



Council Policy 1.1.18 – Complaint Resolution

- Objectives:** Progressive
- Outcome:** 4.1 - A resilient, efficient and effective organisation.
- Strategy:** 4.1.1 - Provide efficient, effective, innovative, professional management of Shire operations to deliver the best outcome for the community within allocated resources.

Purpose

The Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale recognises the value of complaints as an important tool in monitoring and responding to customer expectation. Our objective is to streamline the processing of complaints in order to improve the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale's services and resolve grievances in an efficient and timely manner.

Definitions

“Service Request” a person's request or demand, however made, for a service to be provided or an action to be undertaken by the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale as part of its normal operations.

“Complaints” an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standards of service provided, or an action or inaction by the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale or its Employees, Agents or Elected Members. It is not a service request.

For the purpose of processing and recording it is important to recognise a complaint as differentiated from a service request.

A complaint may be about:

- (i) The standard or quality of the Shire's service, product, action or lack of action.
- (ii) Inappropriate behaviour of employees, agents or Elected Members.
- (iii) Confusing or incorrectly advertised information.

A complaint is not:

- (i) A first request for action or service (eg to slash a verge, to repair a footpath, the reporting of a nuisance dog).
- (ii) A request for information or explanation of Council decisions, practices or procedures made in accordance with due process.
- (iii) A request for action or service which is outside the Shire's jurisdiction or provided by other agencies.



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Policy

Background

The Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale is committed to the fair and efficient resolution of complaints to ensure quality customer service and the continual enhancement of our services. Accordingly, this Policy is intended to resolve most complaints at the initial point of contact where possible.

Lodgement of a Complaint

Complaints can be made:

- a) In writing, including via fax and email. Emails are to be directed to the generic shire address: **info@sjshire.wa.gov.au**
- b) In person, by completing customer feedback form
- c) By telephone. Complainants should be encouraged to lodge their complaint in writing, however if they insist on lodging the complaint verbally, it must be recorded by the employee upon receiving the complaint and the complainant must provide their name and contact details in order to take appropriate action to resolve the issue.

All complaints must be recorded by the officer receiving the complaint at the first point of contact.

Front line staff are responsible for receiving, registering and ensuring the resolution of all straightforward, minor complaints as speedily as possible. Where there is no cost or liability, they have the authority to resolve problems on the spot, and should endeavour to do so. If required the receiving officer may refer complaints directly to an appropriate technical officer for resolution.

The majority of complaints can be resolved immediately by acknowledging the customer's dissatisfaction, making an apology where appropriate, and taking corrective action.

It is important that all complaints are recorded, even if the complaint is resolved at the initial contact. In this case, it should be clearly noted on the customer feedback form that a resolution has been reached.

Complaints made to Councillors

Complaints are often made directly to Councillors rather than to Shire staff. Councillors are requested to:

- Ask the complainant if they have previously made the complaint to Shire staff. If not, Councillors should advise them to contact Shire customer service staff so that the complaint may be addressed; or
- Lodge the complaint on behalf of the customer.

Upon request, the Councillor may be advised of the resolution.



Anonymous Complaints

No action will be taken when a complainant declines to provide their name and/or contact details.

The following guidelines must be followed for anonymous complaints:

- a) An anonymous complaint must be recorded;
- b) Anonymous complaints will be reviewed to determine if the complaint will be investigated further. Anonymous complaints that must be investigated include:
 - (i) The matter being brought to the attention of the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale is in breach of statutory provisions or the Shire's Code of Conduct; or
 - (ii) The matter could be considered life threatening, a "serious risk", or create a health hazard or has a legal or financial implication for the Shire.

Complaints that will not be Considered

A complaint will not be considered if the Chief Executive Officer considers the complaint to contain offensive language or be discriminatory in nature. The complainant will be advised accordingly.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

A complaint may be withdrawn at any time. Complaints that warrant investigation may be pursued even though the complaint has been withdrawn.

Investigation and Referral

Where the complaint cannot be resolved at the initial contact the complaint will be referred to the appropriate officer for investigation.

The complaint may be referred to a relevant Manager or Director when:

- a) The complaint is outside the authority or area of expertise of the receiving officer;
- b) The officer is unable to reach a resolution;
- c) The customer remains dissatisfied;
- d) The nature of the complaint warrants higher authority.

Employees responsible at each level are to ensure that complainants are advised of the progress of their complaint:

- a) All complainants will be provided with an initial reply or acknowledgement, detailing likely action, within **five working days** of receipt;



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- b) If the complaint is referred to a second or third level employee for further investigation, the complainant will be advised within **two working days** of the referral;
- c) All complainants are to be informed of action taken (and/or progress) within **ten working days** of receipt of the original complaint; and
- d) If the complaint requires extended investigation, the complainant is to be advised and kept informed of progress at least every **ten working days**.

Resolution

In many cases an apology is sufficient to resolve the complaint. The apology may be written or verbal and the type of apology issued depends on the situation and nature of the complaint.

If investigation of the complaint reveals that there is a problem with Shire procedures or service provided by the Shire corrective action should be taken to ensure the issue does not reoccur.

The complainant will be notified of the resolution either verbally or in writing, depending on the nature of the complaint.

The resolution of the complaint must be recorded including details of any corrective action taken and communication with the complainant.

Unresolved Complaints

The majority of complaints will be resolved within the above procedure; however the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale may not be able to satisfy every customer on every occasion.

Sometimes local government has to make difficult and complex decisions involving many people and individual customers may not get the outcome they want.

If a complaint remains unresolved or a customer is dissatisfied with the process of complaint resolution, other avenues remain for the customer to explore, which include:

- Make a written request for a review of the complaint at a more senior level.
- The Ombudsman of Western Australia is an independent officer of the Parliament who investigates complaints about state government departments, most statutory authorities and local government. The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Level 2,
 Albert Facey House
 469 Wellington Street
 Perth WA 6000
 Ph (08) 9220 7555

- Other legal advice or remedy



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Whilst a customer is entitled to refer a complaint directly to these bodies at any time, customers are encouraged to allow the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale to investigate the complaint first.

References

Name of Policy	1.1.18 Complaint Resolution
Date of Adoption and Resolution Number	New Policy
Review dates and Resolution Numbers	Adopted OCM179/12/17 18/12/2017 Ordinary Council Meeting
Next review date	
Related documents	<p>Acts/Regulations <i>Local Government Act 1995</i></p> <p>Plans/Strategies Strategic Community Plan 2017 – 2027 Code of Conduct Customer Service Charter</p> <p>Policies Nil</p> <p>Delegations Nil</p> <p>Work Procedures Nil</p>

Note: changes to references may be made without the need to take the Policy to Council for review.