

1 PURPOSE

To provide guidance to staff and customers in relation to the standards of service and the process for making compliments, enquiries and requests, and complaints in relation to Council services.

2 OBJECTIVE

To facilitate consistent standards of service delivery across Council and to provide a mechanism whereby compliments and complaints may be received and processed.

3 SCOPE

This policy covers all services provided by Council to all of its customers.

4 POLICY

The mission of the Burnie City Council is making a valuable contribution to our community through excellence in leadership, services programs and facilities.

This Customer Service Charter is in accordance with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993* and outlines our commitment to customers in accordance with our mission statement and provides a formalised process for making complaints. It outlines customers' rights, the standards customers can expect when dealing with Council and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with Council decisions or actions.

4.1 Our Commitment to Customer Service

The Council is committed to the provision of timely, efficient, consistent and quality services provided by polite and helpful officers that meet our customer's expectations.

The Council places great emphasis on the efficient handling of complaints. Our aim at all times is to provide a quality service. Council may not be able to provide complete satisfaction but will always be trying for the best possible solution.

To achieve this, customers are encouraged to voice their complaints and from Council's perspective to work toward increasing customer satisfaction and continuously improve our services by responding to customer complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible.

4.2 Who are Our Customers?

A customer is any person or organisation having dealings with or using the services of the Council.

4.3 Our Service Standards

4.3.1 *What you can expect from Council staff and services:*

- Professional and informative approach
- Courteous, polite and friendly manner
- Efficient execution of tasks
- Commitment to listening and responding to your needs
- Referral of requests to the appropriate person or agency if unable to fulfil your requirements
- All information will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality
- Acknowledgement and respect for customers' time.

4.3.2 *When a customer visits or telephones the Council*

Staff will attend the counter and answer the telephone promptly, courteously and deal with an enquiry directly without unnecessary referrals or transfers. If staff cannot deal with the enquiry they will provide the customer with the name of the person or agency the request or enquiry should be referred to. If that information is not readily available, staff will request the relevant person or agency to contact the customer directly. Telephone calls to the Council will be returned at the first opportunity, however where information is not readily available verbal enquiries will be answered within 10 (ten) working days.

4.3.3 *When a customer writes or emails*

Council will respond to all written requests or enquiries within ten (10) working days. Our response will be either in full, or as an acknowledgement outlining the name of the person handling the matter. Such acknowledgement may be by telephone or in writing as appropriate. All correspondence will be as prompt as possible, courteous and written in plain English.

4.4 Our Expectations Of The Customer

To make our job easier in providing our services Council ask customers:

- for patience and understanding
- to treat staff with respect and in a civil and courteous manner
- to provide information that is clear, concise and complete
- to respect the privacy, safety and needs of other members of the community
- to phone to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or a need to see a specific officer

- to phone the officer nominated on correspondence sent to the customer, quoting the file reference on the letter.

4.4.1 Abusive Customers

In any interaction with members of the community where personal abuse or vulgar language is used, the communication may be terminated immediately by the officer. If face to face, the officer will walk away. If on a telephone, the officer will terminate the call. If in email, the address may be blocked.

There may be occasions when the issue(s) a person has cannot be dealt with to their satisfaction and it is not possible for Council officers to continue to respond; or correspondence contains personal abuse or vulgar language is used. In these cases, Council may decide to limit or cease responses to the person. A decision of this nature will be communicated in writing to the person.

If a staff member feels threatened by the language or behaviour of the customer, they may notify the Police.

4.5 Compliments

Burnie City Council welcomes compliments about its staff and the services they provide. Compliments assist us to determine whether we are doing something well and also enhance the morale of staff. If you would like to pay a compliment, you may do so by telephone, at the counter or in writing. Council appreciates the time you take to make a compliment.

4.6 Enquiries and Requests

All customer enquiries and requests received by staff at Council are dealt with appropriately. If necessary, customer requests are entered into a Customer Request Management system (CRM). This ensures they are directed to the appropriate officer/s for further actioning. Enquires and Requests can be made by telephone, in person, or in writing.

4.7 Complaints

4.7.1 What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision (outside of a structured process), level or quality of service, or behaviour of an employee or agent, which can be investigated and acted upon and has been specifically referred to Council for action. From an operational perspective, a complaint is also an

opportunity for Council to review certain processes to see whether they can be improved.

A structured process is where legislation (Act, Regulation, Rule or By-law) specifically makes provision for an appeal, internal or external review of a decision.

4.7.2 What is not a complaint?

The following are not considered a complaint:

- A request for service (unless there was no response to a first request for service).
- A request for information or an explanation of a policy or procedure.
- Disagreement with a policy or decision of the Council.
- An appeal or request for internal or external review of a decision for which a structured process applies, other than that made as the result of a complaint.
- An expression concerning the general direction and performance of Council or its Aldermen.
- An expression of dissatisfaction with the behaviour of an Alderman.
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure.
- Reports about neighbours, noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of our service.

Many of the issues above are called ‘complaints’ when a customer contacts us. They are called complaints because a customer is unhappy about the situation and wants something done. The actions we take to resolve many ‘complaints’ are an everyday part of organisational life for us, due to the nature of services we provide. These issues will be dealt with separately from the formal complaints management process.

4.7.3 Complaints Management Process

The Director of each Department of the Council is responsible for handling complaints relevant to that Department.

While most problems can usually be resolved at an early stage, there are times when they require detailed investigation. If a complaint is of a very serious nature, it will be referred to the General Manager.

Irrespective of the manner in which the complaint was received, a response to the complaint can be expected within ten (10) working days. If an Alderman has submitted a complaint on a customer’s behalf we will also respond to the Alderman within ten (10) working days.

There are times when it is not possible to meet this deadline, e.g. where a complaint is a complex one and Aldermen are to be briefed on the outcome of the investigations. In these cases we will endeavour to keep the customer informed of progress.

4.7.4 Form of Complaint

A complaint may be lodged orally (by telephone or at the counter) or in writing. Your complaint will be referred to the relevant Director and may be responded to verbally by telephone, or by meeting with the Director to discuss the complaint, or in writing.

If the complaint relates to a complex matter or there is no resolution from discussing the matter with the relevant Director, the complaint will then be referred to the General Manager for consideration. At this stage, all complaints should be put in writing setting out the complaint details as simply as possible. If you are unable to provide a written complaint yourself, assistance with writing your complaint can be provided.

To assist Council in dealing with your complaint a customer should include the following, if relevant:

- a) date, times and location of events
- b) what happened
- c) to whom the customer has spoken (names, position in the Council and dates)
- d) copies or references to letters or documents relevant to the complaint
- e) state what the customer hopes to achieve as an outcome to the complaint.

4.7.5 Internal Review

Experience has shown that the majority of complaints will be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Director. However, a person who is not satisfied with the outcome may request a review of the complaint by the General Manager. A request for a review of the complaint to the General Manager is to be in writing.

The General Manager will inform the customer of the findings on completion of an investigation.

4.7.6 Consideration of a Complaint

In considering a complaint the relevant Director or the General Manager will:

- Examine and analyse the information already available and follow up points requiring clarification,
- Look at the Council Policies which might have a bearing on the complaint,
- Consider whether or not the Council is at fault;
- Consider any necessary action to be taken to correct the faults identified; and
- Consider a review of the Council's procedures to avoid recurrence of any similar complaint in the future if necessary.

The relevant Director may enter into informal discussions or mediation on a complaint with a view to resolution. If this process does not resolve the situation it may be referred to the General Manager.

4.7.7 Vexatious Complaints

All complaints received by Council will be treated with the utmost seriousness however if a complaint is found to be malicious, frivolous or vexatious no further action will be taken on the complaint. The customer will be informed of this decision in writing.

4.7.8 Anonymous Complaints

While Council will receive anonymous complaints, it will generally only act on them where the matter is considered to be serious and where there is sufficient information in the complaint to enable an investigation to be undertaken.

4.7.9 Protection of Customer

Council will take all care to ensure that the reporting of complaints will not result in a customer experiencing any form of victimisation or retribution as a result of the complaint.

4.7.10 What if a customer is not satisfied with the resolution of the Complaint?

Council is confident that it can resolve the majority of complaints received. However, we understand that it may not be able to satisfy every customer on every occasion.

Sometimes Councils have to make difficult and complex decisions involving many people and individual customers do not get the outcome they want.

If a complaint remains unresolved or a customer is dissatisfied with our process in dealing with a complaint other avenues remain for the customer to explore which include:

- available Administrative Appeals Process,
- the Judicial Review Act 2000, and
- external agencies which can review actions and decisions taken by the Council.

These include:

- The Ombudsman who is an officer responsible to Parliament for investigating complaints made about administrative actions (or inactions) of Tasmanian Government Departments, most Statutory Authorities and Local Government. The Ombudsman is located at Ground Floor, 99 Bathurst Street, Hobart, 7000. Ph (03) 6233 6217.
- Local Government Division, Level 8, 15 Murray Street, Hobart (GPO Box 123 HOBART, 7001) Ph. (03) 6233 6758.

While a customer is entitled to refer a complaint directly to these bodies at any time, customers are encouraged to allow the Council to investigate the complaint first.

4.8 How You Can Contact Us

You can contact us to make an enquiry, compliment or a complaint:

- in person by visiting Council's Offices at 80 Wilson Street, Burnie during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday,
- by telephone by phoning 6430 5700 during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday. Council provides an After-Hours Emergency Service on the same number.
- by Email to burnie@burnie.net
- by Internet on the Council website at www.burnie.net/feedback

4.9 Personal Information Protection

Council has a commitment to protection of Personal Information provided by a customer to Council in accordance with the requirements of the *Personal Information Protection Act 2004* and the *Right to Information Act 2009*.

The *Right to Information Act 2009* allows for a person to obtain certain information that is held by the Council that is not already publicly available.

4.10 Reporting

The General Manager is to provide Council with a report at least once a year of the number and nature of complaints received in accordance with section 339F(5) of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

4.11 Availability

This Customer Service Charter is available:

- for public inspection at the Council Office during normal office hours,
- on the Council's website free of charge, and
- from the Council offices free of charge.

4.12 Review

This Customer Service Charter will be reviewed at least once every two years in accordance with section 339F(4) of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

5 LEGISLATION

Local Government Act 1993
Local Government (General) Regulations 2015
Personal Information Protection Act 2004
Right to Information Act 2009
Public Interest Disclosures Act 2002

6 RELATED DOCUMENTS

CP-CBS-SG-008 Personal Information Protection Policy
CP-CBS-SG-013 Public Interest Disclosure Policy



COUNCIL POLICY

Customer Service Charter

Approved By: **Council**
Doc Controller: **General Manager**
File: 4/14/2

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Version: **4.1**
Approved Date: **30 Jan 2018**
Next Review Date: **31 Aug 2022**

Policy Endorsement

Responsibility:	<p>It is the responsibility of the General Manager to keep a register of formal complaints received by Council.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of the Executive Manager Corporate Finance to maintain and review this policy.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of the Governance Unit to maintain this policy within the Corporate Document Framework.</p>
Minute Reference:	<p>Item AO021-18 – version 4.0</p> <p>V4.1 amended on 15 Jan 2019 to change next review date, due to change to Local Government Act 1993, requiring that Customer Service Charter be reviewed within 12 months of an ordinary election, rather than every two years.</p>
Council Meeting Date:	<p>30 January 2018</p>
Strategic Plan Reference:	<p>Strategy 7.1.1</p> <p>Formulate policy that is equitable, inclusive and responsive to current needs, and ensure decision-making is informed and accountable.</p>
Previous Policies Replaced:	<p>This policy replaces the previous policy CP-CBS-SG-022 version 3.0 dated 19 August 2014, Item AO208-14.</p>
Date of Commencement:	<p>31 January 2018</p>
Publication of policy:	<p>Members of the public may inspect this policy at the City Offices where copies can be obtained free of charge. Alternatively it can be accessed on Council's website (www.burnie.net)</p>