

SHIRE OF EXMOUTH



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE MANUAL

2006

The Shire of Exmouth is committed to providing you with high quality services to meet your needs. To do this, we need your co-operation.

Tell us (about it) if you are not happy with:

- the services that we are providing;
- the way in which these services are provided.

The Shire of Exmouth has established a procedure to help make sure that:

- your complaint is heard;
- it is investigated thoroughly and fairly;
- you are advised of the outcome.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is when a member of the public expresses their dissatisfaction with a Council Service, inappropriate behaviour of a member of staff or Councillor, or a decision made by a member of staff or Council. A customer complaint is not a request for service, a general enquiry, a request for information or an explanation of Council Policy.

HOW TO TELL US WHAT YOU THINK?

- Fill in the “Tell us what you think” form which is attached to this booklet. Hand it to one of our staff; alternatively mail the copy back to us:-

Shire of Exmouth
P.O. Box 21
EXMOUTH WA 6707

- or, call 9949 1399, and our friendly staff will put in touch with the right person to assist.

What Happens Next?

- Contact the Officer who handled your complaint.
- They will then discuss the matter with their Supervisor or Senior Manager.
- The Senior Manager will review your complaint and then contact you within five working days to discuss your concern and tell you what is happening.

An Overview of Our Complaint Procedure

First Stage: Registration of your complaint and resolution.



Second Stage: If you are unhappy with the outcome, your complaint will be investigated by a Supervisor or Senior Manager.



Third Stage: If you are still dissatisfied, your complaint will be reviewed by an internal Appeal Panel.



Fourth Stage: If your complaint cannot be resolved within the organisation, you may wish to contact an external body, such as Department of Local Government & Regional Development.

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Appendix A: *“Tell us what you Think”* Complaint Form

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SHIRE OF EXMOUTH

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1.0 Introduction

A complaint handling procedure is in place to record, report and respond to complaints to enable us to continuously improve our services to customers. The Shire of Exmouth cares about what customers think of us and the concerns they have about our services give us an opportunity to ensure that we remain customer focused.

This Complaint Procedure includes the following:

- a formal procedure for customers to make a complaint.
- Guidelines for staff to resolve complaints.
- Information to staff to prevent customers being dissatisfied in the future.

2.0 Definition: What is a “Complaint”?

2.1 A complaint is when a member of the public expresses to Council their dissatisfaction with:

a) A Council Service.

(for example, a published service standard that has not been met).

b) An inappropriate behaviour of a staff member or Councillor.

(“We have treated him/her unfairly or discourteously”)

c) A decision made by a member of staff or Council.

2.2 A customer complaint, for the purpose of this procedure, is NOT any of the following:

(a) A request for a service

(b) General enquiries

(c) A request for information or an explanation of Council Policy or practice (although a request for information may then be followed by a complaint about a Council Policy or practice).

(d) Lodging of an appeal in accordance with a standard procedure of policy.



A good way of determining whether customer dissatisfaction is actually a complaint is to ask, literally, is someone upset or unhappy with the action or inaction of a member of staff, Councillor or Council? If so, then you are probably dealing with a complaint.

Note: When a customer complains about a “**third party**”, not the action or inaction of Council itself, it should be regarded as a “**service request**”. In order to lessen the possibility of confusing customers, the “**Tell Us What You Think**” Form has been formatted for both external and internal usage.

This procedure **only** deals with complaints (as defined below) NOT service requests. Please contact the appropriate Senior Manager for Service Requests.

3.0 Who Can Complain?

3.1 Anyone affected by a Council service or policy decision can raise an issue, as can anyone acting on their behalf. Anonymous complainants should be aware that nothing can be done on behalf of the Council unless sufficient information about a complaint is provided to enable an investigation to be conducted.

Anonymous issues should still be registered and passed to the Records Department (though a follow up contact obviously cannot be achieved).

This complaints procedure encourages customers to give feedback to Council. It also aims to ensure that all complaints made will be treated confidentially where appropriate, and will be investigated thoroughly and fairly.

4.0 How Can Complaints Be Made?

4.1 Customer complaints may be made in a number of ways; letter, telephone, email or face-to-face. Complaints may be received by *any* employee or Councillor. It is the responsibility of the person receiving a complaint to obtain the required information by completing the “**Tell Us What You Think**” Form (Refer to Appendix A) and forwarding it to the Executive Secretary, who will record the complaint and distribute it appropriately. “*Tell Us What You Think*” forms are available from the Shire Administration or the Senior Managers (Refer to Appendix B).

4.2 If the complaint is by telephone, it will be referred to the nominated Senior Manager for distribution to the relevant Council Officer. If the Senior Manager is unavailable, the telephone call will be transferred directly to the relevant Council Officer.

5.0 Complaint Handling

The complaint Handling Procedure consists of the following four stages:

Stage 1: First Contact

- Staff, except the switchboard, receiving a complaint should complete the “**Tell Us What You Think**” Form. Switchboard should direct all calls to the appropriate Senior Manager.
- Wherever possible, the problem should be resolved at first contact. If this is not possible the customer in question will be informed of the complaints process, the “*Tell Us What You Think*” form and the 5 day turnaround goal for acknowledgement. The complaints package can either be handed, emailed or posted to the customer. If a “*Tell Us What You Think*” form is completed, the issue is resolved and no further action is necessary then the form should still be lodged with the Administration
- Upon lodging the “*Tell Us What You Think*” form the customer will be informed that a Council Officer will be in contact to discuss the matter or acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days. It is the responsibility of the Senior Manager to ensure that the complaint is distributed to the appropriate Council Officer, that the complaints procedure is adhered to and that the 5 day acknowledgement goal is upheld.

Stage 2: Internal Review

- Appropriate supervisor or Senior Manager reviews unresolved complaint, in liaison with relevant staff.

Stage 3: Review Appeal Panel

- Complaints that still remain unresolved are referred to an Appeal Panel comprising of at least two Executive Team Members.
- Details of outcomes that still remain unresolved may be referred to an external body, e.g. the Department of Local Government & Regional Development.

5.1 Stage 1: First Contact

- 5.1.1 Any member of staff or Councillor receiving a complaint must obtain the name, address and telephone number of the complainant, together with details of the issue at hand (complete the attached “*Tell us What You Think*” Form). If a customer does not wish to provide all details, then it must be explained to them the difficulties in addressing the problem with no point of reference. Anonymous complaints are still to be accepted, but at the minimum attempt to obtain a daytime contact telephone number. Where an advocate complains on behalf of

someone else, obtain the details of the original person who is complaining and sufficient details from their representative to be able to contact the complainant, if necessary.

- 5.1.2 Wherever possible, the issue should be resolved at first contact. If this is not possible the customer should be informed that a responsible officer will be in touch with them again within 5 working days. The complaint form should be passed to the Administration Department, who will record the complaint, issue a complaint number and distribute the complaint to the appropriate Senior Manager. The Senior Manager will assign the complaint to the relevant Council Officer and ensure that the complaint is dealt with appropriately and satisfactorily. Council Officers must keep the Senior Manager informed as to the progression of individual complaints. It is the responsibility of the Senior Manager to ensure that completed *"Tell Us What You Think"* forms are returned to the Records Department for recording of complaint resolutions.
- 5.13 The officer dealing with the issue will contact the customer acknowledging their complaint and informing them what is happening about their complaint within five working days. If a reply is not possible within this time period, the officer should inform the complainant of the delay, the reason for the delay and a revised reply target date.
- 5.14 Random follow-up calls should be made, by the Officer or Senior Manager, to ensure that the customer is satisfied with what action was taken in relation to their complaint. If the complainant is not satisfied, the Officer or Senior Manager should refer the matter to Stage Two (Internal Review).
- 5.15 Where a complaint relates to alleged issues of sexual, racial or other discrimination, the Administration section must contact the Chief Executive Officer and take advice on how to proceed.

5.2 Stage2: Internal Review

- 5.2.1 In certain circumstances, complainants may not be satisfied with the outcome, at which stage it should be referred to an appropriate Senior Manager.
- 5.2.2 The Senior Manager should review the original decision or action and take corrective action, where appropriate.
- 5.2.3 The basic guidelines for front line customer services complaint handling apply equally to these cases.

5.3 Stage 3: Appeal Panel

Experience has shown that “*Review Type*” Appeal Panels may assist in satisfying complainants that they have had a “*fair hearing*” even after the rejection of their initial complaint. This process should only be used in exceptional circumstances.

Membership: At least Two Executive Team Members (Generally the CEO and relevant Senior Manager).

- 5.3.1 A complaint Review report is presented to the Appeal Panel. The report should be prepared by the Senior Manager and the Officer or Councillor which initially handled the complaint.
- 5.3.2 The complainant should be invited to attend the Appeal Panel in order that they put their case. In exceptional cases, written submissions may be accepted.
- 5.3.3 The complainant should be advised that a representative can attend the hearing on their behalf as support.
- 5.3.4 Relevant staff or Councillor (s) may be invited to clarify information in the Complaint Review report. On occasions it may also be appropriate for the Shire President or Deputy Shire President to participate.
- 5.3.5 The Appeal Panel considers the report presented to it together with the comments of the complainant, other relevant information and recommends a course of action. Meetings and outcomes will be minuted.

5.4 Stage 4: External Review

The complainant should be informed that in the event of a complaint still remaining unresolved, the matter can be referred to an external body, such as the Department of Local Government & Regional Development.

6.0 Monitoring

- 6.1 The Administration Department shall keep a composite record of all “*Tell Us What You Think*” Forms as they enter the organisation. Complaints will be allocated individual complaint numbers and filed under a separate reference number. Once a resolution has been achieved the details must be forwarded to the Records Section for recording. Details listed below should always be completed:
 - (a) name, address and telephone number of complainant (anonymous complaints will also be recorded, but may be difficult to follow up);
 - (b) the date when the issue in question was received;
 - (c) the date when the matter was satisfactorily resolved;
 - (d) brief details of the complaint; and
 - (e) whether or not the complaint was justified from a Council Officer or Councillor perspective.

7.0 Remedies

- 7.1 Where a complaint is upheld, the person must receive a written explanation and where appropriate, an apology from an appropriate Officer, their Manager (or Chief Executive Officer/Senior Manager on appeal).
- 7.2 Where a complaint is upheld and the person has either suffered or not suffered financial loss, the relevant Senior Manager in consultation with the CEO should decide an appropriate remedy. Where a financial remedy is deemed appropriate, a recommendation to Council must be made on the matter, whereby Council may or may not approve of the remedy.

8.0 Reporting and Reviewing

- 8.1 When the complaint reaches the Appeal Panel stage, the matter should be reported to Council at the first opportunity.
- 8.2 The Chief Executive Officer should submit a yearly summary report to Council containing a summary of complaints received during the previous twelve months.
- 8.3 The summary report should give:
- (a) brief details of all complaints;
 - (b) an indication of whether or not matters had been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
 - (c) brief details of how complaints had been resolved;
 - (d) comments stating whether or not the complaints were justified; and
 - (e) what changes or improvement had been made as a result of individual complaints.
 - (f) These changes may include the way work is organised, procedures altered or staff trained. The emphasis should be on the continuous improvement of services.
- 8.4 It is also advisable to include graphs of the number of complaints over time and the average time to resolve complaints over time in the summary report.
- 8.5 Annually, a composite report should be produced by the Chief Executive Officer and be made available to the public. The report should give the number of complaints received and how many were resolved to the satisfaction of the persons who complained. Finally, it should say what changes have been made as a result of any complaints.

9.0 Special Cases

- 9.1 Where a complaint is made about a Senior Manager, the matter will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer for investigation.
- 9.2 Where a complaint is made about an elected Member or the Chief Executive Officer, the matter will be referred to the Shire President.
- 9.3 Where a complaint is made about the Shire President, the matter will be referred to Council as a behind closed doors item.
- 9.4 Where a complaint relates to alleged sexual, racial or other discrimination in the provision of Council services, the matter, in the first instance, must be referred to the Chief Executive Officer. The relevant Senior Manager should also be made aware of the issue.
- 9.5 The appropriate Senior Manager should be made aware on any complaints or issues relating to individual Council Officers. If appropriate, it may be necessary to enact Shire of Exmouth Disciplinary Procedure.

10.0 Role of Staff

- 10.1 The main task is to provide a high standard of customer service and respond and resolve complaints.
- 10.2 Reminder to staff:
- “own” the problem;
 - make it easy for unhappy customers to tell you what the problem is;
 - listen carefully (arrange for sign/language interpreters or advocates if required);
 - handle complaints within the designated timeframes;
 - be friendly;
 - focus on solving the problem rather than blaming or finding fault;
 - offer a solution which you are able to deliver;
 - take responsibility for solving the problem on the spot if possible;
 - ensure that the administration department receives all necessary documentation;
 - pass the information on to the relevant person;
 - feel free to address any concerns with your Senior Manager.
- 10.3 Reminder of what customers want:
- to be taken seriously;
 - to be treated with respect and not be judged;
 - immediate action;
 - to clear the problem so it never happens again;
 - to be listened to.

11.0 Responding to Complaint

11.1 Basic Principles:

- allow the complainant to be heard;
- make the complainant feel understood;
- make the complainant feel respected;
- provide an explanation or information;
- offer an apology where appropriate; and
- take action promptly.

11.2 Verbal Complaints:

- listen to the customer courteously;
- repeat your understanding of the problem back to the customer to check that you have understood;
- if the complaint is unclear, ask what it is they want to happen or have done;
- decide what action you can take to resolve the complaint on the spot;
- ask the customer whether that action will resolve the complaint;
- take the agreed action; and
- record the complaint.

11.3 Written Complaints:

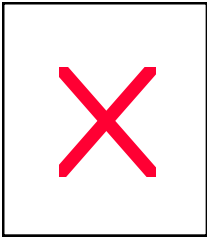
Responding by phone:

- acknowledge the complaint promptly;
- repeat your understanding of the problem to the customer;
- decide what action you can take to resolve the complaint;
- ask the customer whether that action will resolve the complaint;
- tell the customer what will happen, who will be dealing with the matter and how they can be contacted;
- take the agreed action; and
- record the complaint.

Responding by mail/email:

- decide what action you can take to resolve the complaint;
- in your letter or response ensure that:-
 - you acknowledge that you have received the complaint;
 - you outline your understanding of the problem;
 - you suggest action to resolve the complaint;
 - explain what will happen next; and
 - give your name and phone number as contact;
- take the agreed action;
- record the complaint on the customer complaints register; and
- thank the customer for providing feedback to you.

SHIRE OF EXMOUTH



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

Official Shire of Exmouth Complaint Form

Note: For all service requests please refer to the Service Request form.

Shire of Exmouth
22 Maidstone Crescent, Exmouth WA 6707
Tel: (08) 9949 1399 Fax: (08) 9949 1277
Email: shirex@exmouth.wa.gov.au
Website: www.exmouth.wa.gov.au

PERSONAL DETAILS:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Name : _____

Phone: (Home) _____ (Office) _____

(Mobile) _____

Email Address: _____

Address: _____

OFFICE USE ONLY

Register Number _____

File Number: _____

Senior Manager: _____

Officer: _____

Follow up: Yes/No Date: _____

Date Completed: _____

DETAILS:

(Provide details relating to dates, times, location and frequency - if insufficient space is provided below, append a separate sheet with full details continued)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please return completed form to: Shire of Exmouth, P.O. Box 21, Exmouth WA 6707

We aim to acknowledge all complaints within 5 working days.

Thank you for your opinion. We will do what we can to resolve your concern.

**CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE
SENIOR MANAGERS**

DIRECTORATE	REPRESENTATIVE
Administration & Finance	Sue O'Toole
Community Services & Tourism	Roge Kempe
Engineering & Works Services	Keith Woodward
Building & Health Services	Rob Manning
Town Planning	Andre Dalton
Chief Executive Officer	Phil Anastasakis