



GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

13th February 2007

GM7 CORRESPONDENCE AND COMPLAINT HANDLING
FILE: 584 AVB {Folio No. *} }

SUMMARY:

Reporting to Council on outstanding correspondence and complaints for the quarter ending 31st December 2006.

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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 [\(Appendix G\)](#).

The report shows on the left-hand side the Workload indicators, ie. number of items of correspondence outstanding; new correspondence; and finalised correspondence. It should be noted that these figures refer to all items of correspondence, – not just those which were outstanding more than 14 days.

The right-hand side of the report indicates Council's performance as compared to the Service Standard period of 14 days, ie. of the 2,923

items of correspondence finalised within the December 2006 Quarter, 86.66% of these were dealt with in not more than 14 days.

Reasons for correspondence not being answered within 14 days include:-

General Managers Unit

334 items of correspondence finalised during the Quarter, of which 92.81% were completed within 14 days.

- No answer required.
- Transferred to other staff and not marked off log.
- Awaiting determination of Council decisions.
- Christmas invitations for outside of Shire Area not answered immediately.

Corporate and Community Services

878 items of correspondence finalised during the Quarter, of which 83.9% were completed within 14 days.

- Administration – 9 matters related to leasing of property that required investigation and discussions with lessees before finalisation and 9 matters related to insurance and legal issues that required discussions with Council insurer and Council solicitor before replies being sent.
- 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.
- Community Services – Donations are subject to Council policy. Events Management Requests – require liaising with other departments. Some items awaiting adoption of resolution from Council.
- Fleet Workshop - awaiting close date for expressions of interest; response from Rural Fire Service; and staff shortage.

Sustainable Development Services

Of the 1,045 responses sent in the period, 89.57% were completed within 14 days.

- objections to DAs that have not been determined
- an environmental study that has not been determined
- matters that do not require a written response
- matters replied to by the determination of the application to which they relate or in the refund of fees

Shire Services -

494 items of correspondence finalised during the quarter of which 78.3% were completed within 14 days. During the quarter, there was a further reduction in outstanding correspondence at the end from 73 in September to 57 in December. Of the 57 remaining outstanding at the end of December, 16 of these were outstanding for less than the service standard period of 14 days.

- matters requiring referral to Council for a determination.
- annual returns / licences that were completed by their due date but not within 14 days of receipt.
- similarly applications for grants / funding that were submitted by due date.
- land acquisition and road opening/closing that required advice or approval from third parties e.g. solicitors or government departments.
- correspondence relating to lease agreements
- 21 expressions of interest received relating to the provision of trade services.
- Staff vacancies in Engineering Strategy, Works and Macleay Water contributed significantly to the capacity to respond to correspondence within 14 days.

COMPLAINTS

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

In summary the report indicates that during the Quarter 42 complaints were completed, with 42% 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

- Aged Units – required the matter to be programmed into the maintenance program.

Sustainable Development Services

- Of the 27 complaints completed in the period, 44.44% were responded to in 10 days, compared to 30 and 50% in the previous period
- 51.85% were responded in 28 days compared to 75% for the previous period
- There were 16 new complaints for the period compared to 61 for the last period
- There were 5 complaints outstanding at the end of the period, compared to 39 for the previous period.

From the analysis of data relating to these types of complaints regarding service levels it is apparent that the majority relate to dogs and a perception that Council has not acted. In some cases it has been necessary to reinspect complaints on several occasions to verify allegations concerning barking and straying animals.

Other complaints relate to non-urgent matters such as alleged unauthorised uses with complainants demanding immediate action which may not be justified.

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 4% of the 436 of Customer requests

received over the same period that are actioned without the need for a second request.

Shire Services

During the quarter 14 complaints were finalised with a reduction in the number of complaints outstanding at the end of the quarter from 7 to 4.

- Matters that are subject of a complaint often require an amount of investigation that may not be able to be completed within the specified 10 day period.
- Alterations are being made to the process to better identify complaints from work requests so that the appropriate priority can be given to complaints. This should result in a higher percentage of complaints being finalised within the 10 day period in the future.

COUNCILLORS REQUESTS

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

The report shows as follows –

Outstanding Requests at 1 st July	-	11
New Requests during Quarter	-	33
Requests finalised during Quarter	-	32
Outstanding Requests at 30 th September	-	12

The cost of staff responding to these requests has been estimated at \$823.00 for the December Quarter.

REPORT IMPLICATIONS:

- ***Environmental***

Nil

- ***Social***

Nil

- ***Economic (Financial)***

Nil

- ***Policy or Statutory***

Nil

- ***General Manager Comments***

Nil

RECOMMENDATION:

That the information be noted.

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A V Burgess
GENERAL MANAGER