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CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

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1. DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

1.1 Statutory and Regulatory

This Procedure applies to the following meanings and interpretations:

#	TERM	DESCRIPTION
1.1	Batho Pele	It is an initiative by government to get public servant to be service oriented, to strive for excellence and to commit to continuous service delivery improvements.
1.2	Customer Service	It is the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase. The perception of success of such interactions is dependent on employees "who shall adjust themselves to the personality of the guest.
1.3	Customers	These are residents and businesses whose main contact with the municipality is through the consumption of municipal services, and it is here that municipality needs to begin to build relationships with citizens and communities. These include Councillors, municipal officials and other stakeholders.
1.4	Accounting officer	The Municipal Manager
1.5	Chief Financial Officer	A person designated in terms of section 80(2) (a) of the Municipal Finance Management Act No.56 of 2003
1.6	Consumer	Any end user who receives services from an institution, including an end user in an informal settlement
1.7	Councilor	A member of a municipal council.
1.8	Indigent	An indigent household whose total household income is less than such an amount as determined by the Council annually during the budget process.
1.9	Local community	The meaning assigned to it in section 1 of the Municipal Systems Act.
1.10	Municipal council or council	The council of a municipality is referred to in section 18 of the Municipal Structures Act.
1.11	Municipality	(a) When referred to as a corporate body, means a municipality as described in section 2 of the Municipal Systems Act; or (b) When referred to as a geographic area, means a municipal area determined in terms of the Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act, 1998 (Act No. 27 of 1998).
1.12	Municipal Manager	a person appointed in terms of section 82(1)(a) or (b) of the Municipal Structures Act.
1.13	Municipal service	The meaning assigned to it in section 1 of the Municipal Systems Act.

#	TERM	DESCRIPTION
1.14	Municipal Structures Act	The Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (Act No. 117 of 1998).
1.15	Municipal Finance Management Act	The Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act No.56 of 2003.
1.16	Municipal Systems Act	The Local Government: Municipal System Act, 2000(Act No.32 of 2000)
1.17	Municipal Tariff	A tariff for services which a municipality may set for the provision of a service to the local community and includes a surge on such tariff.
1.18	Official	(a) An employee of the municipality or municipal entity. (b) A person second to a municipality or municipal entity to work as a member of the staff of the Municipality or Municipal entity; or (c) A person contracted by a municipality or municipal entity to work as a member of the staff of the municipality or municipal entity otherwise than as an employee.
1.19	Customer Care	It is the task of looking after customers and ensuring their satisfaction with one's business and its goods or services. Modern consumers are aware of their rights to a high standard of customer care thus making Customer care very important to us.
1.20	Customer Service Standards	This is the level and quality of the municipal services that Municipal customers will receive and are informed of such so that they are aware of what to expect.
1.21	Customer Service Charter	A framework that defines service delivery standards, how they are delivered to customers, the rights of customers, what are the expected outcomes from a customer's perspective and how complaints from customers will be handled.
1.22	Monitoring	This involves the continuous collecting, analysing, and reporting data on inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts as well as external factors, in a way that supports effective management and continuous improvement in performance.
1.23	Evaluation	This is the periodic and systematic collection and objective analysis of evidence on public policies, programmes, projects, functions and organizations to assess issues such as relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency) and value for money and recommend ways forward. Evaluation is critical for generating in-depth evidence for improving performance and decision.

2. PREAMBLE

- 2.1 The intention of the policy is to outline the principles and guidelines for interreacting with citizens, businesses and other stakeholders. This further intends to ensure that municipal services are delivered in a customer -centric, efficient and effective manner. The policy wants emphasize on improvement on customer loyalty and customer satisfaction within the Municipality by placing all people at the center of development. Whenever customers have contact with the Municipality, they will consistently experience excellent service standards. By so doing, the Municipality wants to display its commitment to the principle of Batho Pele which simply means “people first” and ensure that service excellence is an integral part of the planning and delivery of all municipal services to its people.
- 2.2 As a service-oriented public entity, Thulamela Municipality is committed to ensuring customer service excellence is integral to planning, resourcing, and delivery of all council services.
- 2.3 The Customer Care Policy aims to ensure that all sections of the community — including those with special needs — are not excluded from any area of service delivery.
- 2.4 Thulamela Municipality aims to ensure that the public receive a consistently excellent standard of customer service as an important tier of the Government's resolve to better the lives of its communities.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

- 3.1 Thulamela Local Municipality is committed to ensuring that customer service excellence is integral to planning, resourcing and delivery of all Council services. This confirms that Council has Customer Care Service at its heart. Batho Pele Principles calls for the setting up of Service Standards, defining outputs and targets and benchmarking performance indicators against national standards. Similarly, it also calls for the introduction of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and structures to measure progress on a continuous basis.
- 3.2 This Customer Care Policy defines the aims and objectives of Batho Pele Principles by focusing on all the principles. Additionally, the Municipality will ensure that the strategy is delivered to a standard that is cost effective, quality driven, user friendly

and efficient. This will be done in a way that is inclusive and addresses the needs of the residents through: A council-wide approach to customer service; and Standards that apply to all aspects of the council including customers, support staff, partners and contractors.

4. PURPOSE

- 4.1 It is common knowledge that every business is different but one thing that makes all business common is the need to keep customers happy and to keep them coming back. The purpose of the policy is to always ensure that the municipality provides consistent excellent service whenever customers make contact with the municipality. This further aims to demonstrate the municipality's commitment to ensuring the human rights principles set out in the South African Constitution, Batho Pele principles aimed at transforming public service and getting it right the first time.

5. OBJECTIVES

- 5.1 To ensure that all staff members uphold the Principles of Batho Pele as provided in the White Paper for the Transformation of the Public Service.
- 5.2 To provide quality service to all stakeholders interacting with the Municipality, i.e., public service providers, contractors, fellow staff members in every department and other Government agencies.
- 5.3 To ensure that customers are provided with relevant information as and when is needed in the appropriate format.
- 5.4 To ensure customer complaints are addressed promptly, timeously and to the full satisfaction of the client.
- 5.5 To ensure that customers, both internal and external to the Municipality always receive consistent and fair treatment at all times.
- 5.6 To reduce the financial and time cost incurred arising from poor customer service due to repeat calls from and to customers.
- 5.7 To equip municipal staff with knowledge and competencies to continually enhance the service standards according to changing customer needs.
- 5.8 To transform the municipality into a more customer focused organization.

- 5.9 This Customer Care Policy should be read together with the Customer Service Charter that incorporates Customer Service Standards that define deliverables for each service delivery unit and is a pledge by the municipality to its customers to deliver excellent services.

6. SCOPE

- 6.1 This Policy applies to all staff and managers in all departments and sections ward councillors and ward committee members within the Thulamela Municipality.
- 6.2 Thulamela Municipality aims to maintain an environment where:
- 6.2.1 Both the public and members of staff feel valued.
 - 6.2.2 Staff workloads are managed effectively resulting in efficient service delivery; and
 - 6.2.3 Services can be tailored to the needs of customers — internal and external based on their feed-back.

7. POLICY CONTENT

CUSTOMER CARE AND ITS IMPORTANCE

- 7.1 This Municipality aims to please its customers by ensuring that each time they interact with it, they would be able to do so conveniently and that they would be treated courteously, promptly and fairly. It is committed to ensuring customers that they would receive clear responses to their service requests or enquiries within a stated period of time as would be stipulated in the Customer Service Standards as well as Customer Services Charter. Customer Care is therefore regarded as:
- 7.1.1 Treating customers with courtesy, dignity and respect;
 - 7.1.2 Treating customers in manner they would like to be treated;
 - 7.1.3 Engaging customers in their language of preference or in English where it is impossible to engage them in their preferred language, as English is used a medium language in South Africa;
 - 7.1.4 Providing a good quality service in a friendly, efficient and helpful manner;

- 7.1.5 Giving customers the information, they need and providing an explanation if the service is not available and;
- 7.1.6 Keeping customers informed of progress in addressing their complaints, request or enquiries.

GENERAL SERVICE STANDARDS

7.2 Customer Service Standards are important to ensure that:

- 7.2.1 All customers, whether they are residents or visitors will receive the same consistent high standards of customer care;
- 7.2.2 Customer Care and Customer Service are essential to the planning and delivery of all Municipal services;
- 7.2.3 All staff members will constantly be conscientised on their responsibility to put Customers First in the performance of their duties; and
- 7.2.4 Council will avoid wasteful expenditure by providing services "Right the First time".

STANDARDS AND VALUES

7.3 The key objective is to ensure consistency in our customer service by:

- 7.3.1 Providing a standard that is simple and user-friendly;
- 7.3.2 Providing a documented framework and guidelines;
- 7.3.3 Developing performance targets which are reviewed regularly and gather feedback from staff, Councillors, our partners, and the public;
- 7.3.4 Ensuring that standards are applied across the council and can be adopted by our partners where services are delivered jointly;
- 7.3.5 All council employees in all departments should adhere to the following customer service standards;

- 7.3.6 Acknowledge receipt of enquiries within two working days and respond within five working days and acknowledge 100% of e-mail enquiries within one working day;
- 7.3.7 Acknowledge receipt of formal complaints within two working days and respond within five working days;
- 7.3.8 Answer 100% of telephone calls across the council within 5 seconds (5 rings);
- 7.3.9 Provide information about services in languages other than English;
- 7.3.10 Show empathy when addressing any special needs of clients;
- 7.3.11 Ensure, where necessary that all buildings are accessible for disabled people;
- 7.3.12 Involve the community in the process of developing — employ an outside-in approach as a basis for enhancing customer services;
- 7.3.13 Aim at providing a service that is fair to all;
- 7.3.14 Project a customer-friendly gesture always.

CUSTOMER INTERACTION

7.4 Face-to-face contact:

- 7.4.1 Customers will be greeted in a polite and courteous manner;
- 7.4.2 Staff will always give their full attention to the customer;
- 7.4.3 Wherever possible, staff will aim to resolve the customer's query/enquiry at first contact;
- 7.4.4 The municipality will aim to ensure that all customers are catered for, and appropriate arrangements are in place e.g., translations;
- 7.4.5 Staff meeting with customers at the first point of contact will ensure adequate information regarding the customer enquiry is obtained, but at the same time ensure confidentiality especially when dealing with sensitive enquiries in a busy reception area e.g., benefits applications, arrears, arrangements etc;

- 7.4.6 At first contact, staff will aim to ensure that customers are not left unattended for more than five minutes in the reception area or in an interview room without providing an update on issues or progress, either directly or via a colleague. If staff is unavailable, the customer should be made aware of the possible waiting time.

7.5 WAITING PERIOD

- 7.5.1 After the initial contact, customers will be given an indication of how long they can be expected to wait.
- 7.5.2 If waiting times are to exceed 10 minutes, customer services staff must inform the customers.

7.6 TELEPHONE CALLS

- 7.6.1 Staff will aim to answer telephone calls within 5 seconds or after 5 rings, whichever is greater.
- 7.6.2 Calls in departments and sections should be answered with a greeting — Department/ Section name — surname or first name.
- 7.6.3 Calls at satellite offices should be answered with a greeting — the name of the satellite office— the official's surname or name.
- 7.6.4 Telephones will be attended during published office hours, if staff are away from their desks, phones should be diverted to another person / section. Customers should never be left with the impression that they cannot be assisted.
- 7.6.5 In cases where staff requires phoning the customer, they will have to establish when it would be convenient or arrange another time and keep the appointment. The switchboard should never be used for this purpose.
- 7.6.6 If a call is put on hold, the customer must be told why this is happening and kept updated if the waiting time is longer than expected.
- 7.6.7 Answer phones and voicemail may be used to ensure that telephone calls are answered. These will allow the customer to contact an alternative number or will give the caller an option to leave a message.

- 7.6.8 All council messages must be responded to within the next working day if the message is left over a weekend, after hours or on a public holiday. Whenever possible, the use of voicemail should be avoided.

7.7 WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

- 7.7.1 Incoming written correspondence (letters, fax, or e-mail) will be acknowledged within two working days (at maximum) and responded to within five working days (at maximum).
- 7.7.2 Receipt of e-mail will be acknowledged within two working days.
- 7.7.3 The presentation and content of any written correspondence must be clear, easy to understand, accurate and include a contact name and number.
- 7.7.4 All issues raised by the customer will be acknowledged and responded to within the correspondence.

7.8 COMPLAINTS' PROCEDURE

- 7.8.1 Staff will aim to resolve all concerns raised by the customer immediately and informally.
- 7.8.2 Staff will inform the customer that if the informal resolution is not to their satisfaction, they may lodge a formal complaint and explain how to do this.
- 7.8.3 Customers should have an acknowledgement of their complaint within two working days and a full written response within five working days.
- 7.8.4 Departmental and sectional heads will analyse the complaints about services in their respective departments/sections and take remedial action so that the problem does not re-occur.

7.9 SUGGESTIONS

- 7.9.1 Customers, partners, and staff will be encouraged to make suggestions through a suggestion box located at the reception area.
- 7.9.2 Additionally, the council will inform the customers of any changes made to services because of their suggestions,

- 7.9.3 Suggestions and complaints should be acknowledged within two working days of receipt.
- 7.9.4 Suggestions and complaints should be addressed within five working days after acknowledgement.
- 7.9.5 Where concerns could not be addressed, customers should be given valid reasons.

7.10 CUSTOMER SAFETY AND HEALTH

- 7.10.1 All customers visiting council buildings will be provided with a safe environment.
- 7.10.2 Municipal buildings shall take into consideration the issue of equitable use and flexible in use where buildings should require low physical effort to use, thereby accommodating everyone regardless of abilities such as having ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms etc. Where possible, buildings which receive members of the public will have designated members of staff responsible for health and safety. The council shall always comply with the health and safety guidelines as espoused in the Occupational Health Safety Act (OHSA) No. 85 of 1993.

7.11 STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 7.11.1 The Municipality shall ensure that staff receives continuous or ongoing training to develop customer service skills and knowledge enable them to satisfy customer expectations.

7.12 STAFF PRESENTATION

- 7.12.1 Staff shall always be appropriately and neatly dressed when meeting members of the public. In that regard, their name tags must be correctly worn, visible at all times with clear names and designations printed on.

7.13 BUILDINGS AND SIGNAGE

- 7.13.1 Municipal buildings will be clearly signed internally and externally.
- 7.13.2 Reception points will be welcoming, kept neat and tidy.

7.13.3 Reception points will clearly display operating hours on the municipal Service Charter.

7.13.4 Details of services and personnel available will be displayed clearly in all reception areas.

7.14 INFORMATION / COMMUNICATION

7.14.1 Information for the public will be clear and reviewed regularly.

7.14.2 Publicised information will be accessible to customers with specific needs and in line with the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) No. 2 of 2000.

7.14.3 Information to the public and other stakeholders will be sent timeously.

7.14.4 The municipality will ensure that customers have easy access to information about:

7.14.4.1 Opening and closing times;

7.14.4.2 Offices and addresses;

7.14.4.3 Names of Managers;

7.14.4.4 Facilities / Services available Access details;

7.14.4.5 Means by which contact can be made;

7.14.4.6 Out-of-hours contact details.

7.15 PUBLICATIONS

7.15.1 The following information will be available in council publications:

7.15.2 Standard of service against targets;

7.15.3 Progress on projects undertaken by the municipality;

7.15.4 Changes made to services because of complaints, feedback or consultations with relevant stakeholders.

7.16 STAFF CONDUCT, AWARENESS AND SAFETY

- 7.16.1 Staff working at information centres (C) must arrive on time and should never leave their centres unattended. Timeous permission should be sought from the immediate supervisor if a staff member wishes to leave an information centre for whatever reason. The necessary disciplinary procedures shall be proffered against any staff member violating this clause.
- 7.16.2 Staff shall be courteous and polite and expect to be treated in the same way by customers,
- 7.16.3 In cases of extended disputes, frontline staff must seek assistance from their immediate supervisors who will liaise with the immediate manager.
- 7.16.4 The municipality will ensure that procedures are in place to safeguard staff from both) verbal and physical attacks.
- 7.16.5 Where such attacks are made to staff, action — legal action or otherwise will be taken.
- 7.16.6 Staff shall always dress appropriately with their name tags for easier identification by customers.

7.17 CUSTOMER INFORMATION PROVISION

- 7.17.1 Stored information will be made available in accordance with the Promotion of Access to Information Act No. 2 of 2000.
- 7.17.2 All communication will be clearly identified as Thulamela Municipality as the author, current date, and any reference numbers.
- 7.17.3 Thulamela Municipality will also promote electronic service delivery to provide customers with information.

7.18 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.18.1 It is anticipated that the Thulamela Municipality's new customer-orientated approach may have some practical challenges for the municipality as an organization and may require review or development of certain municipal

processes to ensure service standards. For example, the following can be applicable and will benefit the municipality:

7.18.2 Every section of the municipality will have its own Service Standards, which will be supported by a set of performance measurement controls that, if complied to, will result in good service standards.

7.18.3 Compliance with or adherence to the Customer Care Service Standards must be reflected as a Key Performance Indicator on each responsible official's performance plan.

7.18.4 Processes will be regularly evaluated in all departments to ensure best practices regarding Customer Care and placing the Customer First.

7.18.5 A performance system will be implemented to recognize staff, sections and departments who are exceptional in achieving service standards and who go beyond the call of duty for the customer.

7.18.6 Staff will be trained to record and communicate feedback from customers – no matter whether the feedback directly relates to the department where it was reported or not – so that problems can be dealt with speedily and without sending customers back and forth. Feedback may also be incorporated in procedures and processes related to Customer Care and service delivery.

7.19 CUSTOMER CARE: MANAGEMENT

7.19.1 At the core of the service delivery principle of placing the Customer first in terms of Batho Pele Principles, the Municipality will develop or re-evaluate processes and to ensure achievement of set standards. To ensure or adherence the following shall be considered:

7.19.1.1 Customer Care Service Standards to be reflected as a Key Performance Indicator on each responsible official's Performance Plan;

7.19.1.2 Continuous training programmes for officials/staff to ensure effective service delivery and Customer satisfaction;

7.19.1.3 Continuous monitoring and review of processes and procedures in ensuring the Customer is put first;

- 7.19.1.4 Consideration for introduction of a computerized call-logging and tracking system, ensuring sensitivity and efficiency in the enquiries, complaints and feedback received from Customers.

8. COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

- 8.1 Violation or non-compliance with this policy will give a just cause of disciplinary steps to be taken. It is the responsibility of the Accounting Officer to enforce compliance with this policy.

9. LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

- 9.1 Batho Pele Principle.
- 9.2 Local Government: Municipal Systems Act No. 36 of 1998.
- 9.3 Municipal Finance Management Act.
- 9.4 Promotion of Access to Information Act 3 of 2000.
- 9.5 Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993.

10. IMPLEMENTATION: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 10.1 Corporate services Department: Communications Section/Unit:
 - 10.1.1 Ensure that customer issues are solved in accurate and timely manner.
 - 10.1.2 Ensure that the customer service team is up to date with knowledge of department's services.
 - 10.1.3 Provide training and lead customer service team to deliver high class customer services.
 - 10.1.4 Plan and schedule training opportunities for customer service staff.
 - 10.1.5 Identify and share best practices with the customer service teams.
 - 10.1.6 Handle escalated customer complaints in a professional manner.
 - 10.1.7 Make recommendation on improving customer satisfaction in the Department.
 - 10.1.8 Branding and signage (appearance of staff and corporate image).

10.1.9 Manage suggestion boxes/complaints registers.

10.1.10 Develop process flow charts with timelines.

10.1.11 Improve customer experience (queue management and correct information)

10.1.12 Monitor and manage implementation of Batho Pele and Customer Care.

11. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

11.1 To measure success in implementation of this policy, Customer Care Policy is supported by the attached Customer Service Charter, which includes Service Standards that will define deliverables for each service delivery unit and will serve as the municipality's promise of delivery to customers.

11.2 Performance will be measured via continuous monitoring, benchmarking against similar organisations, and being subject to regular Performance Audits, via its Customer Relations Department, the municipality will develop methods of receiving customer feedback to determine levels of customer satisfaction in terms of standard of service received.

11.3 To monitor and evaluate adherence to the Service Standards, the Municipality shall:

11.3.1 Organize annual focus group sessions to determine possible gaps that may exist between customer perceptions of municipal service delivery and what the municipality thinks it is achieving;

11.3.2 Actively publicize and advertise a Customer Care number in municipal buildings, Help Line and email address where customers can report good or poor service, or provide feedback and suggestions;

11.3.3 Place feedback or suggestion boxes in strategic places to encourage Customer Care related feedback that will assist in addressing any shortcomings in the standard of service;

11.3.4 Collect information from internal staff, service providers and the community to obtain inputs for improving services;

11.3.5 Sign the Pledge by the Customer Care Staff in which they commit themselves to upholding Customer Service Standards;

11.3.6 Request customers to complete a Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire and post transaction telephone follow-up of a sample of returns to continuously evaluate customer perceptions of our service;

11.3.7 Give feed-back to citizens and other clients regarding the actions which have been taken to address the issues which have been raised;

11.3.8 Recognize Service Excellence in customer care through recognizing high performing staff members;

11.3.9 Be sensitive to the feedback received from customers and use this to improve the levels of service rendered;

11.3.10 Regular customer satisfaction questionnaires and post-transaction telephone follow-up.

11.4 The above monitoring and evaluation methods will assist the municipality to develop programmes to address any shortcomings in the standard of our service. Information to support the above will be collected from the internal staff, service providers and public to obtain inputs for improving service delivery.

11.5 The Municipality will ensure that there are systems and processes in place to monitor and evaluate performance against set standards.

12. REVISION DATE

12.1 The policy shall come to effect upon approval by Council and shall be reviewed annually to ensure relevance of compliance of any changes made.

13. CONCLUSION

13.1 The philosophy of Customer relations is clear but making it real is very difficult in the public sector given the fact the customer base is wide, the history of service delivery. A Municipality may appear to agree on service delivery and its linkage to Batho Pele, but it requires determined leadership to make things happen.

13.2 In conclusion, the Customer Care Policy outlines critical matters raised in the purpose and the objectives. The provisions in the policy contents highlights the need for municipality to adhere to the key issues narrated which will address challenges encountered and lead to effective and efficient implementation of the policy.

13.3 The Municipality commits to make resources available, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the policy, thus encouraging all relevant stakeholders to familiarise themselves with the policy and take necessary actions to fully participate and ensure compliance of the policy.

14. ANNEXURES

14.1 Business process map

14.2 Standard operating procedure.