



Cardinia Shire Council

# Customer Service Charter and Complaint's Handling Procedure

## **1 PURPOSE**

To ensure standardised provision of customer service delivery and the efficient handling of customer complaints.

## **2 SCOPE**

This procedure applies to all Council officers, recognising that customer service is integral to Council's work. The process for customers contacting Council is also outlined.

## **3 COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT**

Cardinia Shire Council is committed to the provision of timely, efficient, consistent and quality service which meets our customer's expectations and which is provided by polite and helpful Council staff.

The Council Plan defines Council's commitment to practising good governance and meeting recognised best practice standards in four key areas:

- Our people
- Our environment
- Our community
- Our economy
- Our governance

Cardinia Shire Council places great emphasis on the efficient handling of formal 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 try for the best possible solution.

To achieve this, customers are encouraged to let their complaints be known to Council and for Council to work toward increasing customer satisfaction and continuously improving our services by responding to customer complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible.

### **3.1 Definition of a customer**

A customer is any person or organisation having dealings with Cardinia Shire Council.

## **4 COUNCIL'S CUSTOMER SERVICE STANDARDS**

### **4.1 Service standards**

At all times Council aims 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 their particular needs
- act on our commitments in a timely manner
- value customers' privacy by treating all personal information confidentially
- be punctual for meetings and appointments
- make Council's services easy to use and offering choices where possible.

## **4.2 Customer enquiries – in person and by telephone**

Council officers 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 this could be the next working day.

## **4.3 Customer enquiries – written (email and letter)**

We will respond to all written requests or enquiries within 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.

# **5 COUNCIL'S EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMER**

## **5.1 Customer's responsibilities**

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
- 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 quote the file number on the letter (where available).

## **5.2 Abusive customers**

Where the customer is personally abusive or uses bad language, the communication may be terminated immediately by the officer.

- If face to face, the officer may walk away.
- If by telephone, the officer may terminate the call.
- If in email, the sender's address may be blocked.

Council's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) may decide to limit or cease responses to any person who is abusive in communication with Council or who fails 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, the police may be notified.

# **6 FORMAL COMPLAINTS**

## **6.1 Definition**

A formal complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision, level or quality of service, or behaviour of an employee or agent, which can be investigated and acted on where no right of appeal or review is available under any other legislation.

Some legislation (acts, regulations, rules or local laws) specifically makes provision for an appeal, or an internal or external review of a decision.

The following are **not** considered complaints under this process:

- a request for works or services; for example, reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure – unless it is a second request where there has been no response to the first request or where in the view of the customer the response or quality of works were unsatisfactory
- a complaint about an event, service or business for which Council is not responsible
- disagreement with Council's policy or a lawfully made decision
- the lodging of an appeal or objection in accordance with a standard procedure or policy; for example, a complaint about an approved development or draft policy or plan – unless this is recorded as a complaint about Council's decision making process
- reports about neighbours, noise, dogs, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of Council's service
- trivial, frivolous or vexatious complaints which will not be investigated, nor will continue to be investigated if the process has already commenced.

Many of the issues above are called 'complaints' when a customer contacts Council. They are called complaints because a customer is unhappy about the situation and wants something done. To Council, however, the 'complaint' is a **request** for action. This terminology does not reduce the importance of the issue, nor does it change the actions Council will take. However, it does help Council differentiate between a complaint and a service request so that the issue can be registered appropriately in Council's customer request tracking system.

In general, most 'true' complaints as defined by Council, are about quality and timeliness of a service or the outcome of a decision.

## 6.2 Lodging a complaint

A formal complaint must be lodged in writing and should be marked 'Formal complaint' or to the attention of 'Council's complaints officer'.

Complaints regarding the behaviour of Council employees will be referred directly to the Manager Organisation Development. The actioning officer, for the purpose of investigation and management of all other complaints, will be the complaints officer as delegated by the CEO.

The complaints officer will undertake management of the complaint in an independent, impartial and objective manner. The complaints officer may, if the officer considers appropriate in the circumstances, undertake mediation between the parties with a view to resolving a complaint, but will not act as an advocate for either the complainant or Council or for any Council officer who is the subject of the complaint.

## 6.3 Complaints management process

The manager of each of Council's business unit is responsible for handling complaints relevant to that business unit. The complaint's officer will inform the relevant manager of the complainant and provide the complainant with details of who the matter has been referred to and an expected timeframe for the response.

While most matters can usually be resolved promptly, at times detailed investigation is required. If a complaint is of a very serious nature, it may be referred directly to the CEO.

When Council receives a formal complaint, an acknowledgement will be sent within three working days and every effort will be made to resolve the complaint and provide a response within 10 working days. If complex investigations are required, the response will provide an indication of the timeframes associated with the investigation process and contact information for the complainant to obtain feedback on the status of the complaint.

To assist Council in dealing with your complaint, you are asked to include the following as relevant:

- date, times and location of events
- a description of what has happened
- to whom you have spoken (names, position in Council and dates)
- copies of or references to any letters or documents relevant to the complaint
- a statement of what you hope to achieve as an outcome to the complaint.

## **6.4 Non-Council issues**

For matters which are not within Council's jurisdiction, the complainant will be informed by the complaints officer of the name, telephone number and any other relevant details of the appropriate organisation (if known).

## **6.5 Consideration of a complaint**

In considering a complaint the relevant business unit 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
- consider a review of Council's procedures to avoid recurrence of any similar complaint in the future if necessary.

The relevant manager may enter into informal discussions or mediation on a complaint with a view to resolution.

# **7 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 Council's CEO. A request for a review of the complaint by the CEO must be in writing.

If a complainant is dissatisfied with how the complaint was initially handled, or the outcome of the complaint, they may ask for the complaint to be reviewed.

Any review will be undertaken by the CEO, or officer designated, provided that officer is not less senior than the original decision maker and is independent of that person.

A report on the review will be submitted to the CEO who will either make a decision on the review request or refer that request to Council for a decision.

In considering a review request, the CEO or designated officer will consider the grounds or basis on which the review has been sought and the principles outlined above.

## **8 EXTERNAL REVIEW**

### **8.1 Alternative dispute resolution**

Council may seek to use alternative dispute resolution methods to resolve the complaint in circumstances where the complaints officer deems such a course of action appropriate. Mediation is a widely recognised technique of resolving disputes and may be considered where:

- the parties will have an ongoing relationship
- the dispute is long-standing or likely to escalate
- alternative redress (e.g. investigation or litigation) is likely to be costly in time and resources
- public interest is served by having the dispute resolved promptly, efficiently and economically.

### **8.2 Review by Ombudsman or other complaints entities**

If Council decides not to undertake a review, it will inform the complainant that a complaint may be lodged with the Victorian Ombudsman or other complaints entities.

### **8.3 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 generated purely to cause annoyance no further action will be taken on the complaint. The customer will be informed of this decision in writing by the CEO.

### **8.4 Anonymous complaints**

While Council is prepared to receive anonymous complaints, it 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.

### **8.5 Protection of customer**

Personally identifiable information concerning the complainant will be available only as needed for the purposes of addressing the complaint within the organisation and these details will be actively protected from disclosure, unless the customer or complainant expressly consents to its disclosure in writing.

We will take 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.

## **9 LEGISLATION AND RELATED DOCUMENTS**

### **9.1 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 *Information Privacy Act 2000*.

# 10 DOCUMENT CONTROL AND REVIEW

This document will be reviewed every three (3) years.

<b>Version No.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>
001	October 2010	Rob Petreski
002	July 2013	Rob Petreski
003	May 2016	Rob Petreski