should influence and shape the general nature of public servants' behaviour. For it to have maximal impact, a Belief Set should be an integral part of any service delivery operations, strategic planning and implementation strategy of all programmes and not an "add-on".

We belong –

Public servants are social-beings whose needs should be recognised and fulfilled. This recognition of needs will instil a sense of belonging to the public service family. We belong because we are recognised and rewarded for living Batho Pele. Citizens who feel satisfied will certainly develop a spirit of patriotism towards the country and will also feel a sense of belonging. In practical terms, this part of the belief set underscores the importance of the human resources function (located in the Corporate Services Department). It is their responsibility to ensure that practices, processes, systems such as conditions of service, rewards and recognition as well as training and development among others, foster a sense of belonging amongst public servants.

Furthermore, this Belief Set is also about:

- Encouraging a spirit, culture and practice of collaboration, teamwork and collegiality among all public servants, thereby fostering effective intergovernmental and inter-departmental relations;
- Building a learning Public Service;

- Fostering partnerships with the recipients and beneficiaries of public services and thus ensuring that the public service is responsive to people's needs in line with the notion of "Putting People First".

We care –

Public servants should be courteous when providing services to the public by listening to their problems, apologising when necessary, and serving people with a smile. We care because we are devoted to doing a job to the end, ensuring that we deliver beyond customer expectations. Public servants should respect all citizens, irrespective of background, gender, colour or creed.

We serve –

In order to have a sense of service; the public service should develop service standards, provide information, seek service delivery solutions and go beyond the call of duty – “We serve by delivering quality services and making citizens look forward to receiving world-class integrated service delivery”.

This could be achieved by:

- Anticipating customer needs through the introduction of regular customer surveys on the type of services citizens would want to receive.
- Offering integrated service delivery through institutions like the district Thusong Service Centres, Raymond Mhlaba Economic Development Agency and other innovative forms of service delivery in communities.
- Going beyond the call of duty even under difficult circumstances where there are limited resources.

Appendix 2 - Standards Relating to Postal Correspondence

Postal correspondence is responded to within ten working days. If a full response is not expected to be possible within the standard, an acknowledgement is sent within two working days to the customer. The acknowledgement outlines any progress made, why the delay is expected, and includes the name and contact details of the person dealing with the query and a new timescale for a full reply.

The corporate style template contained in the Branding / Corporate Identity Manual is used for letters.

The following are tips on plain written language:

- Stop and think before you write – make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order;
- Imagine you are talking to your reader. Write in a tone and style that suits the reader. Be sincere and personal, but do not patronise;
- Get to the point quickly – the beginning must be of interest to your readers and give them the incentive to continue;
- Be understood – obscure, Latin, foreign, legal words or technical jargon will not impress readers or help your writing style. Everyday layman’s language is more likely to help people understand your ideas or messages;
- Do not use jargon unless your readers will understand it – avoid technical words. Explain any technical terms you have to use;
- Keep your sentence length down – try to stick to one main idea in a sentence. Be punchy;
- Be direct and specific in terms of action to be taken;
- Be clear – do not waffle or stray from the main point or message. Make sure the words or phrases you use are not vague;
- Promote the right image – design helpful leaflets and forms;
- Read and check everything you write – is the grammar correct? Does it read clearly? Will the reader understand?
- **Use your spellchecker!**

Standards and guidelines for postal correspondence:

- Use customers’ names when known, for example Miss/Ms/Mrs or Mr rather than Sir/Madam. Where you personalise the letter by using a name you should sign off with “Yours sincerely”. Where you address the letter with Sir/Madam the sign off should be “Yours faithfully”;
- Avoid jargon, technical language and abbreviations;
- If you are going on annual leave ensure someone checks your in-tray for new mail and deals with urgent messages;
- Avoid the use of impersonal standard letters wherever possible;
- If a colleague goes on sick leave ensure that you check their in-tray and deal with urgent messages and correspondence;
- Make sure responses are printed to a good quality and portray the high quality image of the Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality.

Appendix 3 - Standards Relating to Email Correspondence

Email is in most instances less formal, and correspondence is controlled through the corporate email policy.

The following guidelines apply to letters, faxes and emails from Raymond Mhlaba Municipality. Staff will:

- When sending/replying to an email ensure you adhere to the corporate email policy;
- Use plain English and concise sentences;
- Aim to answer the question and try to anticipate further questions;
- Be polite;
- Address the consumer by name whenever possible and not as "Sir/Madam";
- Date individual correspondence;
- Make sure you respond using BLACK as your colour; and void use of other colours, especially RED;
- Take care of your punctuation, and avoid using exclamation marks unnecessarily. One exclamation mark will do.
- Before going on leave, use the out-of-office assistant facility, explaining where help can be obtained whilst you are away. Ensure that you display the dates you will be absent.

Appendix 4 - Standards Relating to Telephonic Communication

Our switchboard will have sufficient capacity so that telephones can be answered within ten seconds of ringing (four rings).

All internal calls must be answered with your first name and the name of your service, for example "Good morning/afternoon, Environmental Services, Peter speaking".

All external calls must be answered with "Good morning/afternoon, Raymond Mhlaba Municipality Communication Services, Peter speaking".

- Telephones should be answered within ten seconds of ringing (four rings);
- If you receive a call that is not for your service area, please return the call to the switchboard, advising the caller before you transfer.
- Where you are unable to help the caller straight away, you should take the customer's name, address and telephone number. Tell the caller when you expect to come back to them, for example within 30 minutes, with a response or, alternatively, ensure that the appropriate officer contacts them;
- Record / document all queries, complaints, petitions and requests for information and forward the information to the relevant party for follow up. Track the responses and inform the consumer of the outcome/s of the investigation or action taken;
- If you are going to be out or unavailable, make suitable arrangements to deal with telephone queries, for example voicemail or diversion of your calls to an appropriate officer within your section;
- Keep a notepad by your telephone and offer to take a message if you are answering a call for someone who is not available or help them yourself if you are able to;
- Ensure that you capture the details of the consumer accurately, and if necessary ask them to spell their name or address details, and repeat their contact details back to them;
- Try to resist the temptation to interrupt, and ask the caller to repeat a message if you do not understand it;
- Raymond Mhlaba Municipality believes that employees should not be subject to verbal abuse and/or threats of violence;
- There will be times when you need to be firm with the caller in order to help them. Be polite rather than aggressive;
- Speak to our customers positively and politely and do your best to ensure that consumers are given access to the person who is best able to help them with their enquiry. If they are not available a message will be passed to them on the consumer's behalf.
- Some enquiries rely on small numbers of specialists who may not be available throughout the day. Where this is the case, staff will arrange for someone else (or a voicemail service) to take a message and they will call the consumer back, normally within two working days.
- Wherever possible, consumer calls should be handled by one person; where this is not possible, Raymond Mhlaba LM will do its best to ensure that a consumer's call is transferred smoothly to an identified person who can help further. We will not keep callers "on hold" any longer than necessary to find the person best able to help. Where we transfer a call to another officer, we will identify the caller to the

person receiving the call and summarise what the call is about. **In other words; check if the person you are going to transfer the call to is available and briefly explain what the call is about.** This is important!

Appendix 5 - Standards Relating To On-line Transactions

A growing range of Raymond Mhlaba Municipality's services will be available online to internet users. Our customer care standards are as follows:

- We will design all our online services to make them simple to use for as many people as possible;
- We will action online requests for service the same way as those received by other means;
- We aim to make our online services available at all times and we will minimise "downtime", both planned and unplanned;
- We will maintain these services to provide a reliable and consistent navigation through the options available;
- If customers need help, they can contact us during office hours. We will assist if we are able, or pass your query to a specialist should the need arise;
- We aim to ensure that all transactions carried out on line are secure and confidential;
- We will provide the opportunity for users to feedback to us on the quality of service.

Appendix 6 - Field Staff Code of Practice

Raymond Mhlaba LM field staff will adhere to a sixteen-point code of conduct:

1. Be polite.
2. Treat customers as you would wish to be treated.
3. Try to contact the occupier of the house or site before starting with your work.
4. Do not start work on private land without contact unless there is risk to property or life, or unless this will result in undue delays and electricity being restored in case of a downtime?
5. For pre-planned work on public land outside a property where there is no contact, leave a card/letter at the household if possible, before starting work.
6. If the occupier arrives after work has commenced, stop and explain what is happening.
7. If circumstances change, keep the occupier advised.
8. If you have to block access to paths, gates or driveways, try to discuss it first with the occupier. If you cannot make contact, ensure that you can restore the access quickly if needed.
9. Let the occupier know when electricity will be disconnected or connected.
10. Do not leave litter behind.
11. If in doubt, contact your supervisor.
12. Be especially careful – the customer is paying for a service.
13. Show your identity card if asked.
14. At the end of the job, advise the occupier that the work is completed and explain about reinstatement if necessary. Leave a card/letter if you cannot make contact.
15. Do not make promises about further work (such as backfilling or reinstatement) if you are not sure that promises can be kept.
16. Most people will accept disturbance if you take the time and trouble to explain what is happening.

Appendix 7 - Front Line Office Staff Code Of Practice

Raymond Mhlaba LM front line office staff will adhere to a fifteen-point code of conduct:

1. Always open and close the offices on time.
2. Maintain neat appearance, and project a humble, confident image; do not chat on the phone in front of customers, or read magazines, or chew gum or food.
3. Give the customer your complete and undivided attention, and be patient.
4. "Bend" the rules, if this serves the customer better. Solve the Problem: find solutions to satisfy the customer or find someone who can. Tell the customer what actions you will take. Make sure the customer understands why you have made your decision.
5. Follow through; take responsibility to track progress of actions required of other people to solve the customer's problem.
6. Take care with opinions; rather give facts.
7. Deal with the customer to finality of his/her problem; get help if you need to; don't pass him/her on.
8. A customer is not someone with whom to argue or match our wits. No one ever won an argument with a customer.
9. Every time you deal with a customer, ask yourself, "How can I make the customer glad he/she dealt with me?"
10. Take action: solve the problem right away, leave the customer feeling that you care.
11. A customer's complaint is always valid, no matter how outrageous it appears to you.
12. Take the blame for the problem and apologise on behalf of Raymond Mhlaba Municipality, even if it is not your fault.
13. Apologise simply, without blaming others (i.e. Raymond Mhlaba LM, head office, the field staff, a colleague, your boss), if you have made a mistake.
14. Don't suggest that any blame attaches to any customer or his representative, or do/say anything that might make them feel guilty. State only what is required to correct a problem.
15. Break down barriers to complaining; make complaining easy. Complaints are gold! Make it easy for customers to complain so that we can learn how to improve company and individual performance, and give our customers better service.

Appendix 8 - Dealing with Complaints

Complaints

- Complaints must be acknowledged within 48 hours
- If possible, deal with complaints "on the spot". If this is not possible, full responses to corporate complaints must be completed within set timescales.
- When responding to complaints remember to answer all points raised by the complainant.
- You should record/document and file all complaints. This will be consolidated into a report for the HODs/Standing Committee/EXCO and the Municipal Manager's Office on the last day of each calendar month.
- Ensure that you listen to the complainant and check that you have interpreted the complaint correctly. If necessary, ask them to spell their name or contact details. Ask the complainant how they feel the matter should be resolved.
- Customer feedback forms should be available at the Customer Care & Service Offices/Administration Offices.
- Take the opportunity to learn from complaints to improve services. Trends need to be monitored and appropriate action plans instigated
- Staff often ask for a definition of a complaint, who can complain and what about. A complaint can be defined as "a dissatisfaction expressed by a service user or someone on their behalf which needs a response".
- Some customers may prefer that their dissatisfaction be dealt with initially as a comment or query. If this happens it should still be recorded with the outcome. If people remain unhappy after this process they will, in most cases, still have a right to make a complaint
- Colleagues must follow grievance procedures, where this is appropriate.

In dealing with complaints (and many other problems), there is generally a sequence in the discussion in which the customer first voices his/her complaint, the official asks questions in order to understand the nature of the complaint and to ensure that he/she understands the complaint in the same way that the customer does, and then the official will try to understand why the problem that gave rise to the complaint occurred in the first place. Following the line of questioning, it may be useful to use the 5 W's and H technique of journalists such as what, where, why, who, when and how.

During the last phase of discussion in which the official is gathering information as to why the problem occurred, and in subsequent analysis of the problem by managers, the "5 Ws" system may also be useful. In a hypothetical and rather simplistic example (to enable simple illustration) of an application for an electric meter connection that was properly lodged by a customer (as she thought) but was not implemented, the "5 Ws" analysis might progress as follows:

1. The application form was not signed and therefore could not be acted upon because the application also includes a contract between the municipality and the consumer relating to electricity connection; why was it not signed?

2. It was not signed because the official assisting the customer did not indicate that a signature was required in the space provided; why did the official neglect this?
3. The official neglected this because he was distracted and had no system such as a checklist to ensure that everything was correct the first time so the customer would not have to come back; why was the official unaware of any checklist?
4. The official was unaware about the use or existence of a checklist; why was the official unaware?
5. Because he was new in the job and had been given any induction training, which had not been the practice in that department; the final why indicates that there is no procedure manual for the department (which results in many inefficiencies).
6. By developing a procedure manual and training officials in its use, which would include a checklist for use by officials to make sure that all transactions where certain aspects (such as signatures required for electricity connection contracts), the cause of the problem would be permanently resolved, along with a number of other potential inefficiencies.

Had the "5 Ws" sequence not been followed, the "negligent" official may have simply been reprimanded for his/her oversight, which would have treated only one symptom of the problem rather than uncovering the basic cause of the problem.

Problems obviously vary, and some causes of problems may be uncovered with fewer than "5 whys", while others may require more, but in general managers should expect at least five before there is reasonable certainty that the underlying cause of the problem has been revealed.

Appendix 9 - Dealing with Angry Customers

Three Basic Steps:

1. Stay silent and listen.
2. Make an intention statement.
3. Propose a solution.

Stay Silent and Listen

The main skill to master is to show the customer you are listening and understand how he/she feels, without expressing any agreement or disagreement with what they are saying.

Remain patient, even if the customer makes unfair accusations, and do not attempt to defend yourself, someone else, or the company in any way.

Make an Intention Statement

(At this stage, the customer has just finished talking angrily/ loudly/ without stopping/ not allowing any interruptions/ without wanting to listen to you or anyone/ is agitated.)

Agree with the customer that it is unacceptable to allow the situation which is making the customer unhappy to continue, and then tell him/her what you intend to do.

Some examples of what you could say are:

- "I intend to get to understand your problem exactly, so that I can help to solve it."
- "I intend to ask you some questions so that I can identify all the things which contributed to the problem, and then make sure something gets done to prevent it happening again."
- "I intend to sort out this mess, and make sure you are happy with my solution."
- "I intend to solve your problem, and that is my only goal right now."
- "I intend to make sure that Raymond Mhlaba Municipality delivers on whatever promise it has made."
- "I intend to make sure that, by the time you leave here today, you have confidence that your problem will be solved."

Assure the person that you will not leave the problem until it is closed, and that you will keep on escalating the problem until it is closed.

The intention statement is an important step; do not be tempted to skip it. You will make yourself much more persuasive, if you make it clear that you acknowledge the right of the other person to be upset, and that your objective is to play the role of "fixer of this problem".

Propose a Solution

Once you see that the customer has calmed down enough, caution the customer that, what you will be doing is working for closure to the problem, which is mutually acceptable to both the customer and Raymond Mhlaba Municipality. (This may not necessarily be the solution the customer originally wanted or thought of.)

Once this is done; state that your first objective is to find a way forward. If the customer keeps going back to the past, try to get him/her to agree that there are two aspects to the problem, one that ensures that the way forward is decided, and the second that will address the past injustice.

Try always to get the customer to agree to focus first on moving forward to solving the problem.

(Usually, the customer will allow the past to be overlooked, if, by the end of the negotiation, he/she is confident the problem will be solved and will not repeat itself.)

If the customer continuously goes back to the past, get the customer to agree that the correct authority will address the obtaining of justice for the past. Make it clear that, in your capacity, you have limited scope to rectify past wrongs, but you have clear authority to ensure that problems are closed to the mutual satisfaction of both parties.

Once the customer agrees to move forward, begin the questioning and negotiation process.

There Are Four Basic Types of Customers That Complain

(1) Customers who feel that their expectations were not met

Examples:

- "I expected my electricity to be reconnected within one day of me paying the reconnection fee, and it didn't happen."
- "I expected my new connection in two weeks from when I applied, and I'm still waiting."
- "I expected the error on my bill to be fixed in my latest bill, but it still shows that I owe too much money."

Response approach:

1. Apologise and accept the blame on behalf of the municipality.
2. Establish exactly what was promised.
3. Do everything in your power to give the customer exactly what was promised, **or better**.
4. If this is not possible, negotiate an acceptable alternative with the customer.

(2) Customers who feel that they have been badly treated

(Customers often do not complain to the person who treated them badly, but rather to another member of staff.)

Examples:

- "The electrician who reconnected me left the area in a mess, and would not listen to me because he was in such a hurry".
- "The lady that I spoke to here before was rude to me and told me I was not being reasonable."

Response approach:

1. Apologise for the offender's behaviour.
2. Be polite, courteous and helpful.
3. Reassure the customer that the offender's behaviour is not acceptable to the company, and is not indicative of the company as a whole.
4. Do not make promises that the offender will be punished, but encourage customers to take details of offenders in the future, and report specific events to the area office.

(3) Customers who believe they have been ignored

(This should not be a common problem in our situation.)

Examples:

- "I have been sitting here waiting for a long time, and nobody has attended to me."
- "I have been in this queue all this time while that lady has been doing only paper work/ on the telephone, when she could have been attending to me."

Response approach:

1. Attend to the customer immediately, even if this means stopping something else (provided it does not inconvenience other customers at the time).
2. Apologise for the error, delay, inconvenience, and assure the customer that the matter will be dealt with appropriately.

(4) Customers who feel that their initial complaint was not dealt with

(This type of complaint is particularly important. If this is properly handled, it gives the customer trust in the company. If it is badly handled, the amount of problems that come later, sometimes weeks or months, are ten times worse. Bad feelings caused by this type of complaint are very difficult to remove from the minds of customers.

This type of complaint may be directed at a supervisor, but also at whoever is available at the time.)

Examples:

- "This is now the second time I'm coming into this office because my bill has not been corrected by the cashier."

- “My meter is wrong again, and I have told the meter reader and the cashier, and nobody wants to listen to me.”

Response approach:

1. Make an **extra special effort** to show concern and understanding.
2. Do not run down colleagues or complain to the customer about them.
3. Encourage the customer to bring details, and promise the customer to pass the details on to a higher authority who will deal with the issue.
4. Express an intention to give the customer feedback on progress towards rectifying the problem, and ask how contact may be achieved in order to provide this feedback.
5. Give the customer details of what follow up action you will take, and who the higher authority person is that you will refer the query to.
6. Be **particularly meticulous** in providing feedback to the consumer, even if it is to say that you have not been able to do anything yet.
7. Invite the customer to bring other complaints to yourself.

Do's And Don'ts about Handling Difficult Situations

The Do's and Don'ts

Do the following:

1. Attend to the problem quickly.
2. Listen, and remain silent until the person's anger or outburst is spent.
3. Develop your own technique to control your thoughts if someone becomes personally abusive to you, to help you escape from the unpleasantness of the moment. Realise that the complainant is acting out his/her frustration at the problem and not you personally.
4. Control your body language, to ensure it indicates that you are listening, and in order to reduce the tension in yourself.
5. See the customer's side of the story. A customer's complaint is always valid, no matter how outrageous it may appear to you.
- 6. RULE 1 – THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT!**
- 7. RULE 2 – SEE RULE 1**
8. Concentrate only on solving the problem, on doing your best to delight the customer.
9. Gather enough information to solve the problem.
10. Get the person to focus on the specific issue that is at the root of any general complaint.
11. Listen to the customer and respond efficiently and effectively.

Do not do the following:

12. Do not interrupt the customer before his/her anger is spent. Count to three before you speak to make sure he/she is finished.
13. Do not become defensive, even if the customer is making preposterous and outrageous statements.
14. Do not argue with a customer. Even if an irate customer is wrong and you are right, do not try to prove anything.
15. Do not ever blame a colleague or another department's employees.
16. Do not do or say anything that implies that the customer caused the problem. Avoid the use of the pronoun “you” or language that may make the customer think that this is what you are doing.

Abusive Behaviour

There are rare instances when individuals express their anger through abusive language, harassment or bullying or violent behaviour. Employees are trained to withdraw from such situations and inform a manager immediately. In extreme circumstances, they will call the police. In the rare event of persistent abusive behaviour, Raymond Mhlaba Municipality may advise a customer that future contact will only be conducted through a third party (friend, advisor, etc) acting on their behalf.

Appendix 10 - Standards Relating To Equity

We are committed to promoting fairness, equality and diversity. We must ensure equal access for disabled people and children when looking at new premises, refurbishing existing buildings, or when arranging external meetings.

We are sensitive to common courtesies due for disabled customers:

- Treat disabled people as you would treat any other person – for example, as any individual in his or her own right and recognise any special needs;
- Do not assume that an offer of assistance will automatically be welcome. Wait until your offer is accepted. Even then do not assume you know the best way of helping. Instead, request how we may help and listen to any instructions you are given by the expert (the one who receives the assistance);
- Do not ignore a disabled person by talking to them through a companion – the “does she or he take sugar” syndrome;
- Relax, speak normally and stand in front to allow contact to be made, in the same way you would when talking to anyone else ;
- Be prepared to sit down or crouch to speak with a person in a wheelchair rather than tower over the person, as this can be intimidating;
- Even when it is the companion you wish to speak to, take up a position so that the wheelchair user, who may be unable to turn, can also join in the conversation and does not feel left out;
- A wheelchair is part of the body space of the person using it. **Do not lean on it;**
- However, do not be afraid to make physical contact with a disabled person in the same way as you would with anyone else, for example offering a handshake.

We have contingency arrangements for assisting customers with sensory disabilities:

- Provide appropriate information for visually impaired residents – for example,
- Always consider signing interpreters for customers who are deaf but sign.

Appendix 11 - Standards Relating to Callers and Meetings

Callers

When it is necessary to call a customer back for any reason, this promise must be honoured unfailingly and in good time. Even if the answer the customer is looking for is not available, the customer should be called back regularly at agreed times to inform the customer of progress.

Meetings

Meetings shall start on time, and at the latest as soon as the customer party is ready. Raymond Mhlaba LM participants shall always plan their time with a contingency allowance to ensure that they can be on time.

In the event of unforeseen circumstances that over-ride the cost of other people's time as they wait for you, you shall inform the senior person at the meeting of when you expect to arrive, and the reason for the delay.

Appendix 12 - Standards Relating To Appropriateness of Standards, Monitoring and Evaluation

Standards should be appropriate to the situation and circumstances. For instance, a standard might say that if a customer has not arrived for an appointment within 15 minutes of the time set then it may not be possible to accommodate their delay. Such a standard may be appropriate for customers with their own transport, but for one reliant on public transport, perhaps 45 minutes may be more appropriate.

Our Administration Offices are conveniently located for customers, and are aesthetically appealing. Capacity in these facilities is also monitored to ensure customers do not experience queuing times that cause frustration to our customers.

On a monthly basis, the Communications Unit will provide a summarised report on customer care issues from each Admin Unit and submit this to the HODs/Standing Committee/EXCO and the Municipal Manager.

However, on a quarterly basis, each Head of Department will report on their customer care indicators as part of their Service Delivery Implementation Plan to ensure regular monitoring and improvement of service level standards and in attaining set targets in accordance with their key performance areas.

--ENDS--