

COUNCIL POLICY

Complaints

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Date	Version	Revision description
09/11/2021	1.0	Policy approved by Council
27/1/2026	2.0	Policy approved by Council

1. Purpose

Alpine Shire Council is committed to providing a high-quality service to all customers and community members, and to seeking out opportunities to improve service delivery. Where Council has failed to meet a customer's expectations, the customer may wish to lodge a complaint.

This policy defines a complaint and outlines the process for the lodgement and management of complaints.

Council actively encourages and welcomes feedback, and maintains this policy to:

- demonstrate Council's approach to complaint handling
- provide visible and transparent information about how and where to complain
- establish a consistent and transparent complaint handling system
- establish expected timeframes for resolving complaints
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of Council staff
- ensure staff handle complaints fairly and objectively
- be accessible to everyone
- ensure there is no detriment to people who complain.

This policy supports Council's commitment to providing excellent customer service and will influence the development of a future public-facing Customer Charter. This Charter aims to further solidify Council's commitment to providing high quality customer experiences.

2. Scope

This policy applies to Council staff, volunteers and contractors engaged by Council.

This policy does not apply to decisions or processes that have separate statutory or other legislative appeal processes. Examples of service areas in which there are separate statutory, or legislative appeal processes include, but are not limited to:

- complaints relating to a Council or committee resolution
- complaints relating to a planning permit application or decision
- complaints relating to parking or local law infringements
- complaints relating to building, environmental health and food services
- complaints relating to a councillor when not performing their role as a councillor
- complaints alleging fraud, corruption, or other criminal behaviour
- freedom of information requests
- work related grievances from Council staff (i.e. complaints relating to their employment)
- complaints already reviewed by an external agency.

Council recognises that the above complaints are still valid; however, these will be managed separately from the complaint policy and through those legislated mechanisms.

3. Commencement Date

This policy will come into effect from 28 January 2026.

4. Policy details

4.1 COMPLAINT CATEGORISATION

The *Local Government Act 2020* defines a complaint as a communication, whether oral or in writing to the Council by a person of their dissatisfaction with:

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

Complaints differ to service requests. The Victorian Ombudsman recommends distinguishing between service requests and complaints by considering whether the customer is:

- requesting something additional or new (a service request)
- reporting what they believe to be a failing or shortfall (a complaint)
- complaining about Council's response to a service request (a complaint).

Council has adopted a four-tiered approach to complaint handling and has categorised complaints as follows:

4.1.1 Tier 1 complaint - First contact

A Council officer receives the complaint and can resolve the complaint at the time a person first contacts Council. Details of the complaint are recorded in Council's Customer Request Management system.

Any member of staff can resolve and record Tier 1 complaints. An officer may be assigned a Tier 1 complaint to review and resolve, where the complaint received relates to their area of responsibility or technical expertise, unless the complaint relates directly to the actions or decisions of that officer, in which case the Tier 1 complaint will be assigned to the supervisor or Manager for review. If the complaint cannot be immediately resolved, the complaint is escalated to Tier 2.

4.1.2 Tier 2 complaint - Investigation

Should a complaint be unresolved at Tier 1 and further investigation is required to facilitate a resolution, then the complaint will be escalated to Tier 2 and assigned to the Manager or Supervisor of the area with that area of responsibility or technical expertise. If the complaint relates directly to the actions or decisions of that officer an independent officer or more senior officer will be assigned the complaint. The investigating individual or individuals gather additional information and make an evidence-based decision. This individual or a representative of the individuals tasked with completing this investigation will communicate with the complainant throughout the investigation and provide a written outcome that explains Council's decision.

Details of the complaint and the correspondence is recorded in Council's Customer Request Management System.

4.1.3 Tier 3 complaint - Internal review

If a complainant believes that an incorrect decision has been made in response to their complaint, they can request an internal review.

A member of the Alpine Leadership Team independent of the decision conducts an internal review and assesses whether the complaint should have been dealt with differently. The original decision may be upheld or overturned.

Any Tier 3 complaints already with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at Tier 2 that remain unresolved will be reviewed by the director that does not manage the area where the complaint originated. The senior officer then follows through to resolution and records the resolution accordingly in Council's systems.

Any complaints received at any level about the CEO will be initially escalated to the Director Corporate and Community who may, if appropriate, record the complaint as a public interest disclosure (see Public Interest Disclosure policy and related procedures) or refer the complainant to an external review body.

4.1.4 Tier 4 complaint - Access to external review

If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the process or outcome of the Tier 3 internal review, the senior officer undertaking the review must then inform the customer of any external avenues through which they may pursue their complaint further. These avenues can include the Local Government Inspectorate, the Ombudsman of Victoria, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) or other appropriate authority. The complaint will be closed in Council's systems and this outcome recorded accordingly.

4.2 COMPLAINT RESOLUTION

The officer responsible for resolving the complaint must communicate with the complainant(s) via phone or email to advise of the outcome, including reasons for the decision made and contact information for the responsible officer. The details of this communication must be recorded against the complaint in Council's Customer Request Management system.

4.3 TIMELINES

All complaints must be responded to within the following timelines:

Initial response

All complaints received will be acknowledged by a relevant Council officer within five business days. This acknowledgement must convey who the responsible officer will be that will ultimately be handling the complaint.

Resolution

Every reasonable step must be taken to resolve complaints within 28 calendar days. For any complaint that takes longer than 28 days to resolve, the responsible officer must contact the complainant prior to the expiry of this timeframe and explain the reasons for this decision.

Complaints that remain unresolved within 28 days will be subject to review and escalated to the manager of the team where the complaint originated.

4.4 RECEIVING COMPLAINTS

Complaints can be received in numerous ways.

- Mail: Alpine Shire Council
PO Box 139
Bright VIC 3741
- Telephone: (03) 5755 0555
- Email: info@alpineshire.vic.gov.au
- In person: Alpine Shire Council Office
2 Churchill Avenue, corner Hawthorn Lane, Bright

4.5 COMPLAINT REPORTING

A number of specific complaints topics have been identified in the Community Vision and Council Plan 2025-29, which are reported to Council on a bi-annual basis.

Council’s Council Plan 2025-29 details how Council will measure progress against the three objectives of the Council Plan, these include public reporting in line with the below:

What we are trying to do	How we are measuring our success	Data Source	Reporting Cycle
We deliver great customer service by resolving your issue the first time you contact us where possible.	Rolling annual average percentage of customer service requests resolved on first contact.	Datascape Service Requests	Bi-annually
We maintain our beautiful parks and gardens for you to enjoy.	Number of complaints related to the maintenance of our open spaces.	Datascape Service Requests	Bi-annually
Our public toilets are clean and functional.	Number of QR code notifications relating to cleanliness of public amenities addressed within 24 hours.	QR code system in amenities and facilities	Bi-annually
Our public toilets are clean and functional.	Number of complaints received about cleanliness of facilities.	Datascape Service Requests	Bi-annually

The Manager Customer Experience will also report on complaints received and resolved to the Alpine Leadership Team every six months to ensure Council maintains a focus on

the satisfactory resolution of customer complaints and continuous improvement in complaint handling.

The Director Corporate and Community will provide annual reporting of complaints received and resolved to Councillors at a Councillor briefing session.

4.6 PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Council staff must adhere to all Council policies regarding the handling of private and confidential information. When gathering customer information to respond to a complaint, Council staff may only use it exclusively for the following purposes:

- to manage the complaint or to address systemic issues arising from the complaint
- to share it in a de-identified format when reporting summary data to the public
- to share it with other relevant Council officers only as needed to effectively resolve a complaint or investigate complaint trends and opportunities to improve how Council handles complaints.

4.7 REMEDIES

Where it has been found that a Council decision was made in error, Council will take steps to redress the situation. Possible remedies may include:

- an explanation of why the error occurred and the steps taken to prevent it happening again
- a reversal of an earlier decision
- an apology to the affected customer(s) if appropriate
- a suitable means of redress.

4.8 OTHER COMPLAINTS

Type of Complaint	Specific Handling Procedure
Complaints about Councillors	Complaints about councillors will be forwarded to the Director Corporate and Community and handled in accordance with the Councillor Code of Conduct
Complaints about Council staff conduct	Any complaints received about Council staff conduct will be handled fairly and equitably in accordance with the Council Employee Code of Conduct and disciplinary policy and procedures.

4.9 UNREASONABLE CONDUCT

Most complainants act reasonably and responsibly in their dealings with Council. In a small number of cases some complainants behave in ways that are inappropriate and/or unacceptable. This behaviour is defined as ‘complex behaviour’ Council’s Dealing with Difficult Customers Policy.

Unreasonable conduct is that which, because of its nature, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for our organisation, our staff, contractors and other service users.

The Dealing with Difficult Customers Policy contains comprehensive guidance on managing complex customer behaviour, including unreasonable conduct.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The following positions are responsible for:

Role / Position	Responsibility
Customer Service Team	Typically, the first point of contact for handling complaints. The team's initial responsibility is to identify the contact as a complaint, record the complaint and work to resolve the complaint. If they are unable to resolve the complaint, they will assign it to a responsible officer.
All Staff	Upon receipt of a complaint, each staff member is responsible for capturing all complaint information and ensuring the complaint and its resolution is logged via the appropriate system or with the Customer Service team.
Managers and Directors	Managers and directors are responsible for addressing issues escalated or assigned to them, investigating complaints and recording the resolutions accordingly. This includes third-party contractor complaints where the manager or director is responsible for the contract relationship.
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	The CEO is ultimately accountable for the complaints handling process and ensuring that all complaints are resolved in line with policy timeframes.
Third Party Contractors	Complaints made to third-party contractors regarding Council should be referred to the relevant Council contract manager to ensure they are recorded and actioned accordingly.

6. Breaches

Failure to comply with this policy, supporting procedures or guidelines will be subject to investigation, which may lead to disciplinary action.

7. Human Rights Charter compatibility

This policy has been assessed as being compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 [Vic]*.

8. Gender Impact Assessment

The implications of this policy were assessed in accordance with the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. The Gender Impact Assessment showed that the management of complaints by Council officers must take into account the varied experiences of access, capabilities, communication styles and ability of a diverse community. The assessment showed it is essential to ensure that gender and intersectional bias does not impact the way customer complaints are managed by Council officers.

9. Supporting documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other relevant, Council policies and procedures, as well as relevant legislative requirements.

Related Legislation

- *Local Government Act 2020 [Vic]*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1982 [Vic]*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 [Vic]*
- *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012 [Vic]*

Related Guidelines, Operational Directives or Policies

- Council Policy No.80 Councillor Code of Conduct
- Council Policy No.92 Public Interest Disclosures
- Council Employee Code of Conduct

Related Procedures

- Complaints Handling Procedure

10. Definitions and abbreviations

Term	Meaning
Alpine Leadership Team	Council's leadership team comprising managers, Directors and the Chief Executive Officer.
Complainant	Any person or organisation who is impacted by Council decisions, actions or inactions and who raises a complaint.
Customer	Any person interacting with, or affected by, Council's services.
Request for Service	A request for service includes 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. This is not a complaint.

11. Approval

THE COMMON SEAL OF THE ALPINE SHIRE COUNCIL was hereunto affixed this 27^h day of January 2026 in the presence of:



DAVID BYRNE
COUNCILLOR

PETER SMITH
COUNCILLOR

WILL JEREMY
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Version 2 of the Complaints Policy was adopted at the Ordinary Council Meeting held 27 January 2026.

The original signed version is held in Council's records.