

Requests for Service Policy

Strategic Reference	Objective 4; Collaborative and respectful relationships amongst community, Council Members and Council Staff. Strategy 4.3; To continuously strive for open and accountable administration practices.
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Responsibility:	Community & Corporate Department
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Applicable Legislation:	<i>Local Government Act 1999, s270</i> Freedom of Information Act 1991 Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (ICAC) Act 2012 Ombudsman Act 1972 State Records Act 1997
Related Policies:	Customer Service Charter Complaints and Compliments Policy Service Range Policy Records Management Policy Internal Review of Council Decisions Policy
Related Procedures:	Request for Service Procedure Complaints Handling Procedure <i>Protocol – Ombudsman Enquiry Procedure</i>

1. Purpose

Coorong District Council 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 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; and
- Establish a standardised process for assessing and processing requests including the collation of information which can be used to directly inform service improvements.

1.1 Principles Underlying the Policy

This Policy is based on five (5) principles, which are fundamental in the way Council approaches requests for service. They are:

1. **Fairness:** treating customers fairly requires impartiality, confidentiality and transparency at all stages of the process.
2. **Accessibility:** to be accessible there must be broad public awareness about Council’s Policy and a range of contact options.
3. **Responsiveness:** this will be achieved by providing sufficient resources, well trained staff and periodic review and improvement of the systems.
4. **Efficiency:** customer requests will be dealt with as quickly as practical while adhering to this policy.
5. **Integration of different areas of Council** where 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 (eg Commonwealth Home Support Program).

2. Definitions

“**Employee**”: any person who is employed by the Council, but also includes any contractors, volunteers, trainees, work experience students and consultants undertaking work for, or on behalf of the Council whether they are working in a full-time, part-time or casual capacity.

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

3. 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 & Compliments Policy and the associated procedures apply. 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.

4. Policy Statement

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

4.1 Reasonable Request for Service

In determining how to respond to a request for service Council will consider:

- An assessment of risk;
- Statutory responsibilities;
- The content of Council’s Strategic Management Plans, Annual Business Plans, annual works program and Annual Budget;
- Relevant Council policies and codes; and
- Established service standards and response times for regular Council activities.

4.2 Processing a Request for Service

In Council’s experience, most requests fit within well established guidelines which are explained to the 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 (*only* if the applicant has requested to be contacted with a response). If a request cannot be fulfilled in a reasonable timeframe, the applicant will be advised, including an explanation of why this decision was taken (*only* if the applicant has requested to be contacted with a response).

In all requests for service scenarios, Council will *only* follow up the request (either verbally or written) with the applicant if they have specifically requested for Council to contact them with a response (ie: confirmation the request has been completed, advice the request could not be completed, etc) at the time of making the request for service.

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 & Compliments Policy.

5. Timeframes for Response

The circumstances of individual requests for service will vary greatly. In the majority of cases, requests will be processed promptly and *if* the applicant has requested to be contacted regarding their request, they will be advised verbally or by return post/email (phone or email are the preferred options when available to ensure a prompt response).

Routine requests are often subject to service response standards. For example, uncollected rubbish bins will be collected within forty-eight (48) hours, and 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 location 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, where practicable or requested will respond within ten (10) business days advising of Council's intentions in regard to the request.

If a request cannot be fulfilled in a reasonable timeframe, or is a service Council is otherwise not able to deliver, or is not the responsibility of the Council to deliver, the applicant will be advised (*only* if they have requested to be contacted regarding their request), including an explanation of why this decision was taken.

6. Recording Requests for Service

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

- Completion of the appropriate form on Council's website: www.coorong.sa.gov.au, click 'Maintenance Requests' button on the Homepage. You can fill out an electronic request form or download and fill out a hardcopy request form.
- Telephone: 1300 785 277
- Fax: (08) 8572 3822
- Email: council@coorong.sa.gov.au
- Via Council's Facebook page (in the form of a private inbox message)
- Letter: PO Box 399, Tailem Bend SA 5260
- Petition to Council

- *My Local Services* Smartphone App (the app must be downloaded to your smartphone to be able to use it)
- Visit a Council customer service office (see “7. Further Information” below)

All requests will be recorded in Council’s records management system and/or customer request management system in such a way that the information can also be analysed for service improvement opportunities.

Please note that requests for service made through our Facebook page must be made in the form of a private inbox message. General comments on Council’s page posts will not be recognised as a formal request.

6.1 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. Council will receive a report on the number and nature of service requests, including the percentage of rejected service requests, at least twice a year.

7. Further Information & Policy Review

This Policy will be reviewed every three (3) years, including within six (6) months following the next periodic regular election. The date for next review is March 2022.

This Policy and the associated procedure will be available for inspection at the Council offices listed below during ordinary business hours and available to be downloaded, free of charge, from Council’s internet site: www.coorong.sa.gov.au

Coorong Civic Centre	Meningie Hub	Information	Tintinara Customer Service Centre
95 – 101 Railway Terrace PO Box 399 Tailem Bend Phone: 1300 785 277 Fax: 8572 3822	49 Princes Highway Meningie		37 Becker Terrace Tintinara

Copies will be provided to interested parties upon request. Email council@coorong.sa.gov.au

Any grievances in relation to this Policy or its application should be forwarded in writing addressed to the Chief Executive Officer of Council.

REQUESTS FOR SERVICE PROCEDURE

(to be read in conjunction with Requests for Service Policy, April 2019)

CM reference	AR19/6257
Version number	3
Date adopted	April 2019

1. Purpose and Scope

Coorong District Council 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 Standard Operating 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; and
- 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.

1.1 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 Requests for Service Policy.

1.2 Legislation & Policy

Local Government Act 1999, section 270
Complaints and Compliments Policy
Customer Service Charter
Requests for Service Policy

1.3 Definitions

“Business Day”: means a day when the Council is normally open for business, i.e. Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays.

1.4 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 (e.g. 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 & Compliments Policy).

A **Complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction with a service which has, or should have, been received. Council’s Complaints & Compliments 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 & Compliments Policy and the associated procedures apply.

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.

It should be noted that the customer will *only* be kept informed of their request if they have specifically asked to be contacted by Council at the time of making their request.

1.5 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:

1. Fairness: treating customers fairly requires impartiality, confidentiality and transparency at all stages of the process
2. Accessibility: to be accessible there must be broad public awareness about Council's policy and procedure a range of contact options
3. Responsiveness: this will be achieved by providing sufficient resources, well trained staff and review and improvement of the systems
4. Efficiency: customer requests will be dealt with as quickly as practical while adhering to this policy and procedure
5. Integration of different areas of Council where the customer request overlaps functional responsibilities

2. Records Management

All documents, notes, telephone calls, photographs and correspondence must be retained and stored in accordance with Council's Records Management Business Rules as required by Section 125 of the *Local Government Act*.

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

3. Procedure

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

3.1 Assisting with the lodgement of requests for service

No one should be excluded from lodging a request for service because of any difficulties they may have representing themselves. All staff are expected to offer assistance where appropriate and provide it on request, including assistance in documenting the request in writing when circumstances warrant.

3.2 Receiving requests for service

A person can make a request in a number of ways:

- Completion of the appropriate form on Council's website
- Telephone
- Fax
- Email
- Letter
- *My Local Services* Smartphone App (the app must be downloaded to your smartphone to be able to use it)
- Via Council's Facebook page (in the form of a private inbox message)
- Visit to a Council customer service office

3.2.1 Recording requests for service

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

- Date and time of call
- Taken by
- Customer's Name
- Customer's address
- Customer's contact phone numbers and email address
- Comprehensive information about the nature of the request
- Who assigned to, and
- Whether the customer wishes to be advised when the work is completed.

Requests for Service received to Council via post, in person, email, Facebook and fax will also be recorded and saved into Council's records management system (Content Manager).

Occasionally a Customer may wish to remain anonymous in making their request for service – if so, Council respects their right to not provide contact details and will note this in the Customer Request Management System.

3.3 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.

Experience suggests that the majority of requests can be scheduled and actioned promptly. Some will require direction from a Director or, occasionally, a decision of Council.

Customer Requests are allocated to the responsible officer and have a specific workflow. It is the responsibility of the allocated responsible officer to follow up any redirection of allocated task to the most appropriate person.

All staff are responsible for ensuring response, action, and ensuring customer timeframes are achieved.

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

- Statutory responsibilities. Is the request about a matter which Council has a statutory obligation to act upon?
- An assessment of risk. Does the request relate to a matter which may impact on a public risk or Council risk?
- 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?

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 (eg. Commonwealth Home Support Program)
- 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. The receiving Council officer will lodge the request using Council's customer request management system, and advise the customer of the next steps.

More complex requests should be forwarded to the relevant Director 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 or new services they will be considered by Council in the preparation of the next Annual Business Plan.

3.3.1 Rejected requests for service

Where a request cannot be accommodated it will be identified as such and details of the request will be stored into the Customer Request Management system.

3.4 Acknowledging requests for service and progress

Once a request for service has been lodged and processed, Council will liaise with the applicant *only* in the instance they have specifically requested to be contacted by Council regarding their request (ie: updates, advice of completion, advice of rejected request, etc), or it is otherwise necessary to advise the applicant.

Under the Policy, Council aims to respond to customer requests as soon as possible, and at least within 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 & Compliments 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.

3.5 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 Customer Request System in such a way that the information can also be analysed for service improvement opportunities.

3.5.1 At intervals determined by the number of requests received, the data on requests for service is reported to the Leadership Team in order to ensure that systemic issues are identified and addressed.

3.5.2 Council is provided with reports containing data about requests for service, (ie: the types of requests for service and numbers of each request type lodged) at least twice a year.

5. Monitoring and Review of Procedure

This procedure was endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer to take effect April 2019.

Thereafter it will be reviewed annually. The next date of review is April 2020.