



Policy No 2014 - 22

Customer Service Charter

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This Customer Service Charter is in compliance with the requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993* and outlines Central Highlands Council's commitment to customers in accordance with our vision and mission statement articulated in the Strategic Plan. 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 including providing a formalized process for making complaints.

OUR COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Central Highlands Council is committed to the provision of timely, efficient, consistent and quality services provided by polite and helpful Officers that meet our customers' expectations.

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

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

WHO IS A CUSTOMER

A customer is any person or organisation having dealings with the Central Highlands Council.

OUR SERVICE STANDARDS

At all times we aim to:

- Treat customers courteously and with respect;
- Deal with customers in a polite and helpful manner;
- Listen to customers and take their views into account;
- Provide customers with necessary and relevant information;
- Treat customers fairly and take account of the customer's particular needs;
- Act on our commitments in a timely manner;
- Value customer's privacy by treating all personal information confidentially;
- Leave a "visit card" with our name and contact number following a visit to a customer's residence if that customer is absent at the time; and
- Be punctual for meetings and appointments.

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When a customer visits or telephones the Council

We will attend the counter and answer the telephone promptly, courteously and deal with an enquiry directly without unnecessary referrals or transfers. If we cannot deal 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. The person concerned will be informed of the reason (s) for the delay.

When a customer writes or emails

We will acknowledge all written requests or enquiries within 3 (three) working days. Such acknowledgement will generally be in writing but may be by telephone if appropriate. We will respond to these written requests as promptly as circumstances allow taking into account the Council meeting cycle and the complexity of the information sought and its availability. Most requests will be answered within 15 (fifteen) working days. All correspondence will be as prompt as possible, courteous and written in plain English.

OUR EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMER

To help us assist you, our customer, in providing our services we ask you to:

- Treat Council Officers with respect;
- Respect the privacy, safety and needs of other members of the community;
- Have a note pad and pen by the phone;
- Provide accurate and complete details;
- Phone to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or a need to see a specific Officer; and
- Phone the Officer nominated on correspondence sent to the customer and quoting the reference on the letter.

Abusive Customers

No Council employee is required to abide threatening, abusive or insulting conduct from customers. In cases where a customer behaves in such a way, the Council employee may immediately terminate dealings with them.

If dealing with a customer face to face, we will advise you that we are terminating the conversation with you due to your behaviour, ask you to leave the premises and then the Officer will walk away.

If on the telephone, we will advise you that we are terminating the conversation with you due to your behaviour, and then the Officer will terminate the call.

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If it is an email, the address you sent the email from may be blocked to prevent further contact after advising the customer that this will happen.

The General Manager may decide to limit or cease responses to any person, who is abusive in his or her dealings or refuses to accept that Council has done all that it can to assist. 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.

COMPLAINTS

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 external review of a decision.

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 the policy of a Council;
- An appeal or request for internal or external review of a decision for which a structured process applies, other than that made as a result of a complaint;
- An expression concerning the general direction and performance of Council or its Councillors;
- An expression of dissatisfaction with the behaviour of a Councillor;
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure; and
- 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 due to the nature of services we provide and will be dealt with apart from the formal complaints management process.

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Complaints Management Process

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

Whilst most problems can usually be solved 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 respond to the Councillor within 20 (twenty) working days.

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

Form of Complaint

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

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

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

- (a) dates, times and location of events
- (b) what happened
- (c) to whom the customer has spoken (names, position in 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.

Internal Review

Whilst most complaints can usually be resolved quickly by the relevant Officer, there are times when a detailed investigation is required.

If a person is not satisfied with the outcome, they may request, in writing, a review of the complaint by the General Manager.

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

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Consideration of a Complaint

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

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 by the General Manager.

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.

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 victimisation or retribution as a result of the complaint.

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

Council is confident that the majority of complaints received can be resolved; 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.

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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*
- 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 86 Collins Street, Hobart Tasmania 7000. Phone 1800 001 170 (free call).
 - ❖ Local Government Division, Level 5, 15 Murray Street, Hobart TAS 7000 (GPO Box 123 Hobart, Tas 7001). Phone 1300 135 513 .

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.

HOW YOU CAN CONTACT US

You can contact us to make an enquiry or complaint:

- In person by visiting Council's Offices at 19 Alexander Street, Bothwell during the hours of 8.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday or 6 Tarleton Street, Hamilton during the hours of 7.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday;
- By telephone on (03) 6286 3202 during the hours of 7.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday;
- By Email to council@centralhighlands.tas.gov.au

PERSONAL INFORMATION PROTECTION

Council has a commitment to the 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*.

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*.

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AVAILABILITY

This Customer Service Charter is available:

- For public inspection at the Council Office during normal office hours;
- On the Council's web-site free of charge; and
- For purchase from the Council Office

REVIEW

A Council is to review its Customer Service Charter within 12 months after a Council election in accordance with Section 339F(4) of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

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