



Meander Valley Council  
Working Together

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER**

*(S.339F Local Government Act 1993)*

### **CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER**

Meander Valley Council is committed to providing quality service to the community. We are continually striving to improve the level of service through employee training, new technology and consultation.

This *Customer Service Charter* is in compliance with the requirements of Section 339F of the *Local Government Act 1993* and outlines our commitment to customers in accordance with our Community Strategic Plan including principles relating to services provided by Council and provides a formal process for making complaints. It outlines customers' rights, the standards customers can expect when dealing with Council and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with Council decisions or actions.

### **OUR COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Meander Valley Council is committed to providing timely, efficient, consistent and quality services undertaken by polite and helpful Officers that meet our customers' expectations.

We place great emphasis on the efficient handling of complaints and we will always strive for the best possible solution.

#### **As part of our commitment to you, we will:**

- respect, listen and care for you and your concerns
- identify ourselves in all communication with you
- respect your privacy and confidentiality
- aim to communicate clearly and in plain language
- be positive and receptive to new ideas
- take a fair, balanced and long-term approach with our decisions
- provide relevant and up-to-date information relating to our services via our website and publications

### **WHO IS A CUSTOMER**

A customer is any person or organisation having dealings with the Council.

## **OUR SERVICE STANDARDS**

### **At all times, we will:**

- treat customers courteously and with respect
- deal with customers in a polite, friendly and 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 our commitments in a timely manner
- value customers privacy by treating all personal information confidentially
- be punctual for meetings and appointments
- provide Council ID if requested
- leave a "visit card" with our name and contact number following a visit to a customer's residence if that customer is absent at the time

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

Staff who attend the counter and answer the telephone will courteously deal with an enquiry directly without unnecessary referrals or transfers.

However, if they cannot deal with the enquiry they will provide the customer with the name of the person to whom the request will be referred. In the event that the information is not readily available they will request that person to contact the customer directly.

Telephone calls will be returned at the first opportunity however where information is not readily available verbal enquiries will be answered within 5 (five) working days.

### **When a customer writes or emails**

We will respond to all written requests or enquiries within 5 (five) working days of receipt. Our response will be either in full, or as an acknowledgement outlining the name 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.

### **Guiding Steps**

When dealing with enquiries from the community we will undertake the following steps to obtain a complete understanding of the request:

- get the whole story
- explain the process and accept responsibility
- see first hand
- be solution focussed but consistent
- assess risk and escalate accordingly
- keep everyone informed
- document everything
- keep data and measure performance
- follow up and provide closure

## **OUR EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMER**

### **To make our job easier in providing 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 enquiry, planning enquiry, building enquiry or a need to see a specific Officer
- phone the Officer nominated on correspondence sent to the customer and quoting the file number on the letter

### **Dealing With Difficult Customers**

There may be times when a customer interaction is difficult to manage, across all communication channels, being written correspondence, emails, face to face and over the telephone.

When interaction with community members involves personal abuse or offensive language, the communication may be terminated immediately by the Officer. If face-to-face, the Officer will walk away. If on a telephone, the Officer will terminate the call. If in electronic communication, the address may be blocked. In these situations it is preferable prior to terminating the communications, to advise the customer that you are finding their behaviour is offensive and ask the customer to please change this to a civil behaviour or we will terminate the communication. This message can be delivered by interrupting the customer. It is not necessary to wait for a break in whatever the customer may be saying or doing. If the behaviour continues after this, then simply terminate the communication. Do not enter into further discussion regarding the nature of the behaviour.

If an Officer feels threatened by the language or behaviour of the customer, they may notify the Police and as soon as possible notify the General Manager.

There may be occasions when

- the person's issues cannot be dealt with to the customer's satisfaction and it is not possible for Council officers to continue to respond; or
- correspondence contains personal abuse or offensive 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.

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE REQUESTS**

We have a Customer Service Request (CSR) System that records, monitors and reports on requests we receive.

### **What is a request?**

A request may be:

- for service, for example garbage and recycling collection

- for information or an explanation of a policy or procedure
- for reporting damaged or faulty infrastructure
- about noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of our service
- for Council to provide new Infrastructure

The request is logged into Council's CSR System, assigned a priority and allocated to an Action Officer. We aim to achieve at least a 95% compliance standard.

## **COMPLAINTS**

There are formal and informal complaints.

### **What is a formal complaint?**

A formal complaint must be in writing. It is an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision (outside 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.

Any Council Officer having difficulty in determining a complaint from a customer service request will seek advice of the Departmental Director or General Manager.

### **What is not a formal complaint?**

Many of the issues raised with Council are called "complaints" because the customer is unhappy about the situation. However, they are 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 process.

Examples of matters that are not formal complaints are:

- a request for service (unless there was no response to a first 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
- reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure
- reports about noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of Council's service

### **Complaints Management Process**

The Director of each Department of the Council is responsible for handling complaints relevant to that Department. If a complaint is about a Director, or of a very serious nature, it will be referred to the General Manager, or if about the General Manager, the Mayor.

Irrespective of the manner in which the complaint was received, a response to the complaint can be expected within twenty (20) working days. If a Councillor has submitted a complaint on a customer's behalf we will respond to the Councillor within twenty (20) working days.

There are times when it is not possible to meet this deadline, eg. where a complaint is a complex one and Councillors are to be briefed on the outcome of the investigations. In these cases we will keep the customer informed of progress.

### **Type of Complaint**

A complaint may be lodged verbally (by telephone or at the counter) and may be responded to verbally by phoning or by meeting with the Director, or a Senior Officer, of the relevant Department to discuss the complaint.

If the complaint relates to a complex matter or there is no resolution from discussing the matter with the relevant Director or Senior Officer, a statement should be made in writing by the customer setting out the complaint as simply as possible.

To assist Council in dealing with a complaint, a customer should include the following if relevant:

- a) date, times and location of events
- b) what happened
- c) to whom the customer has spoken (names, position in the Council and dates)
- d) copies or references to letter or documents relevant to the complaint
- e) state what the customer hopes to achieve as an outcome to the complaint

### **Internal Review**

Experience has shown that the majority of complaints are satisfactorily resolved by the relevant Director. However, a person 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 to 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 already available and follow up points requiring clarification
- look at the Council Policies which might have a bearing on the complaint
- meet with the relevant officer to discuss the matters in the complaint
- consider whether or not the Council is at fault
- consider any necessary action to be taken to correct any faults identified
- 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.

### **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, as determined by the General Manager, then 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 Customer**

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?**

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 our process in dealing with a complaint, other avenues remain for the customer to explore.

These include:

- available Administrative Appeals Process;
- the *Judicial Review Act 2000*;
- contacting external agencies which can review actions and decisions taken by the Council.

These agencies 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 NAB House, Level 6, 86 Collins Street Hobart. (GPO Box 960 HOBART, 7001) Ph: 1800 001 170
- Local Government Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Level 5, 15 Murray Street, Hobart, 7000. (GPO Box 123 HOBART, 7001) Ph. 1300 135 513.

While a customer is entitled to refer a complaint directly to these Bodies at any time, customers are encouraged to allow Council the opportunity to resolve the complaint in the first instance.

### **Complaints against non-compliance or offence**

- (1) A person may make a complaint to the Director of Local Government –
  - (a) that a Council, Councillor or General Manager has failed to comply with requirements under this of any other Act; or
  - (b) that a councillor, the general manager or employee of a council may have committed an offence under this Act.

- (2) A complaint must:
  - (a) be in writing; and
  - (b) identify the complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made; and
  - (c) give particulars of the grounds of the complaint; and
  - (d) be verified by statutory declaration; and
  - (e) be lodged with the Director, Local Government Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Level 5, 15 Murray Street, Hobart (GPO Box 123 HOBART, 7001).
- (3) The Director may require a complainant to give further particulars of the complaint supported by a Statutory Declaration.
- (4) The Director may carry out an investigation without receiving a complaint specified in subsection (1).
- (5) The Director may determine the procedure for handling complaints or investigating matters.

For further information please refer to: [ww.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/local\\_government/making\\_a\\_complaint](http://ww.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/local_government/making_a_complaint)

## **HOW YOU CAN CONTACT US**

You can contact us to make an enquiry, lodge a customer service request or a complaint:

- In person by visiting Council's Offices at 26 Lyall Street, Westbury during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday
- By phoning 6393 5300 during the hours of 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday. Council provides an after-hours Emergency Service on the same number.
- By post to Meander Valley Council, PO Box 102, WESTBURY 7303
- By email to [mail@mvc.tas.gov.au](mailto:mail@mvc.tas.gov.au)
- Via the Internet by visiting the Council website at [www.meander.tas.gov.au](http://www.meander.tas.gov.au).
- Via Social Media: Facebook – [www.facebook.com/MeanderValleyCouncil](http://www.facebook.com/MeanderValleyCouncil)

## **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*.

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

## **REPORTING**

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*.

## **AVAILABILITY**

This *Customer Service Charter* is available

- For public inspection at the Council Office during normal office hours
- On the Council's website free of charge

## **REVIEW**

This *Customer Service Charter* is to be reviewed within 12 months after each Council election in accordance with section 339F (4) of the *Local Government Act 1993*.