

7.4 COMPLAINTS HANDLING FRAMEWORK REPORT 2019

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SUMMARY

Mitchell Shire's Council Plan 2017 – 2021 establishes a key strategic objective to ensure a customer first approach for responsive service delivery and communication. As part of this commitment, a Complaints Handling Framework was developed in 2017 and adopted by Council in October 2017. The aim of the Complaints Handling Framework is to provide greater transparency to the community and identify clear processes for all Council staff to follow.

Following the release of Mitchell Shire Council's Complaints Handling Framework, Council commenced an internal reporting template to record complaints for the following departments:

- Local Laws
- Customer and Library Services
- Children's Services
- Waste
- Operations – Roads only

These departments were initially chosen due to their high levels of interactions with customers. This report provides an overview of the complaints recorded from 1 January to 31 December 2019 for the above departments. The report also outlines improvements being made and recommendations for further rollout.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT

1. Council note the Complaints Handling Framework report 2019.
2. Define "compliant" and ensure consistent reporting across Council.
3. Undertake process mapping for each department to ensure appropriate processes to capture reporting and response to complaints.
4. Progress and complete the rollout of the customer relationship management system.

BACKGROUND

Council is committed to receiving and resolving complaints made by our customers. It is important as Mitchell Shire grows that the complaints handling process is transparent and that complaints are handled in an effective and thorough manner. Complaints

COMPLAINTS HANDLING FRAMEWORK REPORT 2019 (CONT.)

provide an opportunity for Council to make improvements to services and processes and enable customers to have input into continuous improvement.

Complaints are made to Council in the following ways:

1. Directly to frontline staff either face-to-face, over the phone or via email:
 - If the complaint can be resolved, it is not escalated further
 - If not resolved, the complaint is escalated to a Team Leader, Coordinator or Manager
2. Through the Council email address
3. Directly to the department concerned
4. On social media platforms including Facebook

Since the Complaints Handling Framework was adopted, the following departments have committed to centrally recording complaints:

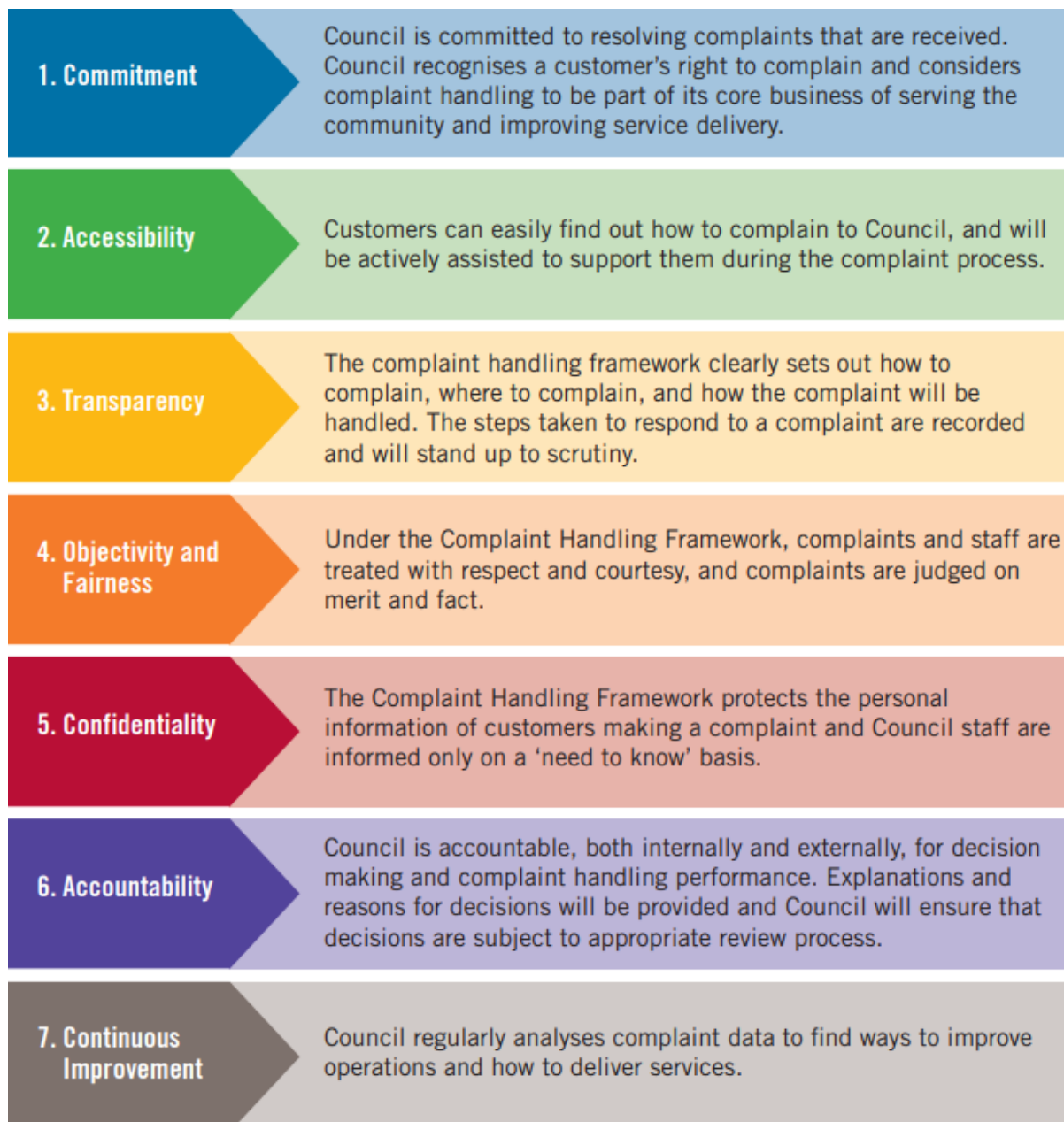
- Local Laws
- Customer and Library Services
- Children's Services
- Waste
- Operations – Roads only

Recording of complaints also occurs through the following mechanisms:

- Electronic Document Management System (TRIM)
- CRM (Customer Relationship Management) System

COMPLAINTS HANDLING FRAMEWORK REPORT 2019 (CONT.)

The Complaints Handling Framework is based upon seven guiding principles:



Further to these principals, Council is committed to ensuring all staff are aware of the Complaints Handling Framework and are dedicated to providing a high level of customer service.

ISSUES AND DISCUSSION

Mitchell Shire Council is committed to delivering excellent service to our community. While Council regularly receives positive feedback about customer service, we also recognised that inconsistent management of customer requests and our approach to

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complaints handling across the organisation are a common cause of customer frustration.

In March 2019, The Victorian Ombudsman surveyed all 79 local Victorian Councils to gain an understanding of how Councils receive and respond to complaints. Mitchell Shire responded to the survey identifying a total of 340 complaints received in 2018. This result was obtained from the Electronic Records Management System (TRIM) and represents all areas of Council.

The report identified that how individual Councils classify complaints varies across Councils. For example: what one Council may classify as a complaint may be considered a request for service by another Council.

The Ombudsman's report can be accessed online:

<https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/Publications/Parliamentary-Reports/Revisiting-councils-and-complaints/Revisiting-councils-and-complaints.pdf.aspx>

From 1 January to 31 December 2019, the following number of complaints were centrally recorded:

Department	Number of complaints (2019)
Local Laws	7
Customer and Library Services	1
Children's Services	28
Waste	43
Operations – Roads only	6
Total	85

As shown above, the number of complaints centrally recorded are minimal and do not provide an accurate picture of all the complaints received across these and all Council departments. The way in which Mitchell Shire Council records and reports on complaints needs to be standardised.

The following actions will be undertaken in consultation with all Council departments as part of stage two of the Complaints Handling Framework rollout:

1. Centralised recording of complaints and adoption of the Complaints Handling Framework across all Council departments.
2. All Council departments will use the CRM (Customer Request Management) system which will facilitate more comprehensive recording and reporting of all customer interactions including complaints.

The business units above were chosen due to their large customer interface and higher community satisfaction, for the first pilot. In addition, Children's Services is mandated to record complaints.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING FRAMEWORK REPORT 2019 (CONT.)

CONSULTATION

Interrogation of customer complaints and feedback indicated that there was inconsistency in Council's management of customer feedback and complaints. While Council regularly receive positive feedback about the way in which customers are treated by staff, inconsistent management of requests and complaints are a common cause of customer frustration and complaint. Further consultation across Council is required to ensure a uniform approach to receiving, responding to and recording complaints is adopted.

FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Further rollout of the Complaints Handling Framework will be undertaken within existing resources.

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The Charter and Complaints Handling Framework are directly related to Strategic Objectives in the Council Plan to ensuring a customer-first approach.

The framework supports Council's obligations under various legislation including Privacy and Health Records, Freedom of Information, Public Interest Disclosures and decisions made under legislation which provides separate avenues of appeal (e.g. Building, Planning, Environmental Health, Infringements, Land Valuations).

The framework strengthens our commitment to an open and transparent complaints handling process and compliments the principles in the Victorian Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Guide for the Victorian Public Sector.

RISK IMPLICATIONS

Risk Ranking is determined using [ROHS201-G1- Corporate Risk Matrix](#). Risk is identified as Low, Medium, High or Very High.

Risk	Risk Ranking	Proposed Treatments	Within Existing Resources?
There is a risk to Council that if complaints aren't recorded and responded to in a consistent manner and timely matter.	Medium	Expand adoption of Complaints Handling Framework to all Council departments Rollout of CRM across all Council departments	Within existing resources

COMPLAINTS HANDLING FRAMEWORK REPORT 2019 (CONT.)

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL)

The Complaints Handling Framework outlines a range of strategies aimed at supporting and enhancing the social and environmental sustainability of the Mitchell Shire.

CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

The rights protected in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* were considered in preparing this report and it's determined that the subject matter does not raise any human rights issues.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

The complaints handling framework provides a transparent process for dealing with complaints across Council. Where complaints have been made which relate to dealings with children and young people, appropriate actions will be taken to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

OFFICER DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any direct or indirect interest in this matter.

CONCLUSION

The Customer Service Charter and Complaints Handling Framework are critical documents to guide Council in providing the best possible customer service for our community.

The documents provide greater transparency to the community and commit all Council staff to delivering excellent service standard that are responsive, accessible and inclusive.

In order to ensure a consistent approach to complaints and feedback, further work needs to be undertaken across Council including:

- Identification of what constitutes a complaint and what is a request for service. This will ensure consistent and accurate reporting.
- Process mapping of current complaints handling and recording processes for each department.
- Rollout of the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) System across all Council departments will assist in accurate recording and reporting of complaints received. It is anticipated that the CRM will be rolled out to all Council departments by the end of 2020.