

POLICY NO.	M.27
POLICY SUBJECT	Complaints
ADOPTION DATE	28 th August 2008

Introduction

The Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes endeavours to provide services and facilities of the highest standard for Shire residents, ratepayers and visitors.

The Shire is committed to the provision of quality customer service and the efficient and fair resolution of complaints.

The Complaints Policy has been developed to provide a straight forward and uncomplicated process for investigating and resolving complaints.

The Shire recognises that the complaints mechanism also provides an opportunity for feedback, and continuous improvement of its processes and services.

Objectives of the Policy

- Provide consistent and clear guidelines for the handling of complaints
- Provide a clear and concise process for recording, examining and resolving complaints
- To obtain feedback to identify services and processes that need improvement.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the quality of service a resident, ratepayer or visitor receives when dealing with the Shire. Complaints also include grievances that a resident, ratepayer or visitor may have about the inappropriate actions or behaviours of a Shire employee or an elected member.

Complaints may concern:

- Services provided by the Shire
- Actions or behaviours of:
 - a staff member
 - the CEO
 - an elected member other than the President
 - the President

All complaints must be received in writing on the official complaints form, as provided at the Shire Service Desk and on the website at www.bridgetown.wa.gov.au .

If correspondence is received by the Shire outlining a complaint, in order for it to be considered, the Shire will respond to the sender within 7 working days requesting the complaint be completed on the official complaints form.

What our customers and visitors can expect from us

- Complaints will be taken seriously
- Anyone making a complaint will be treated with courtesy and respect
- Anyone making a complaint will be listened to and their views will be taken into account
- All complaints will be dealt with in a timely manner
- All complaints will be recorded.

What we would like from our customers and visitors if making a complaint

- Courtesy and respect
- A full and accurate explanation of the complaint
- Identification and contact details so that we can provide feedback and handle the complaint as effectively and professionally as possible.

Anonymous complaints

The Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes will not act on anonymous complaints.

Withdrawing a complaint

Anyone wishing to withdraw a complaint must notify the Shire in writing or via email.

Complaints of illegal or corrupt behaviour

Complaints which, when assessed, relate to illegal or corrupt behaviour or misconduct under the Local Government Act or Code of Conduct will be referred by the CEO to the appropriate external organisation. Where such a complaint alleges such behaviour by the CEO, the Shire President will refer the complaint.

Confidentiality

All complaints will be kept confidential as far as practicable, subject to the constraints of the various legislation that relates to local government.

Termination of a complaint

The Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes may terminate a complaint if it:

- has previously been dealt with by the Shire;
- was lodged more than twelve months after the alleged action took place, except where a complaint alleges that an action more than 12 months previously may have caused the issue of current concern; or
- if another statutory authority could more effectively deal with the complaint, in which case an explanation will be provided along with the contact details of the appropriate organisation.

Complaint Processes and Flow Charts

Complaints must be submitted on the official complaint form for the following processes to be triggered.

A “service complaint” is a complaint about the standard of a service provided by the Shire. A complaint against an employee of the Shire, CEO, elected member or Shire President is about the actions, inactions or behaviour of those persons.

Set out below is a descriptive flow chart showing the various complaint types, and their related processes.

Flow Chart

Complaint Against a Service Provided by the Shire	Complaint Against Staff Member other than CEO	Complaint Against CEO	Complaint Against an Elected Member other than President	Complaint Against President
Complaint is presented to and dealt with by CEO.	Complaint is presented to and dealt with by CEO.	Complaint is presented to Shire President.	Complaint is presented to Shire President.	Complaint is presented to CEO or Deputy President.
▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
If complaint alleges illegal or corrupt action, the CEO will automatically refer to outside agency	If complaint alleges illegal or corrupt behaviour, the CEO will automatically refer to outside agency	If complaint alleges illegal or corrupt behaviour, the President will automatically refer to outside agency	If complaint alleges illegal or corrupt behaviour, the President will automatically refer to outside agency	If complaint alleges illegal or corrupt behaviour, the CEO / Deputy President will automatically refer to outside agency
▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
If complainant is dissatisfied with CEO investigation or determination, he/she to be advised of appeal option to Complaints Panel.	If complainant is dissatisfied with CEO investigation or determination he/she to be advised of appeal option to Complaints Panel.	Shire President appoints Complaints Panel.	Shire President appoints Complaints Panel.	Deputy President appoints Complaints Panel.
▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
If appeal lodged, Shire President is to appoint Complaints Panel to review CEO determination.	If appeal lodged Shire President is to appoint Complaints Panel to review CEO determination.	Complaints Panel to determine complaint and any subsequent action.	Complaints Panel to determine complaint and any subsequent action.	Complaints Panel to determine complaint and any subsequent action.
▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Complaints Panel to determine complaint and any subsequent action.	If Complaint Panel determines finding against staff member, the matter is referred to CEO for determination of action.	If complaint is upheld the Shire President formally advises Council of the contents of the complaint and the action determined by the Complaints Panel, for their information only.	If complaint is upheld the Shire President formally advises Council of the contents of the complaint and the action determined by the Complaints Panel, for their information only.	If complaint is upheld the Deputy President formally advises Council of the contents of the complaint and the action determined by the Complaints Panel, for their information only.
▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
The CEO will submit a monthly report in elected members' information bulletin on the number and status of current service complaints.	If complainant is dissatisfied with Complaints Panel determination and/or CEO action, he/she to be advised of external appeal options.	If complainant is dissatisfied with Complaints Panel determination he/she to be advised of external appeal options.	If complainant is dissatisfied with Complaints Panel determination he/she to be advised of external appeal options.	If complainant is dissatisfied with Complaints Panel determination he/she to be advised of external appeal options.

Step-by-Step Description

(A) Complaints Against a Service Provided by the Shire

Any complaint expressing dissatisfaction about a service provided by the Shire will be dealt with administratively by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) unless a review of the CEO's determination is requested by the complainant.

- (i) The complaint will initially be referred by the CEO to the relevant senior officer responsible for the service that is the subject of the complaint. The senior officer will investigate the complaint, including interviewing relevant staff members and will provide a report to the CEO.
- (ii) The CEO will consider the report from the senior officer and make a determination of the complaint, and if the complaint is upheld will determine whether any changes to current practices or procedures are required.
- (iii) The complainant shall be advised in writing, as soon as practicable, of the outcome or decision concerning the complaint.
- (iv) If the complainant is dissatisfied with the investigations or determinations undertaken by the CEO, he/she will be advised of their rights to appeal to a Shire Complaints Panel established by the Shire President. The Complaints Panel normally shall comprise:
 - (A) President;
 - (B) CEO;
 - (C) Relevant senior officer responsible for the provision of the service that is the subject of the complaint (where the service in question is provided by the Office of the CEO, the Deputy CEO will be the relevant senior officer); and
 - (C) Two (2) elected members, selected by the Shire President.
- (v) The Complaints Panel shall meet as soon as practicable, and in all cases within fourteen (14) days of being informed by the President/CEO of an appeal.
- (vi) The Complaints Panel will assess the complaint and, if necessary, will interview the person making the complaint, accompanied by a support person if he/she so desires, and any other relevant person or officer. The Complaints Panel will prepare a report for the consideration of either the CEO or Council (as determined by the Complaints Panel). The report will contain:
 - (A) details of the complaint;
 - (B) details of how the complaint was investigated;
 - (C) other relevant factors; and
 - (D) a recommendation.
- (vii) The CEO will complete a monthly report to Council containing a list of the service complaints received and processed in the prior month, including the relevant determination and action(s) taken on each complaint. The CEO will also include a summary of these complaints, including the actions taken and their outcomes, in the Shire's annual report.

(B) Complaints Against Employees (other than the CEO):

The Local Government Act 1995, Section 5.41 states:

"5.41 The CEO's functions are to:

... (g) be responsible for the employment, management, supervision, direction and dismissal of other employees (subject to section 5.37(2) in relation to senior employees);"

Any complaint/allegation about an employee (other than the CEO) shall be dealt with administratively by the CEO, other than if a complainant is dissatisfied with the determination made by the CEO in the initial complaint. In that case the complainant may appeal to a Shire Complaints Panel for a review of the CEO's determination. However, in accordance with Section 5.41(g) of the Local Government Act, the CEO will solely make the determination on what action is to be taken against a staff member found by the Complaints Panel to have acted in an inappropriate or adverse manner on the subject of the complaint in question.

- (i) All complaints/allegations will be treated as confidential and will ensure that the principles of "natural justice" and "procedural fairness" are followed at all times.
- (ii) The CEO will advise the employee in writing of the complaint.
- (iii) The advice will:
 - (A) contain details of the complaint/allegation (other than the complainant's name/details);
 - (B) contain details of legislation/Code of Conduct being allegedly breached;
 - (C) seek comments or a response to the allegation; and
 - (D) specify a closing date for receiving such response.
- (iv) The CEO will investigate the complaint/allegation, or may direct another person to carry out the necessary investigations, and will prepare a report.
- (v) If any complaint/allegation or criticism is made concerning an employee, that employee may reply to the complaint/allegation in writing to the CEO.
- (vi) The CEO (or delegate) will prepare a confidential report. The report will contain details of the complaint/allegation, legislation/Code of Conduct being breached and a determination on whether a breach has occurred and if so what action is necessary against the employee.
- (vii) The CEO will consider the response provided and advise the employee being complained about and the complainant, in writing, of the findings.
- (viii) The complainant and the employee being complained about shall be advised in writing, as soon as practicable, of the outcome or decision concerning the complaint/allegation.
- (ix) If the complainant is dissatisfied with the investigations or determinations undertaken by the CEO, he/she will be advised of their rights to appeal to

- a Shire Complaints Panel established by the Shire President. The Complaints Panel normally shall comprise:
- (A) President;
 - (B) CEO;
 - (C) Applicable senior officer; and
 - (D) Two (2) elected members, selected by the Shire President.
- (x) The Complaints Panel shall meet as soon as practicable, and in all cases within fourteen (14) days the complaint received.
- (xi) The Complaints Panel will assess the complaint and, if necessary, interview the person making the complaint and the employee, each accompanied by a support person should either so desire. The Complaints Panel will prepare a report for the consideration of the CEO. The report will contain:
- (A) details of the complaint;
 - (B) details of how the complaint was investigated;
 - (C) other relevant factors; and
 - (D) a recommendation.

(C) Complaints Against Elected Members, President or the Chief Executive Officer:

- (i) The elected member, President or CEO will be advised in writing of the complaint. The President will write to any elected member involved, and where the complaint involves the President, the Deputy President will write to the President. Where the complaint involves the CEO, the President will write to the CEO.
- (ii) Any complaints/allegations about an elected member, the President or the CEO shall be referred to a Complaints Panel for investigation.
- (iii) The Complaints Panel shall normally be chaired by the President, except when the complaint/allegation involves the President in which case the panel will be chaired by the Deputy President. If necessary, the Complaints Panel will interview the complainant and the elected member, the President or the CEO, each accompanied by their respective support person, should they so desire.
- (iv) Notwithstanding (iii) above, if the complaint is about the President and the complainant is the Deputy President, the Complaints Panel is to be chaired by an elected member selected by the CEO, giving cognizance of the elected member's "seniority" of service with the Council.
- (v) The Complaints Panel normally shall comprise:
 - (A) President (except where the complaint/allegations involves the President). In this case the Deputy President will chair the panel (unless he/she is the complainant);
 - (B) CEO (except where the complaint/allegation involves the CEO); and

- (C) Two (2) elected members, selected by the Shire President, or the Deputy President if the complaint/allegations involves the President;
- (vi) The Complaints Panel shall meet as soon as practicable, and in all cases within fourteen (14) days of the complaint receipt.
- (vii) When a complaint is received, the person who is the subject of the complaint will be advised in writing within seven (7) days. The advice will:
 - (A) contain details of the complaint/allegation (including the complainant's name/details);
 - (B) contain details of legislation/Code of Conduct being allegedly breached;
 - (C) seek comments or a response to the allegation; and
 - (D) specify a closing date for receiving such response.

The President or CEO (whichever is applicable) will send the advice to the person who is the subject of a complaint. Where the complaint is about the CEO, the advice will be sent by the President, and where the complaint is about the President, the advice will be sent by the Deputy President.

- (viii) If necessary, the CEO may prepare a confidential report, for the consideration of the Council, to be jointly signed by the President, Deputy President or elected member (as applicable) and CEO. The report will contain:
 - (A) details of the complaint/allegation;
 - (B) legislation/Code of Conduct being breached;
 - (C) other relevant factors; and
 - (D) a recommendation.

The Council will consider and determine appropriate action to be taken.

If the complaint/allegations are against the CEO, and if deemed necessary by the Complaints Panel, the President shall prepare the report to Council,

- (ix) The complainant and the elected member or CEO being complained about shall be advised in writing, as soon as practicable, of the outcome and/or determination concerning the complaint/allegation.
- (x) If any complaint/allegation is made concerning an elected member or CEO, that elected member or the CEO may reply to the complaint/allegation either in writing to the President or to the Council itself. If the complaint is about the President, the President may reply to the Chair of the Review Panel and/or to the Council itself.

If at the End of the Shire's Process the Complainant is Not Satisfied

If a person making a complaint believes that his/her complaint has not been duly dealt with by the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes, and wishes to make an appeal, he/she will be advised to raise their concerns with the Western Australian Ombudsman's Office.

Continuous Improvement

Any suggestions for changes to this policy will be considered prior to the Shire's annual policy review process.