

KINGBOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL POLICY

POLICY MANUAL NO. 1.6

CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

PREAMBLE

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

POLICY STATEMENT

The Kingborough Council is committed to the provision of timely, efficient, consistent and quality customer service in accordance with the mission statement contained in the Council's Strategic Plan 2004 - 2009 that includes the following actions:

- ◆ *taking an active and positive approach to communication, consultation and marketing*
- ◆ *adopting an open, direct and consistent approach to the business of community government*

Whilst Council aspires to provide a level of service that does not attract complaints, where customers are dissatisfied Council is equally committed to their prompt resolution.

POLICY OBJECTIVE

The *Customer Service Charter* provides a formalised process for making complaints. It outlines the rights of our customers, the standards customers can expect when dealing with Council, and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with Council decisions or actions.

POLICY SCOPE

Subject to the following exceptions and clarifications, the *Customer Service Charter* applies to all complaints made by customers in relation to any of Council's operations.

What is a complaint?

For the purposes of the *Customer Service Charter* a complaint is defined as a record of a customer's dissatisfaction with the delivery of a product or service offered by Council or the unsatisfactory conduct of a Council officer. This is distinct from a request for service to inspect, remove, replace, repair or reinstate Council facilities or to attend to something that is within Council's jurisdiction eg a barking dog or unauthorised building, although an unsatisfactory response could result in a request for service being escalated into a complaint.

What is not a complaint?

- A request for service (unless there was no response to a first request for service)
- Disagreement with a policy of the Council.
- A request for information or an explanation of a policy or procedure.
- Complaints for which statutory review processes exist, such that the legislation specifically makes provision for an appeal or review of a decision eg planning decisions that are subject to the appeal provisions of the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*.
- An expression concerning the general direction and performance of Council or its Councillors.
- An expression of dissatisfaction with the behaviour of a Councillor.
- A work-related grievance of an officer or employee.

From time to time customers contacts us because they are unhappy about a situation and want something done. The actions we take to resolve these 'complaints' are an everyday part of our organisational life due to the nature of services we provide. They will be dealt with separately from the formal complaint management process contained within the *Customer Service Charter*.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS CAN EXPECT OF US

We will:

- be understanding and helpful and will treat you with dignity, respect and courtesy,
- act professionally and with propriety,
- provide necessary and relevant information,
- maintain your privacy,
- be efficient and timely in dealing with your issues.

When a customer visits or telephones the Council

We will attend the counter and answer the telephone promptly, courteously and deal with an inquiry directly without unnecessary referrals or transfers.

If we cannot deal with the inquiry, we will provide the customer with the name of the person the request or inquiry will be referred to and 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 inquiries will be answered within 5 working days.

Where the inquiry is of a complex nature or a meeting with a specific officer is required, customers are requested to make a prior appointment.

When a customer writes or send an email

We will respond to all written requests or inquiries within 15 working days.

Our response will be either in full, or as an acknowledgment outlining the name of the person handling the matter. Such acknowledgment 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 OUR CUSTOMERS

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 inquiry or a need to see a specific Officer.
- Phone the Officer nominated on correspondence sent to the customer and quoting the reference number on the letter.

Abusive Customers

Should a customer use personal abuse or vulgar language, or if an Officer feels threatened by the behaviour of a customer, the contact may be terminated immediately by the Officer.

There may be occasions when

- a customer raises an issue on repeated occasions and the issue cannot be dealt with to their satisfaction, and it is not practicable for Council officers to continue to respond; or
- correspondence contains personal abuse or vulgar language.

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.

COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The Director of each Division of the Council is responsible for handling complaints relevant to their Division, but may allocate custody of a complaint to a relevant Manager or Supervisor.

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, Council will investigate and respond to all complaints within 20 working days. If a Councillor has submitted a complaint on a customer's behalf we will also respond to the Councillor within 20 working days.

Where a complaint involves complex issues, it may not be possible to meet this deadline. In these cases we will keep the complainant informed of progress and when a response is likely to be given.

Form of Complaint

A complaint may be lodged by telephone or at the counter and may be responded to by telephone, in writing or by meeting with the relevant Director, Manager or Supervisor.

If the complaint relates to a complex matter or there is no resolution from discussing the matter with the relevant Officer a complaint should be made in writing.

To assist Council in dealing with your complaint you should include the following, if relevant:

- date, times and location of events

- what happened
- to whom you have spoken (names, position in the Council and dates)
- copies or references to letter or documents relevant to the complaint
- what outcomes are required.

Internal Review

Experience has shown that the majority of complaints will be satisfactorily resolved following the initial complaint. However, a customer who is not satisfied with the outcome may request a review of the complaint by the General Manager. A request for a review of the complaint by 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 Director or the General Manager will:

- Examine and analyse the information available and follow-up issues requiring clarification.
- Look at the Council Policy(s) that 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 Director or the General Manager may enter into informal discussions or mediation on a complaint with a view to resolution.

Remedies

Council commits to a range of options for addressing unfair and incorrect decisions, or any unreasonable policy or procedure, or any inappropriate response, action or treatment by an Officer or employee. Appropriate remedies include:

- Admission of fault
- Explanation
- Change of decision
- Apology
- Change to policy or procedure
- Repair / rework / replacement
- Technical assistance
- Counselling or disciplining the member of staff

More than one remedy may be applied if the circumstances justify that course of action.

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 COMPLAINANT

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.

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 Local Government. The Ombudsman is located at Ground Floor, 99 Bathurst Street, Hobart, 7000. Telephone 6233 6217.
 - Local Government Division, Level 8, 15 Murray Street, Hobart (GPO Box 123 HOBART, 7001) Telephone 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 inquiry or a complaint:

- in person by visiting the Civic Centre at 15 Channel Highway during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday
- by telephone by phoning 6211 8200 during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday. Council provides an After-Hours Emergency Service on the same number.
- By email to kc@kingborough.tas.gov.au
- By Internet by visiting the Council Web-site at www.kingborough.tas.gov.au

REPORTING

Council is committed to using complaints data to improve decision-making and customer service. The General Manager will ensure that reports are considered by the Management Team and will provide Council with a report each year of the number and nature of complaints received.

A customer complaints registration system will be progressively implemented and will ensure that complaints will be escalated to a higher level if not finalised within the stipulated timeframes.

AVAILABILITY

This *Customer Service Charter* is available for inspection at the Civic Centre during normal office hours (there is no charge should you wish a copy) or may be viewed and down-loaded from Council's Web-site

REVIEW

This *Customer Service Charter* will be reviewed at least once every two years.

Approved by Council October 2005