## 1. PURPOSE

1.1 This Charter sets out Council's approach to managing customer enquiries, requests, or complaints, and sets Council's standards of service in responding to customers.

## 2. SCOPE

2.1 This Customer Service Charter follows the requirements of the Local Government Act 1993 and outlines Council's commitment to customers and provides a formalised process for making complaints. It outlines customers' rights; the standards customers can expect when dealing with Council, expectations for community interactions with Council staff and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with Council decisions or actions.

## 3. APPLICATION

3.1 Objective

(a) To provide a practical framework for customer service and to ensure that all staff respond in a courteous, consistent, timely and fair manner to all reasonable enquiries, requests for service, or complaints from customers; and

(b) To ensure, as far as is practicable, that Council resources are used efficiently and effectively when dealing with customers' enquiries, requests or complaints.

## 4. LEGISLATION

*Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)*
*Local Government Act 1993 (Tasmania) (s339F)*
*Personal Information Protection Act 2004*
*Right to Information Act 2009*

## 5. OUR SERVICE STANDARDS

### 5.1 What can you expect from Council staff and services:

- Treat all customers with respect;
- Assist customers in a polite and friendly manner;
- Listen to customers, and consider their views and needs;
- Provide complete and accurate information that is consistent and easy to understand;
- Explain what customers need to do;
- Explain any decision-making processes and timelines;
- Act on commitments;
- Respect customers privacy by treating all personal information confidentially;
- Be punctual for meetings and appointments;
- Provide safe and accessible Council facilities for ease of customer access; and
- When involving outside organisations Council are confident that those organisations follow and work within the Customer Service Charter.

## 6. ENQUIRIES AND SERVICE REQUESTS

### 6.1 When a customer visits or telephones the Council

The counter will be attended, and the telephone answered promptly, courteously and customers will be assisted with an enquiry directly without unnecessary referrals or transfers.

If Customer Service cannot assist with the enquiry the customer's enquiry will be forwarded to the appropriate department to follow up, and they will be provided with a time frame for when they can expect a response.

Telephone calls will be returned at the first opportunity however where information is not readily available verbal enquiries will be answered as soon as practically possible and within two (2) working days. Where a call goes to voicemail the call may not be returned unless a message is left.

### 6.2 When a customer writes or emails

Written requests or enquiries will be provided with an acknowledgement as soon as practically possible and within two (2) working days. The response will be either in full, or as an acknowledgement outlining the name of the department handling the matter. Such acknowledgement may be by telephone or in writing as appropriate. Council has no control over Australia Post, and delivery times are not included in the response time. All correspondence will be as prompt as possible, courteous, and in plain English.

Exceptions – specific timeframes that are prescribed by legislation.

## 7. CUSTOMER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### 7.1 Customer Rights

- The right to be greeted politely;
- The right to be listened to carefully so that Council understand and respond to you appropriately;
- The right to privacy and confidentiality;
- The right to lodge a complaint; and
- The right to review and appeal.

### 7.2 Customer Responsibilities

- To treat Council staff with courtesy - staff are entitled to a safe work space and abusive language and behaviour will not be tolerated;
- To respond to requests for information accurately, thoroughly and in a timely manner;
- To abide by legal requirements and other obligations that customers are to meet to be eligible for services sought;
- When responding to correspondence quote the file number on the letter; and
- Arrange an appointment for a complex enquiry or the need to see a specific Officer.

## 8. REQUEST FOR SERVICE

### 8.1 What is a service request?

- 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 services;
- A request for information or/and explanation of a policy or procedure; and
- 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;

A service request is an application to have Council or its representative take some form of action to provide or improve a Council service. Service requests may originate from residents, ratepayers or members of the public, elected members, contractors or staff.

Reports about noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of our services are all treated as requests. These requests are often serious matters and for these reasons regulatory requests may need to be in writing. This is because, for example, the request may result in enforcement proceedings or other legal proceedings being issued after an investigation is completed by the Council (as a regulatory authority).

There may be circumstances where it is necessary for a Customer to provide further information or documentation and to attend hearings to provide evidence arising from a request. Therefore, to investigate a request of a regulatory nature, and as part of due process, there may be a requirement for requests of a serious nature to be provided in writing.

## 9. CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

Feedback (compliments, complaints, and suggestions), assists Council in understanding the expectations of the community and this feedback enables council to continuously improve its processes and service standards.

### 9.1 What is a 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.

## 10. COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The Manager of each Department of the Council is responsible for handling complaints relevant to that Department. While most situations can usually be resolved at an early stage, there are times when they require detailed investigation. If a complaint is of a serious nature, it will be referred to the department Director or General Manager.

A formal acknowledgement of a complaint can be expected as soon as practically possible and within two (2) working days.

There are times when it is not possible to meet this deadline, e.g. where a complaint is a complex one. In these cases, Council will endeavour to keep the customer informed of progress.

### 10.1 Lodging a complaint

If there is no resolution after discussing the matter with the relevant Officer or Manager a complaint may be lodged in the following ways:

**Phone:** 6443 8333 (Wynyard) or 6439 7100 (Waratah)
**Email:** council@warwyn.tas.gov.au
**Visit:** 21 Saunders Street, Wynyard or Smith Street, Waratah
**Mail:** PO Box 168 Wynyard, TAS 7325
**Click:** on Feedback on our website https://www.warwyn.tas.gov.au/feedback

To assist Council in dealing with complaints a customer should include the following information:

- Date, time and location of events;
- What happened;
- 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
- State what is the ideal outcome to the complaint.

### 10.2 Internal review

Experience has shown that most complaints will be satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Officer or 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.

### 10.3 What if a customer is not happy with the resolution of a complaint?

Council is confident that it can resolve most complaints received, however, it is understood that Council may not be able to satisfy every customer on every occasion.

Sometimes there are difficult and complex decisions involving many people and individual customers do not get 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 Administration Appeals Process;
- The *Judicial Review Act 2000*; or
- 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:
Level 6, 86 Collins Street, Hobart 7000;
by mail: GPO Box 960, Hobart 7001;
Telephone: 1800 001 170
or by email ombudsman@ombudsman.tas.gov.au.

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.

## 11. CONSIDERATION OF A COMPLAINT

In considering a complaint the relevant Officer or 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;
- If a complaint is found to be valid, consider any necessary action to be taken to correct the faults identified; and
- Consider a review of the Council's procedure to avoid recurrence of any similar complaint in the future if necessary.

## 12. ABUSIVE CUSTOMERS

Any interaction with members of the community where personal abuse or inappropriate language is used, the communication may be terminated immediately by the Officer. If face to face, the Officer should walk away. If on a telephone, the Officer will terminate the call. If in email, the address may be blocked.

There are occasions when:

- The customer's request cannot be resolved to their satisfaction; or
- Correspondence contains personal abuse or inappropriate 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 in line with Council's Managing Unreasonable Conduct by Customers Policy GOV.042.

## 13. VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

All complaints received by Council will be treated with 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.

## 14. ANONOMOUS COMPLAINTS

When anonymous complaints are received they will only be acted on where the matter is considered to be serious and there is sufficient information in the complaint to enable an investigation to be undertaken.

## 15. PROTECTION OF CUSTOMER

Council will ensure that the reporting of complaints will not result in a customer experiencing any form of victimisation or retribution because of the complaint.

## 16. HOW YOU CAN CONTACT US

You can contact Council to make an enquiry, request for service or a complaint:

- In person by visiting Council's Offices during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday;
- By telephone on (03) 64 43 8333 during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday;
- By Email to council@warwyn.tas.gov.au; or
- By Internet by visiting www.warwyn.tas.gov.au

## 17. 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 *Personal Information Protection Act 2004* and the *Right to Information Act 2009*.

## 18. MEASURING PERFORMANCE

The General Manager 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.* In addition to this, a quarterly Customer Service Report will be provided to Councillors.

## 19. AVAILABILITY

This Customer Service Charter is available for public inspection at the Council office during normal business hours or on the Council's website in accordance with Section 339F(3) of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

## 20. REVIEW

This Customer Service Charter will be reviewed at least once every 2 years in accordance with Section 339F(4) of the *Local Government Act 1993.*