

CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER



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1. Title and strategic outcome

This document is the West Tamar Council Customer Service Charter and is made under Section 339F of the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act).

The customer service charter has been developed to support council's strategic plan objective of being an organisation that values its people and delivers for our community as a recognised leader in local government. We strive to be an organisation focused upon providing efficient service to its internal and external customers. It is Council's intent that complaints will be minimised by ensuring that customers receive quality responses that are prompt, accurate and fair. Complaints received will be reviewed in order to implement strategies and reduce the likelihood of their reoccurrence.

2. Effective date and review

This charter becomes effective on the date it is adopted by council and will be reviewed within 12 months after a council election in accordance with Section 339F(4) of the Act.

3. Statement of commitment

Council is committed to providing quality services to its community and to engaging its customers fairly, confidentially, promptly and in a respectful manner. Whilst council aspires to provide a level of service that does not attract complaints, where customers are dissatisfied it is equally committed to the prompt resolution of their complaints.

This charter outlines council's commitment to its customers in accordance with the Strategic Plan and provides a formalised process for council's service provision and for receiving and handling customers' complaints. It outlines customers' rights, the standards customers can expect when dealing with council and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with council's decisions or actions.

4. Objectives

The charter's objective is to provide a structured framework in which council will:

- Provide customers with an understanding of council's service commitment and complaints philosophy;
- Inform customers of the form of redress available to them and the avenues of review if they are dissatisfied with a particular outcome or decision;
- Provide useful information to customers regarding the quality and range of services provided by council; and
- Provide a framework for the management of complaints received by council with a view to continual improvement of the business processes of council's services, systems and staff skills.

It is important to understand that the reason council exists is to provide its customers, including over 25,000 residents, with the services and facilities they need for their personal and business activities.

The residents have made a choice, based on their individual needs and wants, to live in the West Tamar municipal area. As a result of that choice they require services and facilities including roads, footpaths, waste collection, community and recreation facilities to make it possible to live in a safe, clean and healthy environment.

Today, customers are better informed, more aware of the alternatives and more demanding than at any time in the past. They, rightly, have come to expect that any business that wants their money, let alone

their loyalty, will have to understand their needs and strive to meet their expectations. As council's customers move around in their daily lives they get the chance to make comparisons. Making comparisons shows customers that better services exist and being aware of these, raises their expectations.

Each customer does not necessarily have the same needs or wants or to the same level.

5. Services and service standards

Detailed information relating to council provided services and facilities can be found in the *West Tamar Community Service Guide*. This guide is available on our [website](#) or by contacting a council office.

There are several very important aspects of council's obligations to its customers in the provision of services that need to be clearly understood:

- Council is a monopoly in its municipal area;
- Council's customers do not have an alternative source of supply;
- Council often has only one opportunity to establish its reputation with a customer;
- Council cannot agree to every customer's request and must therefore be able to say "no" with sound reasoning, courtesy and diplomacy; and
- Every employee is an ambassador for council.

At all times council will aim to:

- Treat customers equally, courteously, politely and with respect;
- Deal with customers in a 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 the customer's particular needs;
- Act on its commitments in a timely manner;
- Value customers' privacy by treating all personal information confidentially;
- Leave a "visit card" with an officer's name and contact number following a visit to a customer's residence if that customer is absent at the time; and
- Be punctual for meetings and appointments.

For a detailed list of the services and standards you can expect please refer to *Appendix 1 – Expected Service Standards*.

6. Customers' visits or telephone contact

Council's officers will attend to counter and telephone enquiries promptly and courteously and deal with an enquiry directly without unnecessary referrals or transfers. If an enquiry cannot be dealt with immediately, the customer will be advised which position the request or enquiry will be referred to. When the relevant officer is not immediately available, a response will be provided at the first available opportunity. When the required information is not available a response will be provided within five business days of the information becoming available.

7. Customers' written contact

Where a response is required Council will endeavour to respond to all written requests or enquiries, including email enquiries, within a maximum of ten business days. The response will be either in full, or as

an acknowledgement outlining the position 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.

8. Council's expectations of its customers

Customers are expected to:

- Respect the privacy, safety and needs of other members of the community;
- Provide accurate and complete details when dealing with council;
- Phone to make an appointment for a complex enquiry or a need to see a specific officer;
- Treat councillors and officers with respect;
- Refrain from using any abusive or vulgar language; and
- Refrain from engaging in any actions which may be intimidating or threatening.

In cases where misconduct is experienced:

- If face to face, the councillor or officer should walk away and immediately report the matter;
- If on a telephone, the councillor or officer may terminate the call; and
- If electronic the customer's address may be blocked.

Contact may only resume if so determined by the councillor or the Chief Executive Officer/Director in the case of an officer and in a more controlled environment.

If a councillor or officer feels threatened by a customer's conduct, they may refer the matter to Tasmania Police.

9. Customer Service Request System

Council maintains a Customer Service Request (CSR) system, which records, monitors and reports on all requests council receives.

Examples of requests that can be recorded on a CSR:

- Applications for services such as garbage and recycling collection;
- Information or an explanation of a policy or procedure;
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure (e.g. potholes, blocked stormwater drains);
- Reports about noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of council's service; and
- A request for council to provide new infrastructure.

The request is logged into council's Customer Service Request system, assigned a priority and allocated to an Officer to action. Council aims to achieve at least a 95% conformance in responding to CSR's in accordance with the Annual Plan.

10. What is a formal complaint?

A formal complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision (outside of a structured process) or level or quality of service 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.

11.What is not a formal complaint?

Examples of matters that are not formal complaints include:

- A request for service (unless there was no response to an initial request for a service);
- A request for information or an explanation of a policy or procedure;
- Disagreement with a council policy;
- A request for review of a decision for which a structured process applies;
- An expression concerning the general direction or performance of the council or councillors;
- An expression of dissatisfaction with the behaviour of a councillor or officer;
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure; and
- Reports about noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of council's service.

Many of the issues raised with council are called “complaints” because the customer is unhappy about the situation. However, they are simply issues dealt with by council on a day-to-day basis, are not formal complaints and do not form part of the formal complaints management and reporting process.

12.Complaints Management Process

The Director of each council department is responsible for handling complaints concerning their Department. While most issues 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 should be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.

Irrespective of the manner in which the complaint was received a response to the complaint can be expected within twenty business days.

If a councillor has submitted a complaint on a customer's behalf an officer will endeavour to respond to the councillor within twenty business days.

There are times when it is impossible to meet this deadline, e.g. where a complaint is a complex one and councillors need to be briefed on the outcome of the investigations. In these cases council will endeavour to keep the customer informed of progress.

13.Form of complaint

A complaint may be lodged verbally or in writing and may be responded to verbally or in writing by the Director or a senior officer of the relevant department. If the complaint relates to a complex matter and has not been lodged in writing or there is no resolution from discussing the matter with the relevant Director or senior officer, a statement should be made in writing setting out the complaint as simply as possible. To assist council in dealing with complaints, customers should include the following information if relevant:

- Date, times and location of events;
- Precise description of the event/s;
- Details of councillors or officers to whom the customer has spoken (names, position in the council and dates);
- Copies or references to letters or documents relevant to the complaint; and
- A statement as to the desired outcome.

14.Internal review by a Director or the Chief Executive Officer

Experience has shown that the majority of complaints will be satisfactorily resolved by the Director or senior officer of the relevant department. However, a person who is not satisfied with the outcome may request a review of the complaint. In the case of a determination made by a senior officer, the review will be carried out by the relevant Director and in the case of a determination by a Director, by the Chief Executive Officer.

A request for a review of the complaint must be in writing and the Director or Chief Executive Officer will inform the customer of the findings on completion of an investigation.

15.Consideration of a complaint

In considering a complaint the relevant Director or the Chief Executive Officer will:

- Examine and analyse the information already available and follow up points requiring clarification;
- Examine the council policies and statutory obligations that might have a bearing on the complaint;
- Determine whether council is at fault;
- Identify any action to be taken to correct any fault identified; and
- If necessary, identify any review of council's procedures to avoid recurrence of any similar complaint in the future.

The relevant Director or the Chief Executive Officer may mediate on a complaint with a view to resolution.

16.Vexatious complaints

All formal complaints received by council will be treated with the utmost seriousness, however, if a complaint is found to be malicious, frivolous or vexatious, as determined by the relevant Director or the Chief Executive Officer, then no further action will be taken on the complaint. The customer will be informed of this decision in writing by the Director or Chief Executive Officer.

17.Anonymous complaints

Council does receive anonymous complaints, however, 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.

18.Protection of customers

Council will take all care to ensure that the reporting of complaints will not result in customers experiencing any form of victimisation or retribution as a result.

19.What if a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint?

Council is confident that it can resolve the majority of complaints received however, it understands that it may not be able to satisfy every customer on every occasion. Sometimes council has to make difficult and complex decisions involving many people and individual customers do not get the outcome they would prefer.

If a complaint remains unresolved or a customer is dissatisfied with council's process in dealing with a complaint, other avenues are available for the customer to explore. These include:

- Administrative appeals;
- The Judicial Review Act 2000; and

- External agencies that can review actions and decisions taken by council, including:
 - The Ombudsman, who is an officer responsible to the Tasmanian Parliament for investigating complaints made about administrative actions (or inactions) of Tasmanian Government Departments, most Statutory Authorities and Local Government; and
 - The Local Government Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Customers are entitled to refer complaints directly to relevant external bodies at any time, however, they are requested to give council the opportunity to resolve the complaint in the first instance.

20.Complaints against non-compliance or offence

Pursuant to Section 339E of the Act, a person may make a complaint to the Director of Local Government:

- That council, a councillor or the Chief Executive Officer has failed to comply with the requirements under an Act; or
- That a councillor, the Chief Executive Officer or an employee of the council may have committed an offence under the Act.

A complaint must:

- Be in writing;
- Identify the complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made;
- Give particulars of the grounds of the complaint;
- Be verified by statutory declaration; and
- Be lodged with the Director, Local Government Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

21.Contactting council

The customer can contact council:

- In person by visiting council's offices at West Street, Beaconsfield or Eden Street, Riverside during the hours of 8:30am to 4:45pm Monday to Friday;
- By telephoning the Beaconsfield Office on 6383 6350 or the Riverside Office on 6323 9300 during the hours of 8:00am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday;
- Outside normal office hours (for emergency/urgent situations only) by telephoning council's after hours emergency service on 1300 153 153;
- By post to PO Box 16, Riverside 7250;
- By email to wtc@wtc.tas.gov.au; or
- Via the Internet by visiting www.wtc.tas.gov.au

22.Personal information protection

Council has a commitment to protect personal information provided by a customer to council in accordance with the requirements of the *Personal Information Protection Act 2004* and the *Right to Information Act 2009*.

Council's *Personal Information Protection Policy* is available for inspection at council's offices and on council's website.

23.Reporting

The Chief Executive Officer is to provide council with a report at least once a year of the number and nature of complaints received in accordance with section 339F(5) of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

24.Charter's availability

A copy of this Customer Service Charter is available:

- For public inspection at council's offices during normal office hours;
- For purchase at council's offices during normal office hours; and
- On council's website free of charge.

25. Appendix 1 – Expected Service Standards

Customer Service – Whole of Council	
Answer your telephone call	Within 6 rings when available
Return your call	Within 2 business days of returning to work
Acknowledge your letter/email	Within 10 business days if required
Respond to Customer Service Requests as per the Annual Plan	95% Conformance
Respond to complaints –(please note, if deadlines can't be met due to complex complaints, the customer will be kept informed of progress)	20 business days
Acknowledge/respond to questions received on Council's Social Media – (please note that only questions on the West Tamar Council's official Facebook or Twitter accounts will be responded to).	Within 3 business days
Provide after-hours service for emergencies	Always 1300 135 135
Leave a "card" with contact details if we visit your residence and you are not at home	When relevant
Confidentiality of your personal information	Always
Animal Control	
*Respond to emergency dog attacks	24 hours a day
Respond to routine dog complaints & investigate alleged breaches of the Dog Control Act	3 business days
*For safety reasons, Council only responds to after-hours emergency dog attacks where Tasmania Police has requested assistance. Council is not able to respond to after-hours calls about stray or lost dogs.	
Building	
Process applications for a certificate of likely compliance	Issue certificate within 14 business days of receipt of all information
Process applications for building permits	Issue permit within 14 business days of receipt of all information
Monitor building construction with site inspections	Within 48 hours of notification
Drainage/Stormwater	
Respond to drainage emergencies	Within 24 hours of notification
Respond to seepage/drainage problems	Within 7 business days
Environmental Health	
Respond to food complaints	Within 48 hours of notification
Respond to urgent environmental nuisances and high risk public health matters	Within 24 hours of notification
Immunisation School Based Programs	In accordance with the Immunisation Schedule
Finance	
Payment of accounts	By due date
Respond to rates enquiries	Within 7 business days
Fire Hazards	
Respond to fire hazard complaints (during permit period)	Within 3 business days
Process statutory nuisances	Within 7 days of identification
Governance	
Review Council's Strategic Plan	Every 4 years
Publish Annual Report	Every December
Council Meeting Agenda Available	4 business days prior to meeting

Human Resources	
Acknowledge receipt of job applications	Within 10 business days after closing date
Provide outcomes of job applications	Within 10 business days from interviews
Planning/Subdivision	
Acknowledge your planning application	Within 7 business days of receipt
Process development applications; - Permitted use with no referrals - Discretionary use with no referrals - Permitted use with referrals - Discretionary use with referrals	21 business days 28 business days 35 business days 42 business days
Respond to your request for planning information	Within 7 business days
Plumbing	
Process applications for certificates of likely compliance/plumbing permits	14 business days
Undertake plumbing inspections	Within 24 hours of notification
Roads	
Inspect, assess and respond to requests about road safety issues	Within 14 business days
Process new driveway applications	Within 14 business days
Grade unsealed roads	Minimum of once per year
Road sweeping of Council owned roads	As required
Waste	
Garbage collection	Fortnightly
Recyclable collection	Fortnightly
Food Organics Green Organics collection (FOGO)	Fortnightly in prescribed areas
Provide new or replacement wheelie bins	Within 10 business days
Respond to bin pickup complaints – (missed bins etc.)	Within 1 business day
Emergencies	
An emergency is regarded as an incident that threatens life or property or one that may cause environmental harm	Within 2 hours