	POLICY 28	Version:	3
	Customer Experience	Date Adopted:	12 Nov 2019
		Next Review Due:	Oct 2023

1. STATEMENT

Wattle Range Council delivers an extensive range of services and infrastructure to its community. Council is committed to the provision of quality service to customers and regards service requests, compliments, complaints and internal review requests as an opportunity to enhance practices and procedures as well as resolve matters.

This policy is prepared to meet Council's requirement under section 270 of the *Local Government Act 1999*.

2. DEFINITIONS

Council refers to the Wattle Range Council.

Employee includes a person employed directly by the Council in a full time, part time or casual capacity (whether that position is permanent or contractual) and persons providing services to, or on behalf of, the Council even though they may be employed by another party.

Business Day means a day when the Council is normally open for business, i.e. Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays and office closures.

Compliment is an expression of satisfaction with a product or service delivered by the Council or its representatives. An example is a customer statement of positive recognition or praise for a service or individual.

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

Complaints which are determined to be about matters that are not Council's responsibility, such as disputes between neighbours, will not be handled under this policy.

Frivolous Complaint a request or complaint made that is of false nature and/or has no reasonable grounds for lodging and/or there is not sufficient interest in the matters from the complainant

Vexatious Complaint a request or complaint that is made with the intent to harass, annoy, delay or cause detriment or trouble to the Council.

Feedback can take the form of comments, both positive and negative, about services provided by Council without necessarily requiring a corrective action, change of services or formal review of a decision. Feedback may, however, influence future service reviews and delivery methods.


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

3. PRINCIPLES

3.1 Principles

This policy is based on several principles, which will be fundamental in the way Council approaches provision of service, compliments and complaint handling. They are:

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- **Continuous Improvement:** review of service provision, compliments and complaints give Council an opportunity to identify services and areas of better practice by staff, and incorporate those practices and standards in other areas of Council activities.
- **Performance:** requests, compliments and complaints provide valuable indicators of the effectiveness of a service and useful insights about the aspects of service most meaningful to our community.
- **Recognition:** compliments enable Council to acknowledge excellence, recognise the efforts of staff and celebrate success.
- **Fairness:** treating people fairly requires impartiality, confidentiality and transparency at all stages of the process.
- **Accessibility:** to be accessible there must be broad public awareness about Council's policy and a range of contact options.
- **Responsiveness:** this will be achieved by providing sufficient resources, well trained staff and review and improvement of the systems.
- **Efficiency:** matters will be resolved as reasonably practical, ensuring that they are consistent with this policy and dealt with at a level that reflects their level of complexity.
- **Teamwork:** work together across Council departments where matters overlap functional responsibilities.
- **Procedural Fairness:** is concerned with the procedures used by a decision maker, rather than the actual outcome reached. It requires a fair and proper procedure be used when making a decision.

3.2 Requests for Service

When determining how to respond to a request for service, the following will be considered:

- statutory responsibilities,
- the content of Council's strategic management plans, annual business plan & budget and annual works program,
- relevant Council policies and codes,
- established service standards and response times for regular Council activities.

When prioritising requests for service emphasis will be placed on:


- Public safety and emergencies,
- Fulfilling Council's strategic and business plans,
- Using Council resources efficiently & effectively,
- Guidelines and conditions of externally funded programs.

3.3 Compliments

Council values positive feedback and compliments as they demonstrate where Council is doing things right, what Council needs to do more of and/or continue to do.

Positive feedback will be used to promote better practice across Council and to recognise staff members who consistently demonstrate excellent service.

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3.4 Complaints

The following types of complaints will be addressed under this policy:

- Complaints regarding dissatisfaction with a Council service, that has not been or inadequately supplied. *supported by Requests for Service Procedure and Compliments & Complaints Handling Procedure*
- Complaints alleging an employee has contravened or failed to comply with the Code of Conduct for Council Employees *supported by Compliments and Complaints Handling Procedure.*
- Undertaking a review of the process of how a Council decision was made, or the decision itself. *Supported by Internal Review of Decision Procedure.*

The following matters are not covered by this policy:

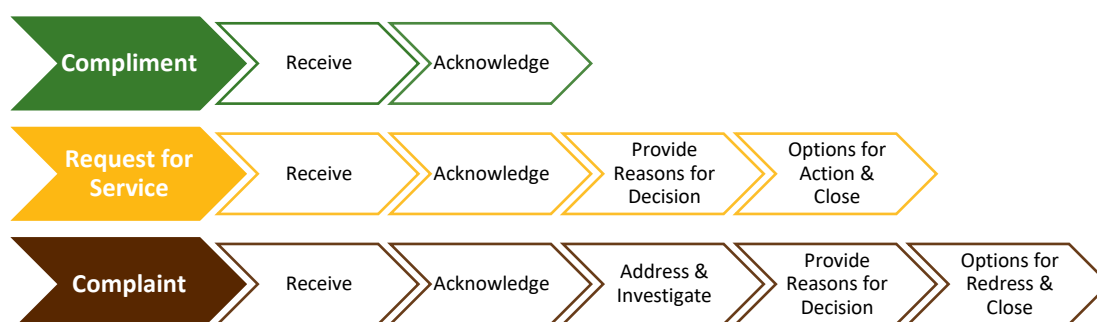
- Complaints against a Council Member (Councillor or Mayor). *Refer to the Elected Members Code of Conduct.,*
- Insurance claims,
- Complaints or appeals against expiation notices,
- Some decisions made by Council may be subject to appeal or review rights as set out in other legislation. Where other appeal or review rights exist or are excluded by other legislation, a request for internal review under this policy will not be accepted. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - Freedom of Information applications (refer to the *Freedom of Information Act 1991*)
 - *Dog & Cat Management Act 1995*
 - *Planning, Development & Infrastructure Act 2016*
 - *Expiation of Offences Act 1996*

The CEO may consider granting an Internal Review on the matters described above at their discretion.


3.5 Managing Requests, Compliments & Complaints

Council welcomes requests, compliments and complaints as a way of improving its services and programs as well as providing an opportunity to put things right.

Council will develop and maintain procedures that consider the following steps in managing these:



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3.5.1 Timeframes

Council aims to acknowledge the receipt of requests, compliments & complaints within 10 business days. Where a matter cannot be resolved immediately or within 10 business days the customer should be advised of the process to be undertaken and timeframe they can expect to be updated on progress.


3.5.2 Complaint Handling

Complaints will be handled in accordance with the below levels of escalation:

Level 1	Frontline Handling & Early Resolution All staff are empowered to handle complaints in the first instance, and it is preferable that they are dealt with promptly at the initial point of contact with the appropriate officer.
Level 2 *	<p>Escalation to a Senior Officer</p> <p>Complaints will be directed to a more senior officer where circumstances indicate that the complaint would be more appropriately handled at a higher level. Examples include, but are not limited to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an officer is the subject of the complaint; • where the complaint is about an issue that requires a decision to be made at a more senior level; or • where a complaint concerns a matter that ranges across more than one Council work area. <p>Allegations that an employee has contravened or failed to comply with the Code of Conduct for Council Employees must be directed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to the employees direct manager, or • if the matter is in relation to the CEO, to the Mayor.
Level 3 *	<p>Internal Review of Decisions</p> <p>Is a process to reconsider the information relied on to make a decision, including new information if relevant. This process is generally a last resort in the complaint handling process, but may also be used in situations which are not able to be resolved by other means, such as a complaint about a decision of the CEO.</p> <p>An internal review request can be made for a decision of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Council • employees of the Council • other persons acting on behalf of Council <p>Requests for internal review must be received within 6 months of the decision in question being made. <i>Refer to Council's Internal Review of Decisions Procedure.</i></p>

** If possible, complaints will be handled independently of the original decision-maker or officer involved in the matter that is the subject of the complaint.*

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3.5.3 Alternative Options

Council prefers being provided the opportunity to resolve complaints directly with our customers. Customers do also have a right to lodge a complaint through the State Ombudsman:

Ombudsman SA
 PO Box 3651, Rundle Mall SA 5000
 Phone: 08 8226 8699
 website: <https://www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au>

If you think a public officer has broken the law, or acted in a way that is seriously inappropriate or negligent then you should consider making a report to the:

Office for Public Integrity (OPI)
 GPO Box 11066, Adelaide SA 5001
 Phone: 08 8207 1777
 website: <https://icac.sa.gov.au>

When advising a complainant of the outcome of an investigation of a complaint, Council will provide information about alternative remedies, including any rights of appeal and the right to make a complaint to an external agency such as the State Ombudsman.

3.6 Systems for Receiving Requests, Compliments & Complaints

Council will maintain a system(s) to record service requests, compliments and complaints that will allow the information to be analysed for service improvement opportunities.

A person can make a request, compliment or complaint verbally or in writing in accordance with the relevant procedure, with the following exceptions:

- persons whose conduct is deemed unreasonable may be restricted in the way they can contact Council (*refer to the "3.7 Unreasonable Customer Conduct" section below*).
- Council will not accept service requests or complaints by social media, e.g. Facebook.


3.6.1 Using Systems to Improve Service (Monitoring & Reporting)

Analysis of requests, compliments and complaints is a powerful way of helping Council inform service improvements. Council will review and evaluate information gained through its system(s) to identify trends, systemic issues or opportunities to improve service.

Council's annual report will include:

- number of requests for internal review made; and
- the kinds of matters to which requests for internal review relate; and
- the outcome of requests for internal review (*refer s270(8) LG Act*).

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Learnings may be implemented where appropriate by making changes to policies, procedures and practices.

3.6.2 Training

Employees will be trained to manage requests, compliments and complaints efficiently and effectively, and provided with a level of delegated authority appropriate for the nature of complaints they are expected to resolve.

3.7 Unreasonable Customer Conduct

All persons contacting Council will be treated with fairness and respect. However, occasionally the conduct of customers can be unreasonable. This may take the form of, but is not limited to:


- **unreasonable persistence:** persons persisting with their issues even though they have been dealt with to finality, refusing to accept final decisions and sending excessive amounts of correspondence.
- **unreasonable demands:** insisting on outcomes that are unattainable, moving the goal posts or demanding to have their complaints dealt with in particular ways.
- **unreasonable lack of cooperation:** providing disorganised, excessive or irrelevant information, being unwilling to consider other valid viewpoints, or refusing to define their issues of complaint when they are capable of doing so.
- **unreasonable arguments:** seeing cause and effect arguments where there are clearly none, holding conspiracy theories unsupported by evidence, and irrationally interpreting facts or laws and refusing to accept other more reasonable interpretations
- **unreasonable behaviour:** extreme anger, aggression, threats or other threatening or violent conduct. This includes making excessive demands, frequently contacting Council and making malicious, frivolous or vexatious requests or complaints.

Where Council or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), or his/her delegate determines that a customer has engaged in unreasonable conduct, this is grounds to dismiss the matter and not take any further action in relation to it.

A determination will take into account:

- any similar requests previously made by the person (i.e. about the same service);
- the response and outcome to previous requests made by the person (if any);
- whether the service is capable of being provided by or required to be provided by the Council;
- the outcomes sought by the person; and
- the resources required to provide the service (to ensure that it is not an unreasonable diversion of public resources).

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Where a person's behaviour is determined as unreasonable conduct a decision may be made to apply restrictions on contact with the person and may be managed or dealt with in accordance with Council's Unreasonable Customer Conduct Procedure.

Any decision to restrict contact or suspend action on a matter will be communicated (preferably in writing) to the customer.

3.8 Privacy and Confidentiality

All requests, compliments and complaints lodged with Council are subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1991* and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed under the provisions of that legislation.

4. REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed every four years after each general election.

Reviews must be done in consultation with the Executive Leadership Team, Council Staff and Council Members.

5. AVAILABILITY

This Policy is available for inspection without charge at the following location during ordinary business hours:


- Principal Office, "Civic Centre", George Street, Millicent
- Council Website: www.wattlerange.sa.gov.au.

A copy of the Policy may be purchased from the Principal Council Office upon payment of a prescribed fee in accordance with Council's Schedule of Fees and Charges.

6. REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

References:	
Relevant Legislation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Local Government Act 1999 – Sections 270 and 271;</i> • <i>Freedom of Information Act 1991;</i> • <i>Development Act 1993;</i> • <i>Expiation of Offences Act 1996</i>
Relevant Policies / Procedures / Guidelines	<p>This Policy should be read in conjunction with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy 2.1 – Code of Conduct for Council Employees • Policy 1.1 – Code of Conduct for Council Members • Policy 1.8 – Fraud & Corruption Prevention • Procedure 101 –Internal Review of Council Decisions • Procedure 142 – Compliments and Complaints Handling • Procedure 400 - Unreasonable Customer Conduct • Procedure 239 - Duress Alarm • Procedure 29 - Request for Service

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7. ADOPTION & AMENDMENT HISTORY

The table below sets out the adoption, review and amendment history of the policy.

Version No:	Issue Date:	Authorised by:	Description of Change:	Minutes Reference:
1	13/03/2012	Council	Adopted	Folio 4732; Item 11.1.5
2	13/12/2016	Council	Amendment and Policy Number Change (formerly 2.2)	Folio 6953; Item 13.2.5
3	12/11/2019	Council	Changed to Customer Experience Policy. Merged Request for Service and Internal Review Policies into document. Some information moved to procedures.	Folio 8697; Item 15.2.12

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