

Complaints Handling Policy

Corangamite Shire

December 2021



**CORANGAMITE
SHIRE**

Council Policy



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Complaints Handling Policy

Introduction

Dealing with complaints is a part of Council business. We value complaints and encourage people to contact us when they have a problem with our services, actions, decisions, and policies.

We are committed to:

- enabling members of the public to make complaints about the Council;
- responding to complaints by taking action to resolve complaints as quickly as possible; and
- learning from complaints to improve our services.

We treat every complaint we receive on its individual merits, through clear and consistent processes. Our complaints policy applies to all complaints from members of the public about Council staff, Council contractors and decisions made at Council meetings. This policy does not apply to complaints about individual Councillors.

The policy has been developed modelling the Victorian Ombudsman “Council’s and complaints – A good practice guide 2015 and 2021 editions”.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- provide a standardised approach to managing customer complaints;
- provide a framework for the management of complaints and feedback with a view to continually improving the services Council provides;
- increase the level of customer satisfaction by resolving issues in an effective, fair, respectful and professional manner;
- ensure all statutory requirements are satisfied, and escalation options for customers are communicated clearly;
- ensure Council is collecting data regarding complaints lodged and using this data to improve the delivery of Council services.

Scope

This policy applies to all Council Officers and contractors carrying out work on behalf of Council. In all instances where a Council officer is the subject of a complaint, the complainant will be directed to that officer’s Manager, Director or CEO.

This policy relates to all complaints made by customers in relation to Council operations with the exception of the following complaint areas which already have separate process in place:

- Complaints relating to a planning application decision
- Complaints already reviewed by an external agency
- Freedom of Information (FOI) requests
- Complaints relating to a Councillor
- Complaints by staff (Complaints, Grievances and Disputes Procedure)
- Complaints relating to legal issues
- Work-related grievances from Council employees (i.e. complaints relating to their employment);
- Complaints or disclosures made under the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012*

This policy relates solely to the management of complaints made to Council and does not provide guidance for the management of customer requests for service or feedback provided to Council.

Definitions

Complaint

A complaint includes a communication (verbal or written) to the Council which expresses dissatisfaction about:

- the quality of an action, decision or service provided by Council staff or a Council contractor
- a delay by Council staff or a Council contractor in taking an action, making a decision or delivering a service
- a policy or decision made by the Council, Council staff or a Council contractor.

In this policy: 'Council staff' is any person employed by the Council to carry out the functions of the Council, and the Council's CEO. 'Council contractor' is any third-party engaged by the Council to carry out functions on the Council's behalf. 'the Council' means the body of elected Councillors.

Request for service

Contact with Council to seek assistance, to access a new service, to seek advice, or to inform or make a report about something for which Council has responsibility.

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.

Complainant

A person or organisation that makes a complaint.

Complaint Handling System

The way in which Council deals with complaints, including policy and procedures, electronic systems and reporting mechanisms.

References

- Corangamite Shire Customer Service Charter
- Corangamite Shire Staff Code of Conduct
- Victorian Ombudsman “Council’s and complaints – A good practice guide 2015 and 2021 editions”
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Protected Disclosure Act 2012*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*
- *Information Privacy Act 2000*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*

Policy Detail

How to make a complaint

A person can make a complaint to Council in variety of different ways.

Mail

Complaints Management
Corangamite Shire Council
PO Box 84
Camperdown Vic 3260

Telephone

Customer Service Team (03) 5593 7100
National Relay Service 133 677

Email

Complaints Management
shire@corangamite.vic.gov.au

Website

www.corangamite.vic.gov.au/contactus

In person

Corangamite Shire Council Civic Centre
181 Manifold Street
Camperdown
Monday – Friday 8.30 am – 5.00 pm

Social Media

www.facebook.com/CorangamiteShire/
www.twitter.com/CorangamiteSC

www.instagram.com/corangamiteshire/

Council is committed to ensuring our complaints process is accessible to everyone. Residents can inform Council if they have specific communication needs or barriers, and we can assist you by:

- using an assistance service, such an interpreter or TTY (for free)
- talking with you if you have trouble reading or writing
- communicating with another person acting on your behalf if you cannot make the complaint yourself

Complaints Process

Overview

Council takes a four-tiered approach to complaint handling, as follows:

1. Frontline resolution - Frontline staff will receive the complaint and resolve it immediately, if possible. This may be with or without the assistance of a supervisor or team member.
2. Investigation, if required - If frontline staff cannot resolve the complaint, it will be referred to a council officer for investigation.
3. Internal review - If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they can request an internal review.
4. Access to external review - If the complainant is not satisfied with the process or outcome of the internal review, they will be informed of any external avenues through which they can pursue their complaint.

When Council receives a complaint, we will record and acknowledge the complaint within five business days. We will initially assess the complaint to decide how we will handle it. This may happen while we are receiving the complaint.

Where possible, Council will attempt to resolve the complaint at the time you first contact Council. If we decide not to take action on your complaint, we will explain why, and, where possible, inform the complainant about other options.

Frontline Resolution

Frontline staff will:

- Define whether the contact with the customer is considered to be a complaint or whether it should be defined as a request for service or feedback.
- Receive the complaint and register it in Council's Customer Request Management system.
- Acknowledge all complaints with five working days.
- Clarify the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking.
- Assess the complaint to determine how it should be dealt with.
- If frontline staff are unsure about any of the above steps due to the nature of the complaint, discuss with Council's Growth and Engagement Manager or their Department Manager.

Investigation

- If frontline staff cannot resolve the complaint, it will be assigned to a council officer for investigation.
- The officer handling the complaint will advise the complainant who the contact person is and how long it will take to respond to the complaint.
- Complaint handling staff will aim to resolve all complaints within 30 calendar days.
- If it takes longer than 30 calendar days to resolve a complaint, the contact person will contact the complainant prior to or at this time and explain why.
- Complaints that are not resolved within 30 calendar days will be subject to review and staff may need to escalate the complaint if necessary to ensure that a resolution is expedited.
- The officer responsible for handling the complaint will write to the complainant to advise them of the outcome. The outcome letter will contain reasons for the decision made and the contact information for the responsible officer.
- Where appropriate, the officer handling the complaint will contact the complainant via telephone to discuss the outcome of their complaint prior to sending the outcome letter.
- A complainant can withdraw a complaint at any point during its review.

Internal Review

- If a complainant is dissatisfied with Council’s decision and how we responded they can request an internal review.
- The internal review will be conducted by a senior Council officer who has not had any prior involvement with the complaint.
- Council will inform you of the outcome of the internal review and explain our reasons within 30 calendar days of the date of this letter

External Review

There are external bodies that can deal with different types of complaints about Council.

You can request an external review from the following organisations.

Complaint	Organisation
Actions or decisions of a Council, Council staff and contractors. This includes failure to consider human rights or failure to act compatibly with a human right under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic	Victorian Ombudsman www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au
Breaches of the Local Government Act	Local Government Inspectorate www.lgi.vic.gov.au

Breach of privacy. Complaint about a freedom of information application	Office of the Victorian Information Commission www.ovic.vic.gov.au
Corruption or public interest disclosure ('whistleblower') complaints	Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission www.ibac.vic.gov.au
Discrimination	Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission www.humanrights.vic.gov.au
Council elections	Victorian Electoral Commission www.vec.vic.gov.au

Learning from Complaints

Complaints from people who use or who are affected by our services provide Council with valuable feedback about how we are performing.

Council regularly analyses complaint data to identify trends and potential issues that deserve further attention.

Council can then use this information to come up with solutions about how to improve our services. Council is open and transparent about the complaints received. We publish our complaint data in our annual report.

Your Privacy

Council is committed to keeping all personal information secure. Council will use your information to respond to the complaint and may also analyse the information provided for the purpose of improving services that relate to the complaint.

Where Council publishes complaint data, all personal information is removed.

When Council receives a complaint officers will ask you to provide the following information

- name and contact details
- whether the complainant has any communication or assistance needs that can be reasonably accommodated
- what is the nature of the complaint
- what outcome is being sought

Responsibilities

All Council staff, Councillors and Council contractors are responsible for contributing to the complaints process.

Role	Responsibilities
Chief Executive Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting positive behaviours and practices relating to enabling, responding to and learning from complaints.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting service improvements that arise from complaints. • Reviewing and publishing complaint data.
Directors and Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting, training and empowering staff to resolve complaints promptly and in accordance with the Council’s policies and procedures. • Managing conflicts of interest in the complaint process. • Reporting on and identifying improvements from complaint data. • Supporting staff who deal with complaints.
All Council staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarising themselves with this policy and the Council’s complaint process. • Assisting members of the public to make a complaint. • Treating members of the public respectfully and professionally.
Councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarising themselves with this policy and the Council’s complaint process. • Referring complaints to Council staff to be dealt with in accordance with our processes.
Contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarising themselves with this policy and the Council’s complaint process. • Cooperating with the Council’s complaint handling processes.

Review Date

December 2025.

It is considered that this Policy does not impact negatively on any rights identified in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

“It is considered that this policy does not adversely impact community members or employees of different genders and has been developed in accordance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.”