

► COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

POLICY NUMBER:	64 (C)
NAME OF POLICY:	COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	February 2018
DATE APPROVED:	21 February 2017
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	General Manager Corporate Services
REFERENCES:	Local Government Act 1989 Information Privacy Act 2000 Local Government Regulations Other Federal and State Legislation Other Council or Management policies and procedures

BEST VALUE PRINCIPLES

Hepburn Shire Council has the responsibility to provide its ratepayers with best value, with all services provided by Council meeting the expectations in terms of quality and cost. In providing this, all services need to be accessible, responsive to the needs of the community, considerate of the natural environment and subject to continuous improvement.

To achieve the best over life outcome for Council's expenditures, which meets quality and service expectations, there will be periodic review of services against best on offer in both the public and private sectors.

All Council staff members are responsible for supporting best value principles in their normal day to day actions to ensure services are recognised by the community as delivering best value.

INTRODUCTION

The Hepburn Shire Council provides a diverse range of services and facilities to its residents and members of the broader regional community. Council recognises that from time to time, service delivery does not meet our required standards.

Hepburn Shire Council welcomes complaints as well as compliments, and will endeavour to use them as an important tool in monitoring and responding to customer expectation to improve services to ratepayers and residents. Council uses complaints as a source of feedback to guide best practice.

In order to assist the Hepburn Shire Council to respond appropriately, all complaints need to be documented and assessed and where necessary, corrective actions taken, as part of an on-going process.

PURPOSE

The intent of this policy is to provide clear guidelines regarding management of complaints to ensure that wherever possible, a positive solution is achieved in an efficient manner.

This policy sets out the responsibility of the Hepburn Shire Council to:

- Provide a clear process for customers and community members to have their complaints heard, considered and responded to;
- Enhance the relationship between Hepburn Shire Council and its customers;
- Demonstrate that the Hepburn Shire Council has a commitment to dealing with complaints fairly, confidentially and in a manner that is respectful to the complainant;
- Provide a mechanism for responding to complaints in a timely and courteous manner;
- Provide a systematic framework to monitor complaints in an endeavour to improve the quality and responsiveness of all services provided by Council.

DEFINITION

Council has defined a complaint as:

'an expression of dissatisfaction with a Council policy, Councillor, procedure, staff member/s, fees and charges, agents, quality of service, or the complaints-handling process itself'.

A complaint is not a:

1. Request (e.g. to get a road issue fixed)
2. Insurance claim
3. Protected Disclosure (i.e. complaints about fraud and corrupt conduct, such complaints are managed by the Protected Disclosure process, see Council's Protected Disclosure Policy for more details)
4. Planning objection (planning objections have an existing process for review and appeal details are available on Council's website)
5. Local-laws dispute
6. Disputes about decisions to impose special rates or charges or the validity of an election
7. Feedback related to proposals for public comment (e.g. proposals for comment made under section 223 of the Victorian Local Government Act 1989)
8. Matters over which Council has no jurisdiction or is not empowered to resolve

The above matters will be referred appropriately, based on Council's policies and processes.

A complaint can however be submitted about how Council has handled any of the above matters, except something that is not Council's responsibility.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCESS

Complaints will be handled fairly and in a consistent manner. Complainants will not be disadvantaged by the complaint process.

Anonymous complaints will be handled to the extent that it is possible to do so, without further contact with the complainant.

Complainants will be kept informed of the progress of their complaint and of the final resolution. Complainants will be advised of avenues for further review of their complaint, if they are not satisfied with the resolution proposed.

Any personal information (such as name, address and/or contact telephone number), requested from the person making the complaint, will only be used or disclosed in accordance with the Privacy and Information Privacy Act 2000 and Council's Privacy policy. All information collected in the lodging of and/or investigation of a complaint will be handled and disclosed on a 'need to know' basis.

The provision of personal information will be restricted to officers within Hepburn Shire Council or any of its agents who require this information to complete their investigation of the complaint or to communicate the result of the investigation to the complainant. Where necessary, the complainant's name will be provided to persons involved in the complaints process (i.e. the subject of the complaint) to enable effective investigation.

The supply of all information is voluntary however if the information sought is not provided or is insufficient (i.e. an anonymous complaint), Hepburn Shire Council may not be able to process the complaint nor provide feedback or progress reports to the complainant.

HOW TO SUBMIT A COMPLAINT TO HEPBURN SHIRE COUNCIL

Complaints must be submitted in writing on the **Customer Complaint Form** or via:

- On-line:** hepburn.vic.gov.au
- Email:** shire@hepburn.vic.gov.au
- Post:** P.O Box 21 Daylesford Victoria 3460
- In person:** at one of the Council's customer service points
- Phone:** (03) 5348 2306 *(where you will be assisted to complete the form)*

WHAT TO INCLUDE

Complaints must include the full name, address (residential and email) and contact telephone number of the person lodging the complaint and a brief description of the complaint including what actions have been taken by the complainant to address the issue.

WHO DEALS WITH MY COMPLAINT?

- Complaints about General Managers will be referred to the CEO.
- Complaints about Councillors will be referred to the Mayor.
- Complaints about the CEO will be referred to the Mayor.
- Complaints about the Mayor will be referred to the Deputy Mayor.

- Employee related complaints, other than those relating to General Managers or the CEO will be referred to the relevant Manager or General Manger (Leadership Team member).
- General complaints will be referred to the relevant Manager or General Manager.

RIGHTS OF OFFICERS, COUNCILLORS AND CEO

In the case where complaints are made about Officers, Councillors and the CEO, the right to provide evidence and a response to the investigation will be offered, ensuring natural justice.

Council will take all reasonable steps to ensure that complainants are protected from any detrimental action.

WHO DO I CONTACT TO RECEIVE ASSISTANCE?

Complainants who require assistance to prepare their complaint should contact the General Manager Corporate Services by telephoning **(03) 5348 2306** or send an email to **shire@hepburn.vic.gov.au**.

The General Manager Corporate Services can clarify the complaint process and assist you to determine if you should lodge a Complaint, Request, Insurance Claim, Protected Disclosure, Planning Objection or Appeal, a By-Laws dispute or feedback related to Section 86 Committees or proposals for public comment.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Acknowledgement of receipt of a complaint will be issued within 2 working days to the complainant.

Outcome of complaints will be formally communicated back to the complainant within 15 working days of receipt of the complaint. Where the investigation will exceed 15 working days, Council will inform the complainant of the need for additional time to complete the investigation, within the 15 working day period.

It is important to understand that some matters are not categorised as complaints or Council may not have the jurisdiction to resolve the complaint (for example, the matter may be in a State Government related area). In these instances, the complainant will be advised that the matter is not under Council's jurisdiction within 15 working days.

WHAT IF I AM NOT SATISFIED WITH THE OUTCOME?

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and requests a review, the review will be conducted by a senior officer who was not involved in the original complaint.

Timeframes for appeals of complaints will be based on the nature of the appeal and the amount of further investigation required, Council will endeavour to respond to appeals of complaints within 15 working days. Response times for complaints referred to the Victorian Ombudsman are outside the control of Council.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the resolution or outcome of Council's response to a complaint, they will be advised of any external avenues through which the complaint may be pursued, including that they may contact the Victorian Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with the process or outcome of a complaint, or review of a complaint.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINT FORM

Name:

Postal Address:

Residential Address:

Telephone:

Mobile:

Email:

Details of complaint:

I request that you review my complaint: *(Please attach any/all relevant information)*

What would be your preferred outcome?

Complainant's Signature*:

Date:

*If form submitted by email a signature is not required