

COR 010 : CUSTOMER AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING

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| <i>Document Status</i> | Current | <i>Version No</i> | 3 |
| <i>Document Controller</i> | Coordinator Corporate Support | | |
| <i>Policy Adopted</i> | | <i>Res No</i> | |
| <i>Last Reviewed</i> | August 2018 | <i>Res No</i> | O0818-091 |

Objective:

The policy sets the guidelines with regard to handling customer complaints and behavioural incidents ensuring that the Shire of Esperance:

1. Recognises, promotes and protects the customer's right to comment on their dealings with the Shire of Esperance;
2. Provides for natural justice and procedural fairness to ensure that the Shire officer is able to respond to any complaint and is not subject to unfair, unfounded or inappropriate allegations;
3. Provides an efficient, fair and accessible framework for resolving customer complaints;
4. Sets standard for dealing with customer complaints;
5. Increases the level of satisfaction among customers through the delivery of effective and consistent services;
6. Enhances the Shire's image and reputation, particularly its reputation for customer service
7. Identifies unacceptable customer behaviour; and
8. Determines actions that will be taken if a customer's behaviour is deemed to be unacceptable.

Policy:

Definitions

A complaint is a grievance against a process or the quality of service that a customer receives when dealing with the Shire (ie. poor customer service, inappropriate staff behaviour etc), as distinct from a service request, which is a request for the Shire to undertake certain works or rectify a particular problem (ie. notification of a pot hole in road, dangerous tree branches; stray dogs/livestock etc). Service requests are lodged through the Customer Request Management (CRM) system and directed to the relevant department for action as soon as they are received.

A complaint can be received either:

- in writing;
- in person;
- by telephone; or
- by email.

All complaints must be documented on the Customer Feedback Form for record keeping purposes.

Anonymous and vexatious complaints cannot be investigated as it is not possible to undertake due process to ensure procedural fairness.

Customer behaviour that is deemed to be unacceptable includes aggressive or abusive behaviour and unreasonable demands and/or levels of contact.

Aggressive or abusive behaviours are those that are hostile and violate other's rights, including verbal, physical and written abuse.

Demands or levels of contact are deemed to be unreasonable when the matter begins to impact excessively on the work of staff and Councillors or the time dealing with the complaint impacts on

service levels provided to other customers.

Commitment

1. All complaints and behavioural incidents will be handled quickly, fairly, effectively and courteously and in a manner which ensures natural justice and due process.
2. Responses should always be in positive terms and never retaliatory.
3. The rights of complainants and persons accused of unacceptable behaviour are protected as are those of staff who receive a complaint, or who may be subject of a complaint or subject to unacceptable behaviour.

Record Keeping

1. The standard Customer Feedback Form will be used throughout the Shire of Esperance to record all Customer complaints.
2. As soon as a complaint is received or an incident occurs, a copy of the complaint or incident details must be forwarded to the relevant Manager who will monitor the process.
3. The physical record of all complaints, incidents and supporting documentation will be recorded in the Shire's Records Management System to allow for accountability and audit.

Responsibility

1. All staff are charged with the responsibility of dealing with customer complaints and behavioural incidents in a courteous manner and to provide customers with information on the Shire of Esperance's complaint handling policy.
2. Staff have a responsibility to record all customer complaints and incidents in compliance with this policy.
3. Any complaints of a serious nature involving inappropriate behaviour of staff (rudeness, discrimination or harassment) should be referred to the Chief Executive Officer, who will inform the relevant Director, and Manager (if required).
4. All other issues should be referred to the relevant Manager who will assign the investigation to an appropriate Officer. In some instances it may be appropriate to engage someone external to the organisation to conduct the investigation. This will be a decision of the Executive Management Team.
5. All complaints will be acknowledged in writing, detailing the action to be taken within 5 working days.
6. Complaints which are unresolved after 5 working days will be referred back to the relevant Manager.
7. Complaints which are unresolved after 15 working days will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.

Complaint Handling –

1. Verbal Complaints

Complaints received in person or by telephone will be handled by the staff member receiving the complaint if possible, or referred to someone who can resolve the matter. Verbal complaints which are resolved immediately must be recorded on the Customer Feedback Form and forwarded to the relevant Manager.

When the complaint cannot be resolved immediately the Customer Feedback Form will be completed and the complaint handled as for a written complaint.

2. Written Complaints

Complaints received by letter, email or feedback form will be forwarded to the relevant Manager unless the complaint relates to inappropriate behaviour of staff (rudeness, discrimination or harassment) and should therefore be referred to the Chief Executive Officer who will then inform the relevant Director.

3. Response to the Complainant

The complainant will be advised of receipt of the complaint within 5 working days. After the complaint has been investigated and a resolution agreed to, the complainant will be notified.

Unacceptable Behaviour –

1. Aggressive or abusive behaviour

Shire staff will take the following action when subjected to aggressive or abusive behaviour from members of the public during the course of their duties;

- Ask the offender to stop their current behaviour
- End telephone call/appointment/meeting
- Terminate direct contact with the customer
- Notify police & direct Supervisor/Director if threatened or subjected to physical violence
- Any other action considered appropriate to the circumstances

2. Unreasonable demands and/or levels of contact

Shire staff will implement the following steps when subjected to unreasonable demands and/or levels of contact;

- Limit contact to telephone calls from the person at set times/days
- Nominate one staff member who will deal with future calls or correspondence
- See the person by appointment only
- Restrict contact to written correspondence only
- Refuse to deal with further correspondence and return any documents
- Advise the person that further irrelevant documentation will be destroyed
- Any other action considered appropriate to the circumstances

Empowering Staff

- All staff will have access to the complaint handling policy.
- All staff will be made aware of updates to the policy.
- Where possible staff will receive training in aspects of customer service relevant to this policy, including the differentiation between complaints and service requests and dealing with difficult customers.

Monitoring Customer Complaints

The Records Coordinator shall be responsible for:

- Monitoring all Customer complaints and ensuring their completion.
- Reporting to the Executive Management Team monthly on complaints lodged.

----- Policy Ends -----