



POLICY

CORPORATE COMPLAINT HANDLING POLICY

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Responsible Officer

Position: *Position responsible for coordinating implementation and evaluating effectiveness of the Policy (Paul Thorne)*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to detail the Corporation's policy and procedures for managing complaints. The intended audience is Corporation staff. The document is designed to explain the policy and procedures so that staff understand their role in complaint handling and what they can expect to happen to complaints once they have been received.

1.2 Scope

This policy and procedure covers all complaints received by the Corporation whatever the source or nature of the complaint.

2. Policy Statement

The Corporation of the City of Adelaide views its management of complaints as an important component of continuously improving the service offered to customers. The Corporation is committed to identifying, investigating and resolving issues whether these arise as service requests, suggestions or complaints. The Corporation is also committed to tracking the progress of complaints and reporting this on a regular basis.

3. Procedure

3.1 Features of the Complaint Handling procedure

The Corporate Complaint Handling procedure is designed to achieve the following goals.

- **Where possible a complaint will be resolved immediately.** The procedure has been designed to ensure that the majority of complaints can be resolved quickly and expeditiously for the customer.
- **Agreement for further action will be made with the customer when the complaint cannot be resolved immediately.** Where a complaint cannot be resolved immediately the customer will be consulted as to their desired outcome and informed of the process for further consultation.
- **The complaint will be logged in a central customer contact system.** The Corporation has recently selected a new customer contact system which will assist in the management of complaints. This will be implemented in the Customer Centre by the end of June 1999. A further roll-out to the rest of the Corporation is planned for

the financial year 1999-2000. This will enable not only logging of complaints, but tracking and reporting as well as the automation of work requests.

- **The complaint will be investigated.** Resolution of complaints requires access to information. The Corporation is continuously improving access to systems and their integration in order to provide up to date information useful for providing service to customers, including the investigation of complaints.
- **A solution will be formulated.** The complaint handling procedure is designed so that appropriate actioning officers formulate solutions to customer complaints.
- **A response will be made to the customer within time frames set in the policy or agreement with the customer.** A response to complaints will normally be provided by the Corporation within 10 days. Where, because of the nature of the issue, a complaint cannot be resolved, a time frame will be negotiated with the customer.
- **Complaints will be recorded and reports generated for department managers and executive management.** Regular reporting is important for the identification of improvement opportunities for the Corporation. Regular reports will be made available to department managers and executive management so that trends can be reviewed, successes reported and the Corporation's processes can be continuously improved.

3.2 Steps in the process

3.2.1 Where does it all start?

3.2.1.1 *What, after all, is a complaint?*

In general, we think of complaints as dissatisfaction expressed about a situation or thing. In the context of the Corporation, complaints may also be a request for some service to be performed, a request for a response about some issue the customer has with Council, or a request for a change to the way the Corporation delivers a service. For example, a person complaining about their bin not being emptied may be making the complaint because they want the situation addressed now (work request). Alternately all they may want is to ensure that the situation does not occur again (suggestion for change to a process). Similarly, a parking complaint may be a request to waive a parking fine (work request), a request for a formal response to the customer's plight or a suggestion to change something about the process (eg, the time allowed for parking in a particular zone).

Complaints are less simple than they at first appear. However, the Corporation is committed to having processes to deal with all complaints no matter from whom they are received or what they concern. For our purposes we define complaints as any dissatisfaction expressed by a customer with the Corporation or its services.

3.2.1.2 Who can make a complaint?

Anyone can make a complaint. This includes all people who live, work, study or conduct business in, or who visit, use or enjoy the services, facilities and public places of, the City of Adelaide. It is important to ensure that we have effective and efficient means for dealing with complaints from all sources. Elected Members play a special role in the community as representatives of Council. Frequently they may be the first point of call for a complaint. A complaint made to an Elected Member is a clear indication that the complainant takes the matter very seriously. Complaints made about decisions of Council are equally important. They provide information about how the community views the actions of Council and help to ensure an ongoing responsiveness to community needs on the part of Council. The Corporation must ensure these complaints are captured by the Corporation's systems and properly managed. Wherever possible these complaints will be managed at the first point of contact. However, at times it may be appropriate for the grievance procedures to be used when these processes have failed.

3.2.1.3 How to submit a complaint

Submitting a complaint is easy. This can be done face to face in the Customer Centre, by phone to the Call Centre or by letter to the Corporation. Complaints can also be submitted via the Corporation's internet pages. Internal staff can use the email system (email to **feedback**) and shortly be able to submit complaints via the intranet. When submitting a complaint, make sure you provide your name and contact details so that you can be informed of the outcome.

3.2.1.4 Who can receive a complaint?

Any Corporation staff member can receive a complaint. Most complaints are likely to be handled by Customer Service Representatives (CSRs). They will be responsible for ensuring that the complaint is recorded, flagged as a complaint and, if possible, resolved immediately. The CSR will be responsible for forwarding complaints to the appropriate actioning officer where they cannot be resolved at the Customer Centre. They will also ask for some contact information so that they can let the person making the complaint know about the outcome.

3.2.1.5 What to do if you receive a complaint

If you are in the situation of accepting a complaint from a customer you need to do a number of things. First, note down the detail of the complaint and obtain contact information from the person making the complaint so that they can be contacted for more information if necessary. If the complaint is regarding a hazardous situation (ie, a situation that poses a threat to personal safety or property) contact the Customer or Call Centre with the details immediately. If the complaint is of a general or non urgent nature contact the Customer or Call Centre at your earliest possible convenience, by phone, calling in or email. Remember to provide your own name and contact details in case further information is required from you.

3.2.1.6 What type of complaint is being made?

The type of complaint being made will determine the action that needs to be taken. When a complaint is received in the Customer/Call Centre it is the responsibility of the CSR receiving it to assess its nature and ensure it is processed promptly or referred appropriately. Handling complaints quickly and effectively when they are made should reduce the number of complaints that require escalation.

3.2.2 Work requests

When a CSR receives a complaint that they assess to be a work request, they also need to decide whether it represents a hazardous situation or not. The CSR will make this decision based on the information provided by the customer.

3.2.2.1 Hazardous situations

A hazardous situation is one that represents an immediate risk to personal safety or property. When a CSR receives a complaint that represents a hazardous situation they will call and email the appropriate actioning officer with the details immediately. The actioning officer (or delegate) will attend within 2 hours. The situation will be resolved immediately if this is possible, otherwise the area will be made safe and the required work scheduled as soon as possible. Where the customer has provided contact details, they will be informed of the assessment and the eventual resolution of the situation.

3.2.2.2 Standard work requests

When a CSR receives a work request that does not represent a hazardous situation they will take details of the request and contact details of the customer. Where they can give the customer an indication of when the complaint is likely to be resolved they will do this. The Corporation is currently developing service standards which will allow us to provide more information to the customer as to when the complaint will be resolved. As these become elaborated CSRs will be able to give progressively more accurate timeframes for completion of work. The request will then be emailed to the appropriate actioning officer who will then schedule the work. Once the work is completed feedback will be provided to the customer if requested.

3.2.3 Requests/suggestions for changing the way Council provides services

Sometimes a complaint is really a suggestion for Council to change the way it delivers a service. It may or may not be possible to implement suggestions such as these. However, they are worth encouraging as they assist the Corporation in identifying improvements and assessing the changing expectations of customers.

On receipt of a complaint/suggestion of this nature, the CSR will forward it to the appropriate actioning officer who will make a decision as to whether it will be implemented. Wherever possible the customer will receive a thank you letter or phone call for their suggestion and an indication of the actions that have been taken in response to their suggestion/complaint.

3.2.4 Requests for a response to an issue

Sometimes complaints are a request for a response to an issue. Wherever possible, CSRs will try to provide a response at the time the complaint is made with guidance from the responsible area of the Corporation. In this way, the Corporation hopes that the majority of complaints can be resolved quickly and effectively. Where a customer is not satisfied with the response from the Corporation they may want to formalise the complaint. This can be done by submitting a written request to the Corporation through the mail or at the Customer Centre. Alternatively, CSRs may formalise the request over the phone.

Once a formal request for a response has been received an acknowledgment letter will be sent to the customer. If the complaint is due to some matter that is governed by Council regulations or it is the first formal complaint on a particular matter the request will be sent to the appropriate departmental manager. An acknowledgment letter will be sent to the customer and a response provided within agreed timeframes. Where a customer is not satisfied with the response they have received the first time round (and the complaint is not of a routine nature, eg, parking infringements) then they will be sent directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). All formal complaints of this nature will be acknowledged when they are received and a response provided in the agreed timeframe.

Should the customer be unhappy with the response to their formal request they may wish to access the grievance procedure described separately.

3.2.5 What to do if you receive a compliment

Compliments are important too. Where a complaint helps us to understand what we are doing wrong, a compliment helps us to understand what we are doing well. Both complaints and compliments help us to understand the expectations of our customers, but let's admit it - we'd rather get compliments! So it's very important that compliments are tracked and reported - especially to the person or department with which they are concerned.

When a customer calls or phones into the Centre, or writes to the Corporation with a compliment, details will be logged by a CSR. The CSR will take as much detail as practicable (ie, name/department, what they did, why the customer was happy about it). Where the

compliment is about a Corporation employee, the CSR will phone or email the compliment to their direct manager. Where the compliment relates to a department or the Corporation generally the details will be forwarded to the departmental manager, the general manager and/or the CEO, as appropriate.

3.3 Roles & Responsibilities

3.3.1 Corporation Employee

As a Corporation employee your role with respect to complaints is quite straightforward. If you are in a position to hear of a customer complaint it is your responsibility to ensure that the customer knows how to have it resolved. If practicable you should take the details of the complaint and the contact details of the person making the complaint and forward them to the Customer Centre. If impracticable, provide the Customer Centre number so that the customer can make direct contact. Business cards have been provided to some mobile staff for this purpose. These can be also be obtained by request from the Customer Centre.

Remember, no matter how trivial a complaint may seem to you, the customer feels strongly about the issue and this must be respected. They may even have taken some time to build the courage up to complain. So be polite, take the details, don't evaluate the complaint, and make sure it gets into the resolution process. Just showing the Corporation takes complaints seriously is good public relations.

3.3.2 Customer Service Representative

CSRs will be the main point of contact for customer complaints. It will be their responsibility to resolve the complaint 'on the spot' if possible or forward the relevant information to the actioning officer.

3.3.3 Customer Service Manager

The role of the Customer Service Manager is to monitor the number and type of complaints being received by the Corporation. This is one way the Corporation can monitor the expectations of customers. The Customer Service Manager will also act as a resource to departmental and general managers in managing and actioning complaints they receive. The Customer Service Manager will ensure that the infrastructure to effectively monitor and act on customer complaints is in place and operating well.

3.3.4 Departmental Manager

Departmental managers will be responsible for resolving complaints relevant to their portfolios. While they may delegate this duty they will be ultimately responsible for the actions identified and their implementation in response to a complaint. Departmental managers

will also be responsible for ensuring their staff deal with complaints according to the Corporation's standards. Therefore, they will require a clear understanding of the processes

3.3.5 General Manager

General managers will be responsible for complaints that require cross-departmental resolutions and complaints that have not been able to be resolved at the departmental level.

3.3.6 Chief Executive Officer

The CEO is responsible for complaints on all serious matters and where the customer has not been satisfied with the Corporation's response the first time round for routine matters. The CEO will consult with the appropriate departments involved to ensure a resolution is achieved.

3.4 Tracking of Complaints

At each step of the resolution of a complaint it will be tracked on the customer service system. This will allow customers to enquire as to the progress of their complaint at any point.

3.5 Reporting

Regular reports will be generated for departments, divisions and the Corporation as a whole. This will help us to monitor changing customer expectations, assess how well our resolution processes are working and identify improvements to our service delivery.

4. Where to get more information

If you are unsure as to what to do with respect to a complaint you have a number of avenues open to you. Your departmental manager should be your first point of call. They have responsibility for understanding the Corporation's complaint procedures and mentoring staff in their implementation. CSRs will be able to provide you with helpful information about what is happening about the progress of a complaint. The Manager, Customer Service will be able to assist with enquiries and facilitate departments in resolving complaints should this be required.