



George Town Council

Customer Service Charter Policy

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1. Introduction

The George Town Council Customer Service Charter Policy sets out Council's service standards, and explains what you – as our customer – can do if we have not delivered a service to that standard.

This Policy is applicable to the following persons:

- Council employees, including all contractors and volunteers; and
- Customers defined as any person or organisation that engages with Council, or seeks product, service or information offered by Council.

2. Type of Policy

This Policy is recognised as a “Statutory” Policy in that it requires adoption by Council due to a legislative requirement.

3. Policy Objective

This Customer Service Charter is in compliance with the requirements of Section 339F (1) through (5) of the Local Government Act 1993 and outlines our commitment to customers in accordance with our Strategic Plan and provides a formalised process for making complaints. It outlines customer's rights, the standards customers can expect when dealing with Council and what a customer can do if dissatisfied with Council decisions or actions.

4. Link to Strategic Plan

Goal 05

Ensure Council listens to and understands community needs and continues to make responsible decisions on behalf of the community.

Key Objective 1

Continue to improve Council communication with the community, including celebrating the successes and achievements.

5. Legislative Requirements

The following legislation should be considered in conjunction with this policy:

- Local Government Act 1993, in particular Section 339F (1) through (5) (the Act)
- Personal Information Protection Act 2004
- Privacy Act 1988
- Right to Information Act 2009

6. Risk Considerations

This Policy aligns itself with objectives for risk management at George Town Council, namely:

- Sets performance standards and regular review and improve practices and procedures.

7. Definitions

"Customer" means any person or any organisation that has any form of dealings with Council. This includes residents, ratepayers, shopkeepers, business operators, Council staff, contractors and elected members.

"Complaint" means an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision (outside of a structured process).

"Request for Service" is an application to have Council or its representative take some form of action to provide or improve a Council service.

"Enquiry" means an appeal for information. An answer to be provided to a specific question or decision to be made in relation to a specific matter.

"A customer compliment" means an expression of satisfaction, appreciation and acknowledgement of the work done by George Town Council or a George Town Council employee/s.

8. Our Commitment to Customer Service

George Town Council aims to be innovative, responsive and maintain a strong customer focus to ensure the ongoing quality of services to our customers and at all times we aspire to:

- Identify ourselves by first name and section.
- Be professional, polite and attentive at all times.
- Listen, clarify and discuss your requirements.
- Make all efforts to satisfy your request at the time of your visit.
- Respond to all telephone messages at the first opportunity (where information is not readily available, verbal enquiries will be answered within 5 working days).
- Acknowledge written correspondence within 5 working days in writing or telephone if appropriate (customers with complex enquiries will be advised when they will receive a response to their request or enquiry depending on Council's meeting cycles and the complexity of the information sought and its availability).
- Correspondence associated with a statutory process will be resolved in accordance with legislative requirements and timeframes.
- Provide a telephone service for after hour emergency calls.

George Town Council places great emphasis on the efficient handling of complaints. Our aim at all times is to provide a quality service. We may not be able to provide complete satisfaction but we will always strive for the best possible solution.

9. Our Expectations of the Customer

Council requires that customers assist Council staff in our service delivery by:

- Treating staff with courtesy and respect.
- Respecting the rights of other customers.
- Supplying us with accurate and complete information.
- Working with us to resolve problems.
- Providing Council with feedback.
- Respecting our community.

10. Customer Service Request System

A customer service request is:

- A request for service, for example garbage and recycling collection;
- A request for information for an explanation of a policy or procedure;
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure;
- Reports about noise, dogs, nuisances, unauthorised building work or similar issues that fall into the regulatory aspect of our service;
- A request for Council to provide new infrastructure.

Requests can be logged via Council's website www.georgetown.tas.gov.au, in person or sent via the mail to George Town Council, PO Box 161, George Town TAS 7253, or email council@georgetown.tas.gov.au.

The request is logged into Council's Customer Request System, assigned a priority and allocated an Action Officer.

11. Abusive Customers

No Council employee is required to abide threatening, abusive or insulting conduct from customers. In cases where a customer behaves in such a way the Council employee may immediately terminate dealings with them.

If dealing with a customer face to face, we will advise you that we are terminating the conversation with you due to your behaviour, ask you to leave the building and then the officer will walk away. If on the telephone we will advise you that we are terminating the conversation with you due to your behaviour and then the officer will terminate the call. If in an e-mail, the address you sent the email from may be blocked to prevent further contact, after advising the customer that this will happen.

A member of the public has no right to enter private offices or some areas in Council buildings unless invited by a duly authorised Council employee.

If a staff member feels threatened by the language or behaviour of a customer or if the person fails to leave an area that is not open to the public when asked to do so, the Police may be called.

The General Manager may decide to restrict or cease responses to any person who is abusive in his or her dealings with Council or who refuses to accept that Council has done all that it can to assist. A decision of this nature will be communicated to the person in writing.

12. Compliments

The George Town Council places great emphasis on the delivery of customer service. We try hard to ensure that we provide up to date knowledge and promote exceptional customer service.

If a George Town Council staff member has given you exceptional service in any way or if you have had a positive experience dealing with the George Town Council please let us know. Recognising outstanding efforts assists us in encouraging and promoting excellent customer service across the organisation.

13. Feedback

Council accepts that it is not possible to please all of the people all of the time and acknowledges from time to time that some customers will not be satisfied with or supportive of decisions. We acknowledge your right to provide feedback both positive and negative whilst also acknowledging that the Council's employees should not be subject to unwarranted criticism or abuse.

14. Complaints

There are many types of complaints; however, a formal complaint must be in writing.

What is a formal complaint?

A formal complaint is a written 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 Bylaw) specifically makes provision for an appeal, internal or external review of a decision.

Any Council Officer having difficulty in determining a complaint as from a customer service request should seek advice of the General Manager.

What is not a formal complaint?

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; 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 process.

Type of Complaint

A complaint may be lodged verbally (by telephone or over the counter) and may be responded to verbally by phoning or by meeting with the Director/Manager of the relevant Department to discuss the complaint.

If the complaint is of a complex matter or there is no resolution from discussing the matter with the relevant Director/Manager, a statement should be made in writing setting out the complaint as simply as possible. To assist Council in dealing with your complaint a customer should include as much information as possible, such as date/s, time/s and location of events. The customer should also state what they hope to achieve as an outcome of the complaint.

Whilst most complaints can usually be resolved quickly by the relevant Director/Manager, there are times when a detailed investigation is required. If it will take time, we will keep you informed of the progress of your complaint.

14. Complaints (Cont.)

If a person is not satisfied with the outcome they 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.

The relevant Director/Manager 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.

If a customer is not satisfied with the resolution of the complaint?

Although Council is confident that the majority of complaints received can be resolved, we understand that we may not be able to satisfy every customer on every occasion.

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 Administrative Appeals Process;
- The Judicial Review Act 2000;
- Contact external agencies which can review actions and decisions taken by the Council, which include:
 - The Ombudsman at the Ombudsman's Office on 1800 001 170 (free call from a landline nationally, but call charges may apply from a mobile phone or pay phone), or by email at ombudsman@ombudsman.tas.gov.au. The Ombudsman is located at NAB House, Level 6, 86 Collins Street, Hobart TAS 7000 (GPO Box 960 Hobart TAS 7001).
 - Local Government Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet GPO Box 123 Hobart 7001. Ph: 03 6232 7022.

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 a Council, a Councillor or General Manager has failed to comply with requirements under this or any other Act; or
- That a Councillor, General Manager or an employee of a Council may have committed an offence under this Act.

14. Complaints (Cont.)

Complaints must be in writing, identifying the complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made, giving particulars of the grounds of the complaint and must be verified by statutory declaration and lodged with the Director, Local Government Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet, GPO Box 123 Hobart 7001.

15. How you can contact us

- In person by visiting Council's offices at 16-18 Anne Street, George Town during the hours of 8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday
- By phoning 6382 8800 or faxing 6382 8899 during the hours of 8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday
- By phoning 6382 8800 after hours in the case of an emergency
- By post to PO Box 161 George Town 7253
- By email to council@georgetown.tas.gov.au
- Via the internet by visiting the Council website at www.georgetown.tas.gov.au

16. Privacy

As a customer of George Town Council you can expect your privacy respected and your personal information protected under the Personal Information Protection Act 2004 and the Right to Information Act 2009.

17. Reporting

In accordance with Section 339F(5) of the Act, the General Manager is to provide the Council with a report at least once a year of the number and nature of complaints received.

18. Implementation of Policy

Responsibility

Responsibility for the administration of this Policy rests with the General Manager.

Date of Approval:	16 th November 2016
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Commencement Date:	16 th November 2016
Related Council Documents:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • George Town Personal Information Protection Policy No. 02 • George Town Policy Development, Approval and Review Policy No. 09 • George Town Information Disclosure Policy No. 28
Next Review Date:	2018
Publication of Policy:	This Policy will be made publicly available via Council's website or in paper form on payment in accordance with Council's current fees and charges schedule.