



GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

14th November 2006

GM4	CORRESPONDENCE AND COMPLAINT HANDLING
FILE: 584	AVB
	{ Folio No. * }

SUMMARY:

Reporting to Council on outstanding correspondence and complaints for the quarter ending 30 September 2006.



DESCRIPTION:

Council's Service Standards require correspondence to be answered within 14 days and for complaints to be handled within 10 days.

Recommendation six of the Department of Local Government Report – Promoting Better Practice is, "Reports should be provided to Council on a regular basis on council's complaint handling activities so that Councillors receive information about Council's handling of complaints and correspondence".

The action plan forwarded to the Department of Local Government indicated that it is proposed to report to Council quarterly in August, November, February and May each year.

At the June meeting of Council it was resolved: -

- "2. That the information on Councillor requests received and dealt with be included in the quarterly report on the complaints and correspondence handling system.
3. That a resource usage estimate be included in this report."

CORRESPONDENCE

A report which summarises Council's correspondence handling performance is attached at [\(Appendix B\)](#).

In summary the report indicates that during the Quarter 3,401 items of correspondence were finalised with 85.5% of these being dealt with in not more than 14 days.

Reasons for correspondence not being answered within 14 days include:

General Managers Unit

378 items of correspondence finalised during the Quarter, of which 92.59% were completed within 14 days.

- RSVP's answered by phone and not logged off correspondence list.
- No answer required.
- Transferred to other staff and not marked off log.
- Awaiting determination from MIDGOC Councils.

Corporate and Community Services

955 items of correspondence finalised during the Quarter, of which 84.2% were completed within 14 days.

- Matters actioned, but not recorded on correspondence system.
- Business Services – delays included awaiting research, organising meeting dates and seeking confirmation or replies from other government departments and private companies.
- Financial Services – delays due to investigation/consultation required in order to address issues and frame a response. Staffing levels and workload have also contributed to delays.
- Fleet – Response not required
 - Completed but not marked off
- Community Services – Time required to liaise with other departments concerning Events Management Applications
 - Current workloads within business unit.

Sustainable Development Services

Of the 1,174 responses sent in the period, 90.37% were completed within 14 days. This compares to 1,031 and 89% respectively for the previous period.

95.48% of correspondence was replied to within 28 days compared to 95.15% for the previous period.

- Of the 201 replies outstanding for more than 14 days at the end of the period:
 - 7 relate to objections to DAs that have not been determined
 - 1 relates to an environmental study that has not been determined

- 6 relate to matters that do not require a written response
- 16 relate to matters replied to by the determination of the DA to which they relate or in the refund of fees
- Other outstanding correspondence will be investigated

The increase in outstanding correspondence is attributable to there being four (4) staff vacancies within the Department for most of the reporting period. With two (2) positions now filled, an improvement is expected during the second quarter.

Shire Services

An analysis of the outstanding correspondence statistics indicate a reduction by almost one-third of correspondence outstanding between 1 July 2006 (112) and 30 September 2006 (76). There has also been an improvement from 69% (June quarter) to 76% (September quarter) of the percentage of correspondence finalised within 14 days.

Reasons for correspondence not being answered within 14 days include:

- 25 quotes received for the supply of heavy haulage trucks and supply of gravel. No reply was necessary but are shown on the report as outstanding for 35 days until notations were entered on the file.
- matters that needed to be referred to Council.
- annual returns/licences that were completed by their due date but not within 14 days of receipt.
- similarly, applications for grants that were submitted by closing date.
- land acquisition/transfer etc that required advice or approval from third parties e.g. Government department or solicitors.
- staff shortages in Engineering Strategy, Works and Macleay Water contributed significantly to the ability to respond to correspondence within 14 days.

COMPLAINTS

A report which summarises Council's complaints handling performance is attached at [\(Appendix C\)](#).

In summary the report indicates that during the Quarter 73 complaints were completed, with 44% of these being dealt with in not more than 10 days.

Reasons for complaints not being finalised within 10 days include:

Corporate and Community Services

- The work orders were allocated to Shire Services staff. Whilst completed within 10 days work orders were then not taken off computer system.

Sustainable Development Services

- Of the 30 complaints responded to in the period, 50% were responded to in 10 days, compared to 20 and 75% in the previous period
- 73.33% were responded in 28 days compared to 100% for the previous period
- There were 61 new complaints for the period compared to 23 for the last period
- There were 39 complaints outstanding at the end of the period, compared to 6 for the previous period. Of these:
 - Only 6 related to a perception that no action had been taken by staff either failing or not being able to contact the complainant
 - None were the result of staff failing to take action
 - 20 related to matters such as barking dogs and crowing roosters that are often difficult to resolve immediately
 - 4 were incorrectly registered as a complaint

It should be noted that complaints are logged whenever a person either registers a complaint about Council staff not attending to a matter or where more than one complaint is registered for the same matter. These types of complaints represent only 8% of the 484 of Customer requests received over the same period that are actioned without the need for a second request.

It should also be noted that the officer allocated the task of coordinating Customer requests was required to act in the Complying Development Officer role over the period due to a vacancy in the position.

Shire Services

- In the quarter there has been a reduction of outstanding complaints by 40% from 10 to 6.
- improvements are being made to the process to ensure appropriate priority is afforded to complaints received. This will result in a higher percentage of complaints being finalised within the 10 day period in the future.
- several complaints were not assigned to the appropriate person.

COUNCILLORS REQUESTS

A report on Councillors requests received and dealt with is attached at [\(Appendix D\)](#).

The report shows as follows –

Outstanding Requests at 1 st July	-	21
New Requests during Quarter	-	28
Requests finalised during Quarter	-	37
Outstanding Requests at 30 th September	-	12

The resources required to handle Councillors requests has not been identified for this Quarter. A system to collate such costs will be implemented in readiness for future reports.

REPORT IMPLICATIONS:

- ***Environmental***

Nil

- ***Social***

Nil

- ***Economic (Financial)***

Nil

- ***Policy or Statutory***

Nil

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be noted.

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A V Burgess
GENERAL MANAGER