

LIVERPOOL PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL

POLICY REGISTER

Policy No. 1.26

POLICY TITLE: CUSTOMER SERVICE AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING

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OBJECTIVES

This policy forms part of Council's overall commitment to excellent Customer Service and will ensure that all complaints are dealt with in the most effective and efficient manner.

POLICY STATEMENT

Liverpool Plains Shire Council welcomes, supports and encourages valid and non-vexatious complaints (and compliments) and will ensure that every complaint is received courteously, investigated and acted on quickly and appropriately.

Council recognises that an effective Complaints Handling Policy forms part of good customer service and that feedback from customers is essential in understanding customer expectations and levels of satisfaction.

It is the intention of the Council to use the information resulting from the effective implementation of this policy to improve the level of service Council provides to its valued customers.

DEFINITIONS

Complaint: For the purpose of this policy, a complaint will be regarded as “An expression of dissatisfaction with the Council’s policies, procedures, charges, staff, agents or quality of service, presenting the opportunity to improve.”

Complaints Handling Policy: A Complaints Handling Policy refers to an organised way of responding to, recording and using complaints to improve customer service. It includes procedures for customers to make complaints and provides information to managers and staff that can assist them to prevent customer dissatisfaction happening in the future.

CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY OBJECTIVES

- (1) That Council recognises and acknowledges that customers want:
 - Solutions to their problems.
 - A knowledgeable service provider who takes responsibility.
 - To be recognised as an individual and to feel important.
- (2) To regard all people whether they are ratepayers, residents, business people, Councillors, fellow employees or others as customers to our Council.
- (3) To consistently provide the highest possible quality service to all customers.
- (4) To represent Council in a positive way and to enhance the Council’s image by treating customers in a courteous, friendly, considerate, efficient and respectful manner.
- (5) To ensure effective follow-up of all customer enquiries and provide only the most accurate and up to date information.
- (6) To encourage customer suggestions for improvements to the Council’s service.
- (7) To provide the appropriate resources and training to employees to ensure adherence to this policy.
- (8) To ensure that the front counter staff demonstrate a continued commitment to a well organised and tidy foyer.

CUSTOMER SERVICE GUARANTEE

- (1) Staff will listen to our customers and try to provide the services that they really want. Staff will not assume that they know what the customer wants and will find out and listen to the facts.
- (2) Staff will not give any customer the “run-around”. If a staff member cannot directly help a customer, it is their responsibility to ensure that they find someone who can and then put them in contact with the customer. If the person who is able to help the customer is unavailable, it is the responsibility of the person who receives the call to ring back the customer and advise them of a time when the appropriate person will help them.
- (3) Answers to any enquiry or complaint will be easy to understand and will not contain jargon. They will be clear, concise, straight to the point and directly address the original enquiry or complaint.
- (4) All telephone enquiries or complaints will receive at least an initial response by the next working day.
- (5) All written correspondence, not requiring report to Council, will receive at least an acknowledgement and where possible a reply within 10 working days.
- (6) All staff dealing with customers will identify themselves either verbally or in writing and when answering the phone will give their first name.

In its aim towards efficiency and in the interest of customers, Council reserves the right to limit the use of staff and resources on false or unreasonable demands.

LEVEL OF COMPLAINTS

For the purpose of this policy, complaints will be divided into four levels:

First Level Complaints

First level complaints are straight forward complaints or complaints of a minor nature that can be received, registered and resolved by appropriately trained frontline staff.

Second Level Complaints

Second level complaints are unresolved first level complaints and other more serious complaints where, if the customer is dissatisfied by the first level response, the complaint is investigated by a more senior officer and the results of the review reported to the customer.

Third Level Complaints

Third level complaints are those which allege corrupt conduct, criminal action, pecuniary interest or anti-competitive practices.

Fourth Level Complaints

Fourth level complaints are complaints that cannot be resolved within the Council and the complainant is referred to an outside agency to seek resolution.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Director – Corporate Services

The Director – Corporate Services is responsible for the overall management of the Customer Service and Complaints Handling Policy.

Public Officer / Nominated Disclosures Officer (as appropriate)

The Public Officer is responsible for the day to day management of the Customer Service and Complaints Handling Policy.

The Public Officer will:

- Be an expert on Council's Customer Service and Complaints Handling Policy and procedures and ensure that the system works;
- Know what authority to exercise in different situations;
- Know when to refer a complaint to the Nominated Disclosures Officer;
- Understand the power and functions of other authorities and how these might relate to complaints received by Council;
- Produce timely and regular management reports for the General Manager and Directors on the number and kinds of complaints (see "Reporting Procedure" below); and
- Feed useful information from complaints back to the relevant sections of Council.

Where a third or fourth level complaint is received, the Public Officer may be required to refer the matter to the Nominated Disclosure Officer, who will then become responsible for the management of the complaint.

LODGING A COMPLAINT

Council will ensure that, wherever possible, the process of making a complaint is as simple and efficient as possible.

Customers may lodge a complaint in the following ways:

- In writing, addressed to the General Manager;
- In person at the Liverpool Plains Shire Council Office; or
- By phoning the Liverpool Plains Shire Council Offices.

First Level Complaints

All frontline staff are responsible for receiving, registering and ensuring the resolution of straight forward, minor complaints as quickly as possible.

Frontline staff may refer complaints to their supervisor if they are unsure who should attend to the problem. In the case of more serious complaints, the frontline staff shall direct the complaint to the most suitable authority either in Council or in another agency. In such cases, the frontline staff may refer to the Public Officer for guidance.

Second Level Complaints

More serious complaints and unresolved first level complaints will be immediately referred to the Public Officer or his/her delegate.

Third Level Complaints

Where a complaint is received which alleges corrupt conduct, the General Manager must be notified in all instances.

Where a complaint alleges criminal action, pecuniary interest or anti-competitive practices, one of the following must be notified immediately:

- Protected Disclosures Co-ordinator (Director – Corporate Services)
- The General Manager
- The Mayor

These complaints will be dealt with in accordance with Council's Internal Reporting Policy No. 1.9.

Fourth Level Complaints

In all cases, if a complaint cannot be resolved within Council, the complainant will be referred to an outside agency such as the Department of Local Government or the Ombudsman.

RESPONDING TO A COMPLAINT

In accordance with the Customer Service Guarantee:

- All telephone complaints will receive at least an initial response by the next working day;
- All written complaints not requiring report to Council will receive at least an acknowledgement and where possible a reply within 10 working days;
- Answers to complaints will be easy to understand and will not contain jargon. They will be clear, concise and straight to the point and will directly address the original complaint.

Where it is determined that Council is unable to help or adequately respond to a complaint, the complainant will be advised of their options including their right to appeal to another public agency.

When a complaint has been investigated, the customer is contacted to:

- Explain any action taken to remedy the problem;
- Ask if the customer is satisfied; and
- Explain methods of recourse if the customer is dissatisfied.

If there is a delay in responding to or investigating the complaint:

- Immediately notify the customer of the delay;
- Say why there is a delay;
- Say when it is expected that the task will be completed; and
- Explain methods of recourse if the customer is dissatisfied.

If the delay is due to seasonal conditions such as road grading or tree planting and the request is considered reasonable, then it is to be placed on a forward work schedule and the customer notified. If the customer is satisfied, then this complaint may be marked as resolved.

REPORTING PROCEDURE

The Director – Corporate Services has the responsibility of reporting regularly to the MANEX meeting on the following:

- The frequency of complaints made verbally and in writing;
- A breakdown by categories of the subject matter of the complaints;
- The percentage of complaints that are actually resolved;
- The method by which resolution was achieved e.g. conciliation, investigation, external course, tribunals, etc., and
- A carry over figure of matters under enquiry or not resolved at report date.