



Glamorgan Spring Bay Council

Customer Service Charter Policy

Version 4

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1 Introduction

1.1 Objective

- To outline Council's commitment to customers in accordance with our mission statement and provide a formalised process for making complaints.
- To outline customers' rights, the standards customers can expect when dealing with Council and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with Council decisions or actions.

1.2 Scope

This policy includes all points as required by Section 339F of the Local Government Act 1993.

1.3 Definitions

Who is a customer? A customer is any person or organisation seeking services or information from the Glamorgan Spring Bay Council.

1.4 Related Policies and Legislation

This policy relates to and depends on other Council policies, as well as legislation, including:

- Local Government Act 1993
- Personal Information Protection Act 2004 (Tas)
- Privacy Act 1988 (Australian Government)
- Right to Information Act 2009 (Tas)

1.5 Policy Review and Update Cycle

This policy is to be reviewed within 12 months after an election and thereafter, bi-annually.

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.

1.6 Reporting

The departmental managers are to provide a monthly report to Council, which details the number of complaints received for that particular month and year.

2 Procedure

2.1 Our Commitment to Customer Service

The Glamorgan Spring Bay Council is committed to the provision of timely, efficient, consistent and quality services provided by polite and helpful Councillors and staff members that meet our customers' expectations.

The Glamorgan Spring Bay Council places great emphasis on the efficient handling of complaints. Our aim at all times is to provide quality service. We will always aim for the best possible outcome or solution for our customers.

Customers are encouraged to voice their concerns or complaints; Council will work toward increasing customer satisfaction and continuous improvement of services by responding to customer complaints as efficiently and effectively as possible

2.2 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.
- Offer and 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.

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 recorded, logged and answered within 5 (five) working days.

When a customer writes or emails

We will acknowledge all written requests or enquiries within five (5) working days and where necessary provide a response within twenty (20) working days. Our response will be either in full, or an update on the item 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.

2.3 Our Expectations of the Customer

We ask customers to:

- Treat Councillors and Council staff 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 staff member.
- Phone the staff member nominated on correspondence sent to the customer and quote 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 member of staff. If face to face, the staff member should walk away. If on a telephone, the staff member 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 staff 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 and a copy of the communication provided to Council.

If a Councillor or staff member feels threatened by the language or behaviour of a customer, they should notify the Mayor, General Manager, their direct manager or supervisor and may need to notify the Police.

2.4 Complaints

What is an organisational 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 and Councillor 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 a complaint a customer should include the following information 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.

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 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 achieve 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 NAB House, Level 6, 86 Collins Street, Hobart, Postal address is GPO Box 960, Hobart 7001. Ph 1800 001 170 (free call nationally)
 - Local Government Division, Level 5, 15 Murray Street, Hobart (GPO Box 123 HOBART, 7000) Ph. (03) 6232 7022

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.

2.5 How You Can Contact Us

You can contact us to make an enquiry or a complaint during normal business hours:

- In person by visiting Council's offices at 9 Melbourne Street in Triabunna during the hours of 9.00am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday
- By telephone on 03 6256 4777 during the hours of 9.00am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday. Council provides an After-Hours Emergency Service on the same number.
- By email: admin@freycinet.tas.gov.au
- By internet www.gsbc.tas.gov.au

2.6 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 Federal Privacy Act 1988 and the Personal Information Protection (PIP) Act 2004 (Tas). The Tasmanian PIP is available on www.thelaw.tas.gov.au

2.7 Availability

This Customer Service Charter is available:

- For public inspection or collection from the Council office during normal office hours.
- On the Council's website free of charge.

3 Implementation

The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the General Manager and will be reviewed every two years. After Council election and then biannually according to S339F (4) of the Local Government Act 1993.