

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy</b>
<b>Type:</b>	<b>Council</b>
<b>Adopted:</b>	23 October 2019
<b>File No:</b>	19/64080
<b>Attachments:</b>	Nil

### 1. Purpose

This Policy sets out standards for receiving, managing, responding to and acting upon, complaints and other customer feedback. It establishes Council's commitment to upholding our customers' right to comment on our performance and holds us to our service standards.

### 2. Rationale

Customer complaints and feedback provide us with valuable information about our services. They are an opportunity to learn about what we are doing well and what we need to improve. They are also a useful source of information about community expectations of our services. Customer feedback helps to make us accountable to our community. Our organisational values of Empathy, Professionalism, Accountability and Integrity underpin our commitment to providing great customer service through an appropriate management and handling of feedback and complaints.

### 3. Scope

All employees must act in accordance with this Policy. The Council CEO, directors, managers and coordinators must promote and enforce this policy with their staff. Councillors are not subject to this Policy.

Anyone who has contact with our staff, facilities or service can provide feedback to Council.

This Policy applies to all types of customer feedback we receive. It excludes:

- ordinary requests for service (i.e., a customer request)
- follow up queries about an existing request (unless that request is outside our service standard timeframe for completion)
- reports of a hazard or emergency
- private matters concerning neighbours, including disputes between neighbours
- expressions of dissatisfaction with decisions made under legislation which have separate avenues of appeal, for example, those which fall under Freedom of Information legislation
- serious complaints, as defined in the table below
- protected disclosures (which are dealt with separately under Council's Protected Disclosure Policy)
- complaints about councillors, including alleged breaches under the Councillor Code of Conduct (which are dealt with under provisions of that Code), are not within the scope of this Policy.

#### 4. Definitions

Reference Term	Definition
Feedback	Any customer view – positive, negative or neutral – about Council's services, decisions or staff. 'Feedback' is the collective term used in this Policy to include comments, suggestions, complaints and compliments from customers regardless of how these are collected/transmitted.
Routine Complaint (referred to throughout as a 'Complaint')	An expression of dissatisfaction with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the quality of an action taken, decision made or service provided by Council, Council officers or its contractors</li> <li>a delay or failure to act or provide a service to a promised standard.</li> </ul>
Serious Complaint	A serious complaint requires different treatment to a 'routine complaint'. It requires special handling, confidential recording and investigation as it needs to accord with strict legislative requirements.  Examples of serious complaints are a significant breach of privacy, report of child abuse, significant health and safety risk or incident, suspected fraudulent, corrupt, criminal or unethical conduct or any complaints regarding staff conduct.  (While defined here for completeness, handling of serious complaints is not within the scope of this Policy.)
Customer	Includes ratepayers, residents, members of local community groups, volunteers, other agencies, visitors and the general public.
Customer Request	A request for service which includes contact with Council to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seek information, assistance or advice</li> <li>access a service</li> <li>make a report about something for which the Council has responsibility.</li> </ul>

#### 5. Policy

We are committed to delivering great customer service and to maintaining effective two-way communication with our community.

Despite our best efforts, we understand that sometimes we might make mistakes, fail to meet customer expectations or our own service standards.

When this happens, we want to hear from our customers. We are committed to making it easy for our customers to tell us what they think of our service. To this end we:

- make it simple for customers to submit feedback via multiple means - in person, via phone or email or 24/7 through our website
- actively seek community feedback about our customer service through an annual community satisfaction survey
- actively seek customer feedback about our how we did in completing customer requests, wherever practicable
- have engaged and professional staff who recognise, record and action customer complaints and feedback
- ensure we understand trends in customer feedback so we can improve and innovate to offer a better service.

Responsible Officer: Manager Customer Experience

23 October 2019

TRIM Reference: 19/59530

## Customer Feedback and Complaints

### Welcoming and Valuing Feedback

We encourage and value feedback:

- for its potential to improve our service, policies, procedures, practices and systems
- because we are accountable to our customers
- because we value the effort our customers make in providing that feedback.

In addition to aiming to provide great customer service, we want to make customers feel comfortable providing feedback to us. To achieve this, we will:

- accept and acknowledge all feedback quickly and courteously
- seek to fully understand the matter being raised and the outcome the customer wants to achieve
- seek to resolve all complaints quickly and without escalation wherever possible
- respond with an answer or planned course of action within 10 working days or sooner where possible - unless the issue warrants a lengthier examination
- advise when the matter is resolved, including an explanation of how the complaint has been addressed, or in the case of no resolution, why it could not be addressed yet, and what the next steps will be
- record everything we do in relation to a complaint in the appropriate Council database
- regularly review feedback, including trends in feedback, so that faults raised by customers lead to action, service improvements or innovative solutions.

### Complaints Regarding Regulatory Decisions

If a complaint relates to a regulatory decision (such as compliance or enforcement), the CEO will undertake an initial review of that decision and then appoint a person who has not been involved in the original decision to undertake the review.

### Escalation of a Complaint

We will provide a clear review (escalation) mechanism for complaint handling for customers. If we are unable to resolve a complaint to the customer's satisfaction at the first point of handling, the complaint will be escalated for investigation.

We will tell customers if they have exhausted Council's complaint escalation processes. We will maintain information on our website for our customers about how to escalate a complaint to an external body where we are unable to resolve the complaint to their satisfaction.

We note that these internal review processes do not apply where Victorian legislation sets out a specific process for review of decisions – for example, review of a planning decision by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

### Irregular Complaints

'Anonymous complaints' - are difficult to investigate as they usually involve limited information and are therefore difficult to investigate and verify. We will generally only act when the matter is considered to be serious and there is sufficient information to enable a valid investigation to take place.

'Informal complaints' - are expressions of dissatisfaction with an aspect of Council's performance, where the person does not wish to formally lodge a complaint. Council is generally unable to record or act on this information. The only exception to this rule is a situation where the information provided might constitute a serious complaint, public safety issue or suggests a Code of Conduct violation.

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'Vexatious complaints' - are those which are deemed to be frivolous, mischievous, repetitive or voluminous in nature. Council might choose to suspend its normal complaint service standards and processes for complaints of this kind.

Compliments for work well done or for exceptional customer service will be recorded in the same way as complaints. Compliments provide recognition and encouragement for Council officers in their work and their interactions with the community. Compliments provide useful information about how to keep customer satisfaction levels high.

Coordinators and managers will forward such feedback to the staff member concerned and acknowledge and thank the customer for submitting this feedback where possible.

### **6. Related Policies, Strategies and Legislation**

*Employee Code of Conduct*

*Councillor Code of Conduct*

*Local Government Act 1989*

*Customer Service Policy*

*Customer Service Charter*

*Our Values and Behaviours Statement*

### **7. Council Plan**

The Policy is consistent with the Council Plan 2017-2021 Our Promise strategy 'to commit to developing a stronger customer-focused culture that makes us easier to deal with' and 'ensure our culture, systems and technologies encourage and enable innovation in our business practices and service delivery'.

### **8. Management and Review**

This Policy will be circulated to staff. The CEO, directors, managers and coordinators are responsible for its implementation.

The Manager of Customer Experience will review this Policy in October 2022.

### **9. Consultation**

Consultation took place with private sector organisations, other councils and with a customer service bench-marking company.

### **10. Human Rights Charter**

This Policy has been developed with consideration of the requirements under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.