

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday October 22nd, 2024

Council Adopts Managing Unreasonable Conduct by Customers Policy

Waratah-Wynyard Council is seeking to highlight the essential services it provides to the local community while ensuring Councillors and council staff can operate in a safe and rewarding work environment.

At yesterday's meeting, Council adopted a new Unreasonable Conduct of Customers Policy to define unreasonable conduct and protect staff from its potential harm.

Mayor Mary Duniam said Council elected representatives and staff worked hard to serve their local communities and didn't deserve to be abused.

"Whether it's representing the community in Council meetings, at community events or our valuable staff fixing potholes, keeping our parks clean and tidy, ensuring the welfare of animals, we are dedicated to providing the highest standards of service to our municipality," Mayor Duniam said.

"While it is rare, we have sadly seen our people verbally abused whether it be on the work site, at our customer service centres, at events or via community groups and organisations."

"All of our Councillors and most of our staff are also residents, with children in our schools and a stake in our local community, so when they face abuse while doing their jobs, it can have a deeply personal impact."

"We urge all members of our community to treat one another with respect and to acknowledge the contributions of Council staff in making Waratah-Wynyard a wonderful place to live."

Mayor Duniam said the overwhelming majority of interactions with Council were positive and reasonable.

"Unfortunately, a small number of people resort to unacceptable behaviour including aggression, verbal abuse and threats.

"We classify conduct as 'unreasonable,' when it raises health, safety, and resource concerns for our councillors, staff, and other service users."

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Unreasonable conduct incidents will be managed by limiting or adjusting how the Council interacts with or provides customer services. This can include restricting:

- **Who** the customer contacts (assigning them a single point of contact).
- **What** issues they can raise (limiting the topics we will address).
- **When** they can contact the Council (restricting contact to specific times or frequencies).
- **Where** they can meet staff (limiting face-to-face interactions to secure areas).
- **How** they can communicate (adjusting or limiting forms of contact, potentially prohibiting access or terminating services).

Mayor Duniam said enacting a formal response under the new policy was an absolute last resort.

“We believe in treating everyone with kindness and respect, and we always aim to resolve concerns through understanding and open communication,” Mayor Duniam said.

“Taking formal action is a last resort, but when necessary, it ensures a safe and respectful environment for our staff and the community.”

**Authorised for general media distribution by Shane Crawford, General Manager,
Waratah-Wynyard Council on October 22nd, 2024.**