



CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

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The mission of the Circular Head Council under its Strategic Plan is to work in partnership with the community to improve the quality of life for the people of Circular Head by investing in a dynamic, sustainable and equitable future.

This *Customer Service Charter* is in compliance with the requirements of S.339F of the *Local Government Act 1993* and S.30 of the *Local Government (General) Regulations (2005)* 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.

OUR COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Circular Head 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 Circular Head 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 always 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 Circular Head Council.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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 customers 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.
- Be punctual for meetings and appointments.

OUR SERVICE STANDARDS

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.

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.

OUR EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMER

To make our job easier in providing our services we ask customers 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.
- Phone the Officer nominated on correspondence sent to the customer and quoting the file number on the letter.

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 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, 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.

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 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 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.
- 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 and will be dealt with apart from the formal complaints management process.

Complaints Management Process

The Manager 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 twenty (20) working days. If a Councillor has submitted a complaint on a customer’s behalf we will also try to respond to the Councillor within twenty (20) working days.

There are times when it's not possible to meet this deadline, eg. 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 complaint 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) 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 letter or documents relevant to the complaint
- e) state what the customer hopes to achieve as an outcome to the complaint.

Internal Review

Experience has shown that the majority of complaints will be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant 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.

Consideration of a Complaint

In considering a complaint the relevant 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 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.

Alternatively, if the General Manager is unable to satisfactorily resolve the matter, he or she should invite the complainant to put their complaint in writing for consideration by the Council.

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 or the complainant has insufficient personal interest in the matter, 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 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 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 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.

HOW YOU CAN CONTACT US

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

- in person by visiting Council's Offices at 33 Goldie Street, Smithton during the hours of 8:15am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday
- by telephone by phoning 6452 4800 during the hours of 8:15am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday. Council provides an After-Hours Emergency Service on the same number.
- By Email to council@circularhead.tas.gov.au.
- By Internet by visiting the Council Web-site at www.circularhead.tas.gov.au

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 *Freedom of Information Act 1991*.

Council's *Privacy Policy*, *Protected Disclosure Requirements Policy* and *Freedom of Information Policy* are available for inspection at Council's Offices and on Council's Web-site. Requests for information/documentation are handled in accordance with these policies.

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*.

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

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*.