

Customer Service Charter

GOV-CORP 003

Version Number	Approval Date
1	November 2015
2	May 2017

Authority and Other Information

Date of approval	<p>Adopted by Council by Resolution No. 15.023/05 dated 14/09/05</p> <p>Reviewed and amended by Council Resolution No.15.012/07* dated 12/09/07</p> <p>Reviewed and amended by Council Resolution No. 15.015/09* dated 09/09/09</p> <p>Reviewed and amended by Council Resolution No. 16.019/11* dated 12/09/2011</p> <p>Reviewed and amended by Council Resolution No. 15.041/13* dated 11/12/2013</p> <p>Reviewed and amended by Council Resolution No. 16.034/15* dated 09/12/2015</p> <p>Reviewed and amended by Council Resolution No. 15.025/17* dated 31/05/2017</p>
Source of approval	S.339F <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>
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Source of authority	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>
Legislative Reference	<i>S.339F Local Government Act 1993</i>
Delegations	N/A
Strategic Plan Reference	5
Date of review	<p>A review must be conducted every two years in accordance with Section 339F (4) of the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>.</p> <p>Next review date is May 2019</p>
Previous policies withdrawn or amended	Not Applicable
Department responsible for implementation	Corporate Services
Department responsible for policy	Corporate Services
Publication of policy	A copy of the <i>Customer Service Charter</i> be placed on Council's website, and copies made available for inspection and free of charge from Council Customer Service Centre

1. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The vision of the Huon Valley Council under the Strategic Plan is working together for a prosperous, vibrant and caring Huon Valley community.

This Customer Service Charter is in compliance 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.

2. OUR COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

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

To achieve this customers are encouraged to submit feedback and for Council to work toward increasing customer satisfaction and continuously improve our services by responding to customer feedback as efficiently and effectively as possible.

3. WHO IS A CUSTOMER

A customer is any person or organisation having dealings with the Huon Valley Council.

4. KEY STANDARDS OF SERVICE

At all times we aim to:

- Treat customers courteously and with respect;
- Assist customers in a polite and friendly manner;
- Listen to customers, treat them fairly and take into account their views and particular needs;
- Provide complete and accurate information that is consistent and easy to understand;
- Explain what customers need to do;
- Act on our commitments in a timely manner;
- Value customers privacy by treating all personal information confidentially;
- Leave "visit card" with our name and contact number following a visit to a customers residence if that customer is absent at the time;
- Be punctual for meetings and appointments;
- Provide safe and accessible Council facilities for ease of customer access;
- Phone a customer and make appointment where possible;

4.1 When a customer visits or telephones the Council

We will attend the counter and answer the telephone promptly, courteously and assist with an enquiry directly without unnecessary referrals or transfers.

If we cannot assist with the enquiry we will provide the customer with the name of the person the request or enquiry will be referred to or, if that information is not readily available, will request the relevant person to contact the customer directly. Telephone calls will be returned at the first opportunity however where information is not readily available verbal enquiries will be answered within 5 (five) working days.

4.2 When a customer writes or emails

We will respond to all written requests or enquiries within fifteen (15) 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.

5. CUSTOMERS RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rights

- The right to review and appeal;
- The right to lodge a complaint;
- The right to privacy and confidentiality.

Responsibilities

- To treat staff with courtesy;
- To respond to requests for information accurately, thoroughly and in a timely manner;
- To abide by legal requirements and other obligations that customers are to meet in order to be eligible for services sought;
- When responding to correspondence quote the file number on the letter;
- Arrange an appointment for a complex enquiry or the need to see a specific Officer.

6. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

We welcome feedback (compliments, complaints and suggestions).

Huon Valley Council understands that customer feedback enables us to improve our service standards; we process all compliments, complaints and suggestions in a consistent way addressing them appropriately.

6.1 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.

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

6.2 What is not 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 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 of dissatisfaction with the behaviour of a Councillor;
- 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 services;

Many of the issues above are thought of as 'complaints'. They are called complaints because a customer is unhappy about the situation and wants something done. The actions taken to resolve many "complaints" are an everyday part of organisational life due to the nature of service provided and will be dealt with apart from the formal complaints management process.

Reports about noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of our services are all treated as requests. These requests are often serious matters and for these reasons regulatory requests may need to be in writing. This is because, for example, the request may result in enforcement proceedings or other legal proceedings being issued after an investigation is completed by the Council (as a regulatory authority).

Also, there may be circumstances where it is necessary for a customer to provide further information or documentation and to attend hearings to provide evidence arising from a request.

Therefore, in order to investigate a request of a regulatory nature and as part of due process there is a requirement for request of a serious nature to be provided in writing.

6.3 Complaints Management Process

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

While most situations 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 (20) twenty working days. If a Councillor has submitted a complaint on a customer's behalf we will also try to respond to the Councillor within (20) working days.

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

6.4 Form of Complaint

A complaint may be lodged orally (by telephone or at the Customer Service counter) and may be responded to orally by phoning or meeting with the Executive Manager of the relevant Department to discuss the complaint.

If the complaint relates to a complex matter or there is no resolution after discussing the matter with the relevant Executive Manager a complaint should be made in writing setting out the complaint as simply as possible.

To assist Council in dealing with complaints a customer should include the following if relevant:

- Date, time and location of events
- What happened
- To whom the customer has spoken (names, position in the Council and dates)
- Copies or references to letters or documents relevant to the complaint
- State what is the ideal outcome to the complaint.

6.5 Internal Review

Experience has shown that the majority of complaints will be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Executive Manager. However, a person who is not satisfied with the outcome may request a review of the complaint by the Council's 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.

6.6 Consideration of a Complaint

In considering a complaint the relevant Executive Manager 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 any necessary action to be taken to correct the faults identified; and
- Consider a review of the Council's procedure to avoid recurrence of any similar complaint in the future if necessary.

The relevant Executive Manager or the General Manager may enter into informal discussions or mediation on a complaint with a view to resolution.

6.7 Abusive Customers

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 should walk away. If on a telephone, the Officer will terminate the call. If in email, the address may be blocked.

There are 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, the General Manager may decide to limit or cease responses to the person. A decision of this nature will be communicated in writing to the person.

If an Officer feels threatened by the language or behaviour of the customer, they may notify the Police.

6.8 Vexatious Complaints

All complaints received by Council will be treated with 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 by the General Manager.

6.9 Anonymous Complaints

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

6.10 Protection of Customer

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

6.11 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 we 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 Administration Appeals Process
- The Judicial *Review Act 2000*
- Contact 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 Level 6, 86 Collins Street, Hobart 7000; by mail GPO Box 960, Hobart 7001; phone 1800 001 170 or by email ombudsman@ombudsman.tas.gov.au.

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.

7. HOW YOU CAN CONTACT US

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

- In person by visiting Council's Offices at 40 Main Street, Huonville during the hours of 8:30am to 5pm Monday to Friday
- By telephone on (03) 6264 0300 during the hours of 8:30am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Council provides an After-Hours Emergency Service on the same number
- By Email to hvc@huonvalley.tas.gov.au
- By Internet by visiting the Council website at www.huonvalley.tas.gov.au

8. 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*.

Council's *Privacy Policy, June 2011*, is available for inspection at Council's Offices and on Council's website.

9. 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*.

10. 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
- For purchase from the Council Office

11. REVIEW

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