

# Request for Service

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Responsible Division	Office of the CEO
Related Documents	Requests for Service Procedure Complaints Policy Complaints Handling Procedure Internal Review of Council Decisions Unreasonable Complaints Policy Public Interest Disclosure Policy
Applicable Legislation	<i>Local Government Act 1999, sec.270</i>

## 1. Introduction

Local Government delivers an extensive range of services and infrastructure to communities, and discharges obligations under many pieces of legislation. Providing services to the community is a key component of Council's operations and requests for work to be undertaken or a service provided are a daily occurrence.

Council is committed to the provision of quality service to customers and aims to provide services fairly and efficiently. It also monitors requests to identify ways in which it can proactively improve its services.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with other relevant Council policies, especially in making the distinction between a request for service and a complaint or a request for a review of a Council decision.

Section 270(a1)(a) of the *Local Government Act 1999* requires Council to develop and maintain a policy about "any reasonable request for the provision of a service by the Council or for the improvement of a service provided by the Council."

This policy aims to:

- provide guidance on what may constitute a reasonable request for a service or an improvement to a service
- distinguish between requests, complaints and feedback to Council and give direction on management of requests
- establish a standardised process for assessing and processing requests including the collation of information which can be used to directly inform service improvements.

## 2. Definitions

**Business Day** - means a day when the Council is normally open for business, ie Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays.

*Complaint* - means 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. A complaint may be made in any form, including verbal, written or electronic means.

*Council* - refers to the Alexandrina Council.

*Customer Service Request* – is a request that a customer makes, requesting a service from council, supported by information which is not related to an escalated complaint.

*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.

*Feedback* – means those comments, which are sometimes framed as complaints, where the intent is clearly for the matter to be noted, but where there is no implied or expressed expectation of follow up, review or action.

*Request for Service* – means an application to have the council, or its representative, take some form of action to provide a council service or improve a council service. Council also receives complaints and feedback across all areas of its operations and makes the distinction between a request for service and a complaint for the purpose of this policy.

### 3. Principles

This policy is based on five principles, which will be fundamental in the way Council approaches requests for service. They are:

*Fairness*: treating customers 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*: customer requests will be dealt with as quickly as practical while adhering to this policy

*Integration*: incorporating contact and responses across different areas of Council when the customer request overlaps functional responsibilities.

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

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

#### 4. What is a request for Service?

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

Council also receives complaints and feedback across all areas of operations and clarification may be necessary to make the distinction for the purposes of this policy.

A Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a service which has, or should have, been received. Council's Complaints Policy defines a complaint as:

"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."

Where Council has failed to meet the normal standards for a service which has been, or should have been, delivered, the Complaints Policy and the associated procedure applies. Where ambiguity exists, Council will deal with a matter as a request for service, rather than a complaint, in the first instance.

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.

Requests for service will be assessed in the context of the services and work provided for in Council's Annual Business Plan and Budget, and according to the conditions of externally funded programs.

#### 5. Reasonable Request for Service

In respect to requests for the provision of new or enhanced services, Council will consider:

- An assessment of risk
- Statutory and Legislative responsibilities
- Alignment with Council's Strategic Management Plans, Annual Business Plans, annual work program and Annual Budget
- Adopted Council policies and codes
- Established service standards and response times for regular Council activities.

#### 6. Processing a Request for Service

In Council's experience, most requests fit within well established guidelines which will be explained to an applicant at the outset. Council aims to manage requests efficiently and effectively. Employees are provided with a level of authority to advise applicants of the likely timeframe to complete the action required. Where further evaluation is necessary before committing Council to undertake the work, the applicant will be informed accordingly. If a request cannot be fulfilled in a reasonable timeframe, the application will be advised, including an explanation of why this decision was taken.

Where an applicant is not satisfied with the Council's decision, it is open to the applicant to lodge a complaint against the decision under Council's Complaints Policy.

## **7. Timeframes for Response**

The circumstances of individual requests for service will vary greatly. In the majority of cases requests will be processed promptly and the applicant advised verbally or by return post/email.

Routine requests are often subject to service response standards. For example, the assessment of public safety concerns will occur, where practicable, on the same day as the request is received. Other requests may be best suited to scheduling to coincide with work in a particular suburb or season. Examples of this include tree pruning on Council streets and attention to minor drainage problems. Requests for major works or new services will be referred to Council for consideration as part of the next annual cycle of review and public consultation.

Council staff will acknowledge with five (5) business days and will then within ten (10) business days advise of Council's intentions in regard to the request.

## **8. Recording Requests for Service**

A person can make an application for a service in a number of ways:

- Telephone
- Email
- Letter
- Council's website
- Petition to Council
- Visit a Council customer service office

All requests will be recorded in Council's records management system in such a way that the information can also be analysed for service improvement opportunities.

## **9. Rejected Requests**

All rejected requests will be recorded and may be reconsidered at a future date, such as in conjunction with the preparation of an Annual Business Plan and associated budget.

## **10. Availability of Policy**

This Policy will be available on the Council's website [www.alexandrina.sa.gov.au](http://www.alexandrina.sa.gov.au). Copies will also be provided to interested members of the community upon request, and upon payment of a fee in accordance with Council's Schedule of Fees and Charges.