Request for Service Procedure

First Approved	January 2012
Review Frequency	4 yearly or as required
Status	LGA Mandatory
Last Reviewed	2 December 2020 (Endorsed by Executive Group – COG)
	17 July 2023 – Resolution Ref: C23271
Next Review Due	July 2027
File Number	18.87.003 / PC2023160
Responsible Division	Office of the CEO
Related Documents	Requests for Service Policy
	Complaints Policy
	Complaints Handling Procedure
	Internal Review of Council Decisions
	Unreasonable Complaints Policy
	Public Interest Disclosure Policy
Applicable Legislation	*Local Government Act 1999*

1.   Purpose and Scope

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.

Section 270 of the *Local Government Act 1999* requires Council to maintain a procedure 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 Procedure commences at the point that a request for service is received and covers processes for:

- distinguishing between requests, complaints and feedback to Council
- deciding how to respond to the request
- using requests to directly inform service improvements.

The aim of this procedure, which is available on Council's website, is to ensure requests for service are addressed in a fair, consistent and structured process which is transparent to all customers. This procedure does not apply to matters that do not fall within Council's jurisdiction. These types of issues will be referred to appropriate external processes.

2.   Responsibility

This procedure applies to all Council staff who may be involved in receiving or processing a request for service in the course of their work.

Officers will act reasonably and transparently, demonstrate good customer service, undertake their responsibilities in a proficient manner and use their judgement where necessary to ensure an outcome in line with Council's Request for Services Policy.

3. General Notes

Council receives requests for service, complaints and feedback across all areas of operations. Clarification may be necessary to make the distinction for the purposes of this procedure.

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

Complaints about the activities of third parties (eg barking dogs or food premises) are to be treated as Requests for Service in the first instance where this is a reasonable interpretation.

However, if the complaint is about the way in which Council has dealt with a matter concerning the activities of a third party, this will be dealt with as a complaint (see Council's Complaints 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 associated procedure applies.

Feedback can take the form of comments, both positive and negative, about services provided by Council without necessarily forming the basis of a complaint or a request for service. Council welcomes feedback of all types as an important way of continually monitoring its service standards.

Communication with the customer is an important ongoing process while undertaking the actions necessary to resolve the request. When immediate resolution is not possible, the customer must be regularly kept informed of progress, either by email, letter or personal contact.

4. Principles Underlying this Procedure

This procedure and the policy it accompanies, 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

5.   Records Management

All documents, notes, telephone calls, photographs and correspondence must be retained and stored in accordance with Council's Records Management protocols as required by section125 of the *Local Government Act 1999.*

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

6.   Procedure

Council welcomes requests for service as a way of improving its services and programs as well as fulfilling the needs of its customers.

7.   Receiving requests for service

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

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

8.   Recording Requests for Service

Record details of the request in Council's Customer Request system, including:

- date and time of call
- taken by
- customer's name
- customer's contact phone number/s and email address
- comprehensive information about the nature of the request
- who request was assigned to
- does the customer wish to be advised when the work is completed

9.   Deciding how to respond to requests for service

Each request must be assessed to determine its nature, how it should be dealt with, when it should be dealt with, and who should be involved.

The majority of requests will be able to be scheduled and actioned promptly. Some will require direction from a Manager or, occasionally, a decision of Council.

Council's policy provides guidance on how to respond to requests by considering:

- The content of Council's Strategic Management Plans, Annual Business Plans, annual works program and Annual Budget. Does the request fit within the directions and programs which Council has agreed to, and budgeted for?

- Relevant Council policies and codes. Does the request fit within other agreed positions documented by Council?

- Established service standards and response times for regular Council activities. Can the request be accommodated within Council's agreed operating standards?

- An assessment of risk? Does the request relate to a matter which may impact on a public risk or Council risk?

- Statutory responsibilities. Is the request about a matter which Council has a statutory obligation to act upon?

Before determining Council's response, it is also important to consider:

- Public safety and emergencies (the need and requirement of immediate action)
- Using Council resources efficiently and effectively
- The guidelines and conditions which apply to certain externally funded programs
- The complexity of the response by Council (does it require an integrated approach from more than one department?)

Where possible, Council should advise customers what action will be taken in response to requests at the time of lodging. For routine requests refer to Council's service standards and intended work programs. Lodge the request using Council's preferred customer request system and advise the customer of the next steps.

More complex requests should be forwarded to the relevant Manager for determination of how to respond. Ensure that the referral occurs promptly, and the customer understands the process and timeline for the next action.

Where requests are for major work on new services, they will be considered by Council in the preparation of the next Annual Business Plan.

10. Rejected requests for service

Where a request cannot be accommodated it is to be identified in the database as a rejected request.

Council will establish a process for revisiting rejected requests from time to time as Council priorities shift.

11. Acknowledging requests for service and progress

Under the policy, Council aims to acknowledged within five (5) business days and respond to customer requests as soon as possible, and within at least ten (10) business days, advising of Council's intentions in regard to the request.

If a request is rejected Council should explain the decision clearly and offer any possible alternative actions available to the customer, including reference to Council's Complaints Policy.

Where work is delayed customers should be informed of progress and the reasons for any delays.

If the customer has asked to be advised when the work is completed, this task is the responsibility of the employee who finalises the request.

12. Service Improvement

Learning from requests for service is a way of helping to improve Council's processes and procedures. Council therefore has systems to:

- record, analyse and report on the types of requests for service it receives.
- apply the information to improve customer service

Understanding the number and type of requests initiated by customers may suggest changes to policies, procedures or systems to improve service delivery. It is important to ensure that lessons learnt are put into practice.

All requests for service, including those which are rejected, must be recorded in Council's records management system in such a way that the information can also be analysed for service improvement opportunities.

13. Availability of Policy

This procedure will be available for inspection on Council's website www.alexandrina.sa.gov.au. Copies can 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.