



Customer experience policy

Classification	Policy
Strategic reference	Goal 4 Organisational : Effective governance and organisational efficiencies
Relevant legislation	Local Government Act 1999
Relevant documents	Internal review of Council decisions policy Public interest disclosure policy Public interest disclosure procedure Council members conduct complaint handling policy
Responsible officer	Chief Executive Officer
Date adopted	December 2020
Next review date	December 2023

1. Purpose

This is a service level policy.

Southern Mallee District Council is committed to delivering the highest level of service to its customers and ensuring this high level of service is offered across all forms of communication, including face to face, phone, written correspondence, web site and social media.

Section 270 of the Local Government Act 1999 requires Council to establish policies and procedures to respond to reasonable requests for the provision of a service by Council or for the improvement of a service provided by Council and to deal with complaints about the actions of the Council, employees and/or other persons acting on behalf of the Council.

The purpose of the policy is to:

- Provide a customer experience across all aspects of Council business that is consistent, professional and treats every customer with respect, courtesy, fairness and responsiveness;
- Provide guidance on what may constitute a reasonable request for a service or an improvement to a service;
- Provide clarity on response times for different types of communications;
- Distinguish between requests, complaints and feedback to Council and give direction on management of requests and complaints; and
- Establish a standardised process for assessing and processing requests and complaints.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Council staff and volunteers who have contact with the public and is applicable to:

- All aspects of customer interactions
- All requests for service and complaints made to Southern Mallee District Council, from individuals and organisations that utilise the services provided by Council.

Requests for review of Council decisions should be referred to the mechanisms identified in the following policy:

- Internal review of Council decisions policy

3. Policy statement

Council is committed to the provision of a quality experience to customers and aims to provide services fairly and efficiently. It also assesses reasonable requests for the provision of new or increased services and monitors requests to identify ways in which it can proactively improve its services.

Council also recognises the importance of complaints to the organisation and regards them as opportunities to improve its services by resolving complaints in a prompt, impartial and just manner. Complaints provide the organisation with an opportunity to gather information on a variety of services and service delivery methods and to identify customer needs and expectations. This information helps Council work towards improving customer experience.

4. Guiding principles

- **Courtesy** – Council will provide a customer experience which is based on quality and pride in the services delivered to the community by using common sense, compassion and courtesy.
- **Responsiveness** – Council will be responsive to the needs of the community.
- **Fairness** – Council will be open, honest and will follow through with our commitment.
- **Respect** – Council will treat all customers respectfully and in an equitable manner.

5. How to make a reasonable request for service

In processing requests for service, emphasis will be placed on:

- Public safety and emergencies;
- Fulfilling Council's strategic and business plans; and
- Using Council resources efficiently and effectively.

The operations of Council are based on a range of planned actions, many of which have been the subject of community consultation processes. The annual budget is set, and the rates determined, to fund a specific range of activities, which includes responding to reasonable requests as well as the completion of business plans and public works. Requests for service are considered in this context.

A person can make a request for a service in writing by email, letter or Council's online service request system. Verbal requests are discouraged for all but the most basic request to ensure Council has a clear and documented request. In determining how to respond to a request for service, Council will consider the community need in light of:

- An assessment of risk;
- Statutory responsibilities;
- The content of council's strategic management plans, annual business plans, annual works program and the annual budget;
- Relevant Council policies and codes; and
- Established service standards and response times for regular council activities.

In council's experience, most requests for existing Council services fit within well established guidelines which will be explained to the customer/applicant at the outset. Where further evaluation is necessary before committing Council to undertake the work, the applicant will be informed accordingly.

Other requests may be best suited to scheduling to coincide with work in a particular locality or season. Reasonable requests for additional major works or new services will be referred to Council for consideration as part of the next annual budget cycle review and public consultation.

If a request cannot be fulfilled in a reasonable timeframe or is a service that is not the responsibility of the Council to deliver, the applicant will be advised, including an explanation of why this decision was taken.

5.1 Timeframes for response

Council will respond to all written requests within 5 business days. Where requests are unable to be responded to within 5 business days, the customer will be advised of the process and the anticipated timeframe for a response.

The circumstances of individual requests for service will vary greatly. Routine requests are often subject to established service response standards. Requests for additional major works or new services will need to be referred to Council for consideration as part of the next annual budget cycle of review and public consultation.

All phone enquiries from customers will be responded to by Council within 48 hours. If the phone enquiry is a request for anything other than a basic matter the customer will be encouraged to submit a request in writing to receive a response.

Council will respond to email and online service requests by return email. Letters of request will receive a letter response. Phone enquiries will receive a return phone call but no written response.

Council will respond to phone calls within 2 business days.

6. Complaint process

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a product or service delivered by the organisation or its representatives that have failed to reach the standard stated, implied or expected. This includes complaints about a service that has been, or should have been delivered.

Complaints can originate from members of the public, elected members, contractors or staff. A customer may only register a complaint in writing. Where required, assistance will be made available in preparing a written request, including the use of an interpreter, or in providing assistance with a disability.

All staff are empowered to handle complaints in the first instance and it is preferred they are dealt with promptly at the initial point of contact. Where this is not possible, we will seek to resolve the complaint as soon as possible and acknowledge the customer within 5 business days.

The principles of natural justice will be observed. This means processes will be fair, equitable and reasonable. All parties will have access to relevant information and are able to respond where relevant.

The CEO has the discretion to refer the complaint to an independent third party for mediation, conflict resolution or neutral evaluation where the CEO believes appropriate.

6.1 Complaints involving a representative of Southern Mallee District Council

There are many representatives of Southern Mallee District Council. Complaints of this nature are handled differently depending on the representative involved.

- a. **Staff member** – this may relate to how a staff member has behaved or undertaken their responsibilities. All complaints regarding a staff member are referred to the appropriate manager.
- b. **Chief executive officer** – this may relate to how the CEO has behaved or undertaken their responsibilities. All complaints regarding the CEO are handled in accordance with the Complaints handling policy.
- c. **Council member** - this may relate to how a Council member has conducted themselves or undertaken their responsibilities. All complaints regarding Council members are handled in accordance with the Council Members Conduct Complaint Handling Policy.
- d. **Contractor** - this may relate to how a contractor has conducted themselves or undertaken their responsibilities. All complaints are referred to the relevant manager/supervisor responsible for the specific work being undertaken by the contractor.
- e. **Volunteer** – this may relate to how a volunteer has conducted themselves or undertaken their responsibilities. All complaints regarding volunteers are referred to the relevant manager/supervisor.

6.2 Complaints governed by legislation or statutory review

Council may be limited in its authority by policies and/or legislation. When a customer complains about a problem which exceeds Council's jurisdiction they may be referred to an external source.

It is important that the complainant is provided with details of the relevant authority and policy and/or legislation to assist them to understand Council's role.

6.3 Complaints disclosing public interest information

The community has a right to demand that Council conducts itself with integrity, honesty and diligence.

If you have formed a reasonable suspicion that this is not happening, and you consider the conduct could raise a potential issue of corruption, misconduct or maladministration in public administration, then you should consider making a complaint or report to the Office for Public Integrity, the contact details are:

Office of Public Integrity
Level 1, 55 Currie Street Adelaide,
GPO Box 11066, Adelaide SA 5001
08 8207 1777

6.4 Complaints under the public interest disclosure (PID) Act

Council supports the appropriate disclosure of public interest information. Public interest Information falls into two categories:

1. Environmental and health Information

- Information that raises a potential issue of a substantial risk to the environment or to the health or safety of the public generally, or significant section of the public

2. Public administration information

- Information that raises a potential issue of corruption, misconduct or maladministration in public administration

What is an appropriate disclosure of public interest information?

Environmental and health information disclosure

An appropriate disclosure made to a relevant authority (e.g Council)

- informant (ie the person making the disclosure) believes on *reasonable grounds* that the information is true (or may be true, and is of *sufficient significance* to justify disclosure so truth may be investigated) and
- that the disclosure is made to the Responsible Officer, member, officer or employee of the Council

Public administration information disclosure

- informant *reasonably suspects* the information raises a potential issue of corruption, misconduct or maladministration in public administration
- informant is a Public Officer
- that the disclosure is made to a
 - Responsible Officer or a person responsible for the supervision of public officer or Responsible Officer (for a disclosure about a Public Officer) or
 - made to a member, officer or employee of Council (in relation to a disclosure made about a location within the Council area)
- wants to have their information kept confidential and have the protections under the PID Act

Council's management of the assessment and investigation of these disclosures is contained in its Public interest disclosure procedure.

Sometimes complaints regarding a Council decision, policy, procedure, service or fee require a formal application to be lodged and, in this instance, the formal complaint will then be handled in accordance with Council's Internal Review of Council Decisions Policy and Procedure.

7. Other options

While Council prefers to resolve requests for review directly with our customers, it does not negate customers' rights to seek an external review of a decision through the State Ombudsman

Ombudsman SA
Level 8/95 Grenfell St, Adelaide SA 5000
Adelaide SA 5000
PO Box 3651, Rundle Mall SA 5000
Telephone: 08 8226 8699

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.sa.gov.au

and, other legal appeal processes or the Courts at any time during the complaint handling process.

8. Definitions

List all key terms and acronyms that are used in the policy, and their definition.

Key term	Definition
Complaint	A complaint is made when a customer: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• expresses or infers dissatisfaction with a product or service delivered by the organisation which has, or should have, been received that has failed to reach the standard stated, implied or expected. This may include decisions of Council, its policies, procedures, charges, employees, agents or the quality of Council services; and/or• informs and notifies the Council of his/her belief that the Council has failed to act upon a request for service within a reasonable timeframe.
Feedback	can take the form of comments, both positive and negative, about services provided by Council without necessarily forming the basis of a complaint
Request for service	an application to have Council or its representative take some form of action to provide or improve a Council service
New service	A service not currently provided by Council
Internal review of council decision	A formal request for a review under the Local Government Act 1999 Section 270
Public officer	Schedule 1 of the independent commissioner against corruption act provides a list of public officers. Public officers include <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Members of the South Australian Parliament• Members of the South Australian judiciary• South Australia police officers• Public service employees• Councillors• Council employees• Persons contracted to perform work for a public authority or the Crown

Policy review

The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed every three years or as necessary.

Further information

This document is available on Council's website www.southernmallee.sa.gov.au and at the principal office of the Southern Mallee District Council at Day Street, Pinnaroo SA 5304.

A copy of this document may be purchased from Council.