

Revisiting councils and complaints

October 2019

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The Victorian Ombudsman pays respect to First Nations custodians of Country throughout Victoria. This respect is extended to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge their sovereignty was never ceded.

Letter to the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly

To

The Honourable the President of the Legislative Council

and

The Honourable the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Pursuant to sections 25 and 25AA of the *Ombudsman Act 1973* (Vic), I present to Parliament
Revisiting councils and complaints.



Deborah Glass OBE

Ombudsman

8 October 2019



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Foreword

The goal is not to receive zero complaints. The goal is to record instances where a service has not been delivered, and analyse this data to see if improvements can be made.

- Victorian Ombudsman, Councils and complaints 2015

When is a complaint not a complaint, and why do complaints matter?

These questions are at the heart of my second enquiry into how local councils deal with complaints. It follows a report I tabled four years ago into complaint handling by Victoria's 79 local councils, along with a Good Practice Guide to encourage councils to do it better. My earlier report identified that one of the main causes of complaints against local councils was the way those councils dealt with complaints: all too often seen as a nuisance, or provoking a defensive, unhelpful, bureaucratic response.

Good complaints handling carries its own rewards: more satisfied customers and the opportunity to learn and improve services as a result of feedback. The reverse is also true: poor complaints handling, including failing to acknowledge dissatisfaction as 'a complaint', carries significant costs, not only in reduced transparency and accountability but in public confidence.

So in 2019 it is timely to see what has changed. We found encouraging progress in some areas as well as promising pockets of good practice around Victoria, but less so in other areas. More councils now have complaint handling policies; information for the public is better; and complaint handling is more accessible, except to those with different communication needs. But some councils could not even tell us how many complaints they had.

At the heart of good complaints handling must be an understanding of what 'a complaint' is. Far too many councils still adopt a narrow definition of complaint or interpret it narrowly in practice. So as this report shows, the Melbourne council with the most interactions with the public recorded a mere 88 complaints the previous year, while one of Victoria's smallest rural councils recorded over 1,000.

This matters. Not only is it impossible to compare the councils, those who understate the level of public dissatisfaction may well be failing to deal with it.

A broad definition of 'complaint' - an expression of dissatisfaction - recognises this. Complaints are free feedback: whether about a missed bin, blocked drain, rates notice or parking ticket, they say something about council services. Recording them as complaints does not mean they have to be handled any differently; providing the service or pointing out a statutory right of appeal may well be the appropriate response. But capturing them as complaints allows councils to consider what may be needed to address systemic patterns of dissatisfaction that may emerge, to improve their service to the community.

I acknowledge that many councils have systems issues affecting their ability to record complaints, and it is encouraging to see councils such as Benalla and Baw Baw Shire working on upgrades to complaints management systems. I also recognise that councils may have more systemic concerns about recording and reporting complaints, particularly when complaints data is used unfairly to criticise council services. But it is not a solution to disguise the true level of community dissatisfaction by labelling it as a 'request for service' or 'matter with a statutory right of appeal', instead of recognising it as a 'complaint'.

This report also highlights good practice, from which other councils can learn. This includes Ararat Council, which in counting grievances about missed bins as complaints and acting on them, reduced complaints about this service by over 25%. And others could benefit from the work of East Gippsland Shire Council, who worked with Scope, one of Australia's largest disability service providers, to improve their accessibility. The council's customer service centres were awarded Scope's Communication Access Symbol and more importantly, as they told us, the exercise changed the way they viewed complaints.

We continue to produce tools to assist councils to do it better, and to gauge their effectiveness: our Good Practice Guide needs updating, and we will do that. Since my last report we have trained hundreds of council staff on good complaint handling, dealing with challenging behaviour and conflicts of interest, and we continue to offer these courses around the State.

I acknowledge councils' frustration with my own office's data about their complaints, which traditionally occurs every year when I publish the numbers in my Annual Report. The solution must be more meaningful data. It will always be the case that the number of complaints to the Ombudsman will be different from the number of complaints councils themselves receive. This year we will be publishing better data, including general outcomes of the complaints to my office. We will be looking to further refine this data during the following year.

My 2015 report also highlighted the role of government in ensuring consistent good practice across councils. The new Local Government Bill and Local Government Performance Reporting Framework offer opportunities for the State Government to help drive improvement across councils state-wide. I welcome the Minister's active engagement with the issues, and his acceptance of my recommendations.

But ultimately the responsibility for addressing these issues falls on councils themselves. Some have already embraced complaints for the free feedback they provide; it is time for all councils to recognise the value of welcoming complaints, handling them well, and reaping the benefits.

Deborah Glass
Ombudsman

Introduction

The purpose of this enquiry

1. This report revisits an issue the Ombudsman first examined five years ago – how local councils handle complaints from the public. It looks at how councils have changed their practices and what more can be done to ensure they:
 - make it easy to complain
 - respond to complaints effectively
 - learn from complaints to improve services.
2. When the Ombudsman announced her first enquiry into councils and complaints in June 2014, councils accounted for around a quarter of contacts with this office. The volume of contacts was unsurprising considering councils have broad responsibilities, including planning, collecting rates and issuing parking fines. However, this office was concerned about the number of people who were unhappy not just with the council's services, but also with the way the council responded to their concerns. In some cases, it appeared councils' complaint handling practices were fuelling grievances instead of addressing them.
3. The first enquiry surveyed all 79 councils about their complaint handling practices and met with councils and community groups. It found that councils too often viewed complaints as a nuisance. Instead of using complaints as an opportunity to improve services, councils sometimes responded in ways that were defensive, bureaucratic or unhelpful.
4. The result was a 2015 Report (the 2015 Report) and a Good Practice Guide (the 2015 Guide) for councils aimed at fostering common standards for complaint handling amongst councils (see the following page).¹
5. Many councils welcomed the 2015 Guide. The following year, over 50 councils reported they were using it to improve their complaint handling. Some were creating or updating complaint or customer service policies. Others were adding public information to their websites or reporting complaint trends to council managers.²
6. Almost five years after the first enquiry, it was time to revisit the issue. This office observed continued room for improvement in the way some councils handle complaints, with many people still expressing frustration to the Ombudsman about responses to their concerns. This office's advice for councils also needed updating to take account of changes since the Guide was published, including:
 - State Government plans to replace the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic) with a new legislative framework for councils.
 - The State Government's new performance reporting framework for local councils, which requires them to report publicly on their performance in areas such as roads, statutory planning and waste collection.³
 - This office's greater focus on human rights and accessibility for people with different communication needs, particularly in the context of dealing with challenging behaviour when people complain.

¹ Victorian Ombudsman, *Councils and complaints – A report on current practice and issues* (2015); Victorian Ombudsman, *Councils and complaints – A good practice guide* (2015).

² Victorian Ombudsman, *Report on recommendations* (2016) 27.

³ The Local Government Performance Reporting Framework was developed by Local Government Victoria in 2014. It is designed to improve the transparency and accountability of council performance. Local Government Victoria collects performance information from councils in key areas and publishes the information on its website, www.knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au.

The Ombudsman's 2015 Report and Good Practice Guide

The Ombudsman's 2015 Report and Guide encouraged councils to see complaints as free feedback that can be used to improve services.

The Guide encouraged councils to build a positive culture around complaints and fair and effective systems for dealing with them. It recognised that each council needs to decide what works best for its local community and also set out some basic common principles and standards.

The seven common principles were: commitment, accessibility, transparency, objectivity and fairness, confidentiality, accountability and continuous improvement.

The common standards were structured around three stages of complaint handling.

1. Enabling complaints – The Guide explained how councils could make it easier for people to complain, for example by:
 - adopting a complaints policy
 - publishing information about their complaints process
 - making their processes accessible.
2. Responding to complaints – The Guide explained how councils could respond to complaints fairly, objectively and efficiently including by:
 - acknowledging complaints early
 - considering the fairness as well as the lawfulness of their actions
 - admitting mistakes and acting to correct them
 - advising people about their rights of review.
3. Learning and improving – The Guide also encouraged councils to learn from complaints to improve their services. It explained how councils could:
 - record complaints better
 - use complaints data to identify systemic issues with services.

The Ombudsman's Report also recommended the State Government Minister and Department responsible for local government:

- consider including a definition of 'complaint' in the Local Government Act
- consider including a requirement that councils have a complaint handling policy and procedures, and an internal review function, in the Local Government Act
- develop, or coordinate the development of, standard fact sheets or advice for councils where legislation binds the way they respond to complaints, such as rates, infringements and planning.

7. On 5 February 2019, the Ombudsman wrote to the Chief Executive Officers of all local councils, the Minister for Local Government and peak local government bodies to advise she was starting a second enquiry into councils and complaints. This enquiry focused on two issues:

- the extent to which councils have implemented the principles and processes in the 2015 Guide
- how to improve the Ombudsman's 2015 Guide and other information and advice for councils.

Why complaint handling matters

8. As the Ombudsman's 2015 Report noted, complaints are a source of free feedback about services. They can highlight the need to improve services, or at least to explain decisions better.
9. Good complaint handling generates financial benefits for organisations, according to 2018 research from the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals Australia and the University of Newcastle. This research found organisations get the best return on investment in complaints systems when they use complaints to generate improvements to products and processes. The researchers' modelling found every dollar invested in complaint handling by an organisation generates potential returns of \$10.⁴

10. For government agencies, good complaint handling also serves the public interest. When government agencies handle complaints well, they:

- create better outcomes for members of the public
- restore trust in their services and integrity
- identify ways to improve services for the community as a whole.

11. By contrast, when government agencies handle complaints poorly, they:

- undermine their relationship with members of the public
- compromise their integrity and reputation
- risk wasting time and resources if the aggrieved person escalates the complaint to senior managers, ministers or complaint bodies like the Ombudsman, or takes costly legal action
- miss opportunities to learn from the situation and improve their services.

12. Good complaint handling is particularly important for councils because of their role in delivering services to local communities. In 2017-18, Victorian councils spent an estimated \$8.5 billion on service delivery and managed an estimated \$102.1 billion in infrastructure and assets.⁵ They provide the type of local services that people use every day – rubbish collection, local roads, parking, planning, health and community services, libraries, parks and swimming pools. As the Ombudsman said in her 2015 Report:

Every Victorian has a relationship with his or her local council ... The work of councils is evident in every street or every town and suburb in Victoria. For many people, their main interaction with government is with their local council.

⁴ Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals Australia and University of Newcastle, *Return on Investment of Effective Complaints Management Report* (2018).

⁵ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Reporting on Local Government Performance* (2019) 7.

Enquiry methodology

13. To identify how councils have changed their complaint handling practices since the Ombudsman's first enquiry, this enquiry once again surveyed all 79 local councils (the 2019 Survey). The 2019 Survey asked 62 questions about how councils receive and respond to complaints and how they record and use complaints data. The Survey gave councils an opportunity to highlight examples of good practice and areas for improvement.
14. The 2019 Survey also invited councils to comment on:
 - the usefulness of the Ombudsman's 2015 Guide and other information provided by this office, and how it could be improved
 - the usefulness of information provided by the State Government agency responsible for local government, Local Government Victoria.
15. All 79 councils responded to the 2019 Survey. The enquiry team gave each council a copy of their own survey response and a summary of key survey results for councils of a similar type. This allowed councils to compare their own responses with similar councils. The councils were then given the opportunity to clarify the information in their survey responses.
16. The enquiry team also consulted the following Victorian regulatory bodies, peak bodies and consumer groups about their observations of complaint handling in councils:
 - Local Government Victoria
 - the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, the integrity body that audits the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of council programs and services
 - the Victorian Local Government Inspectorate, the integrity body that investigates matters relating to council operations, elections and electoral matters and prosecutes offences under the Local Government Act
 - the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
 - the Municipal Association of Victoria, a peak body representing councils
 - the Victorian Local Governance Association, a peak body representing councils and councillors
 - Ratepayers Victoria, which represents local ratepayer advocacy groups
 - the Mental Health Legal Centre
 - the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner
 - Disability Justice Australia, an advocacy organisation for people with disabilities.

-
17. In May 2019, the Ombudsman and the enquiry team met with the Minister of Local Government to discuss the enquiry. The Ombudsman later wrote to the Minister with recommendations for the Victorian Government's proposed new Local Government Bill (see paragraph 214 of this report).
 18. The Ombudsman undertook these activities using the 'own motion' enquiry powers in section 13A of the *Ombudsman Act 1973* (Vic).

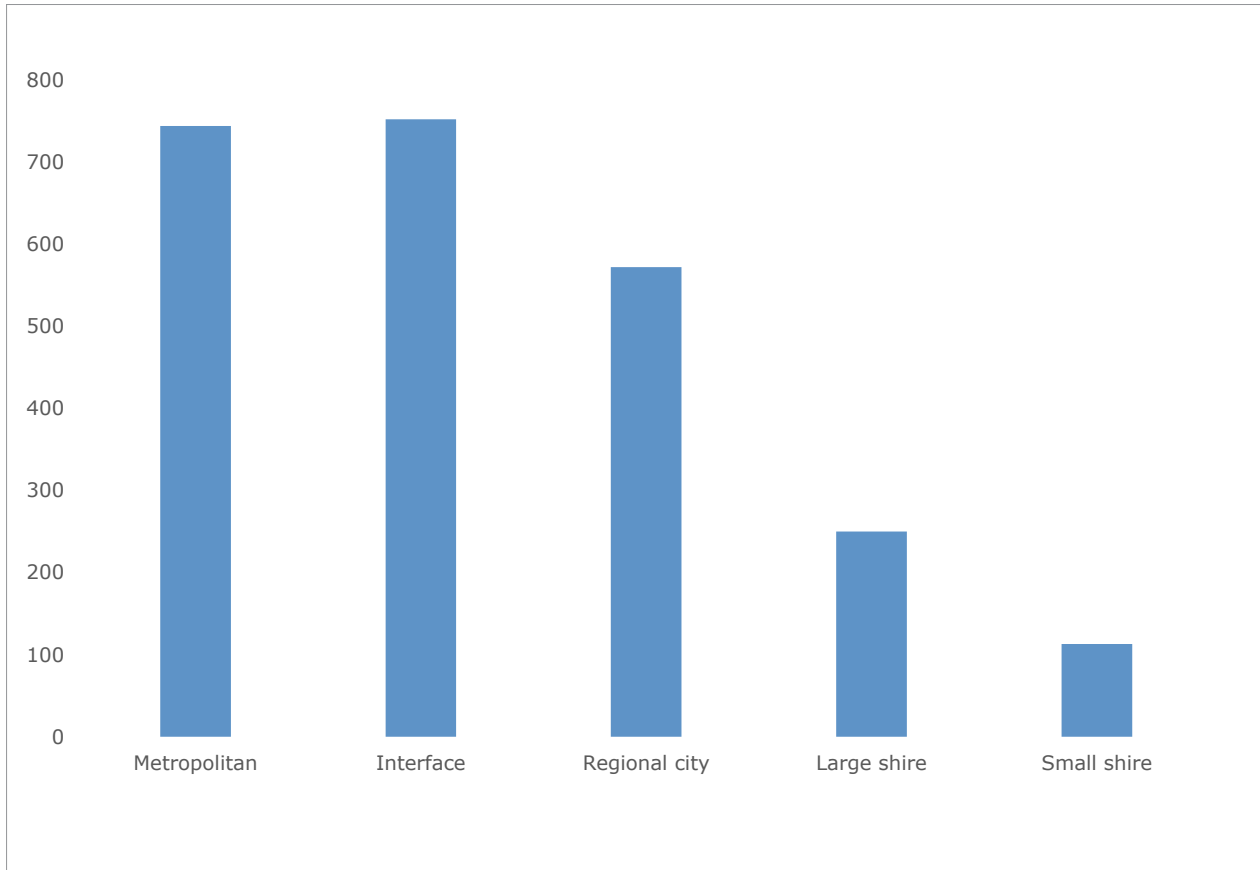
This report

19. The remainder of this report is divided into two sections. The first section looks at the extent to which councils have implemented the recommendations in the Ombudsman's 2015 Guide, based on the results of the 2019 Survey and consultation with organisations.
20. When comparing councils, the report uses the five council types or 'comparator groups' adopted by Local Government Victoria for its Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (see paragraph 6 and footnote 3). The five council types are:
 - **Metropolitan councils** – 22 councils representing inner-city and suburban Melbourne.
 - **Interface councils** – nine councils forming Melbourne's outer-urban ring.
 - **Regional city councils** – 10 councils representing large Victorian regional centres and surrounding areas.
 - **Large shire councils** – 19 councils representing areas of regional Victoria with populations over 15,000.
 - **Small shire councils** – 19 councils representing areas of regional Victoria with populations under 15,000.
21. Appendix B summarises key survey results for each council type, while Appendix C summarises key survey results for individual councils. Appendix D provides the number of reported complaints and requests for service received by each council in 2018, as reported by the councils.
22. When reviewing this data and comparing councils, it is important to remember:
 - The data is based on councils' self-reporting in survey responses and has not been audited.
 - Councils differ in terms of the resources they can devote to complaint handling. In 2018, for example, the Victorian Parliament's Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee reported on financial and other challenges facing rural and regional councils.⁶ Graph 1 on the following page shows the average number of full-time equivalent staff at different types of councils and highlights the relatively limited resources of councils in regional Victoria.
23. The second section of this report considers the role of the Ombudsman and the State Government in encouraging and equipping councils to handle complaints effectively. It reflects on the usefulness of initiatives such as the Ombudsman's 2015 Guide and looks at what more can be done to improve councils' complaint handling in the future.

Appendix A lists the councils in each category.

⁶ Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee, Parliament of Victoria, *Inquiry into the sustainability and operational challenges of Victoria's rural and regional councils – Final Report* (2018).

Graph 1: Average number of full-time equivalent staff - 2019, by council type (as per responses provided by councils)



Councils and complaints – then and now

24. This section looks at how councils have changed their complaint handling practices in response to the Ombudsman's 2015 Guide. It looks at progress against three main stages of complaint handling:

- Enabling complaints
- Responding to complaints
- Learning from complaints to improve services.

25. It begins with a threshold issue that affects all stages of complaint handling – the way councils define a 'complaint'.

Defining a 'complaint'

Common sense definition

26. The Ombudsman's first enquiry identified that many councils define the word 'complaint' narrowly. This problem was still evident in this enquiry, almost five years later. The result is that some councils appear to underrecord and underreport the level of dissatisfaction with their services.

27. The Australia/New Zealand Standard for complaints management adopts a common sense definition of 'a complaint' that is consistent with the ordinary meaning of the word. The Standard defines a complaint as an:

Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organization, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.⁷

28. The first enquiry found many councils had adopted narrower definitions. Many defined some expressions of dissatisfaction not as 'complaints', but as 'requests for service'.

29. This issue was highlighted when the enquiry consulted councils about a case study in which a person complained that the council waste collection service missed their rubbish bin. One council argued this was a 'request for service', not a complaint, even if the person was expressing dissatisfaction with the council's services.

30. The Ombudsman's 2015 Report said:

There will always be an element of subjectivity in deciding what constitutes a complaint and what does not, however, it is clear that some councils have adopted an unnecessarily narrow approach to categorisation ... I remain of the view that the definition of complaint should be centred on a person's dissatisfaction with a council.

31. The 2015 Report recommended the Minister for Local Government consider including the following broad definition in the Local Government Act:

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with:

- The quality of an action taken, decision made, or service provided by a council or its contractor
- A delay or failure in providing a service, taking an action, or making a decision by a council or its contractor.

32. In the meantime, the 2015 Guide advocated that councils adopt this broad definition in practice. The Guide advocated that councils confine the term 'request for service' to:

Contact with the council to seek assistance, access to a new service, advice or to inform/make a report about something for which the council has responsibility.

⁷ Standards Australia, *Australian/New Zealand Standard: Guidelines for complaint management in organizations*, AS/NZS 10002:2014 (2014).

33. The 2019 Survey identified that councils continue to define 'complaints' inconsistently, and many councils continue to define 'complaints' narrowly. This occurs in two main ways.
34. First, some councils still classify expressions of dissatisfaction as a 'request for service'. For example, they may record a person's first contact with the council as a 'request for service' and any later contacts as a 'complaint'.
35. Second, some councils 'carve out' whole topics from their definition of complaint. These 'carve outs' often include reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure, general feedback, missed bins and disputes where people have a statutory right of review (eg disputes about infringements, rates, property valuations or fines).
36. Some of the different definitions provided by councils on their websites or in response to the 2019 Survey are shown below.

Examples of council definitions of 'complaint'

Council A (a large shire council)

As a general rule of thumb, the initial contact from a customer on a particular matter is considered to be a request.

Subsequent dissatisfied contact on that matter is considered a complaint.

In addition to that frontline officers are often called upon to use their judgement when hearing from customers about how a policy or procedure is being implemented, or about the conduct of an officer, for example. These are generally considered to be complaints.

Council B (a regional city council)

Requests for service are classified as work that is expected of Council that has not been undertaken or to the customer's satisfaction. A complaint is about the handling of the request or multiple failures to provide the service.

Council C (a small shire council)

A complaint does not include:

- ordinary requests for service ie a customer request - this can be done through our Customer Request process*
- follow up queries about an existing request, if that request still falls within our Customer Service Charter timeframes for response or action*
- reports of a hazard or urgent emergency*
- reports concerning neighbours or neighbouring properties and disputes between neighbours*
- a request for information, including Freedom of Information requests or an explanation of a policy or procedure*
- expressions of dissatisfaction with decisions made under legislation which provides for separate avenues of appeal, for example, those which fall under Freedom of Information legislation*
- an alleged breach under the Councillor Code of Conduct (which is dealt with under provisions of the Councillor Code of Conduct).*

Examples of council definitions of 'complaint' – continued

Council D (an interface council)

The following are not considered complaints ...

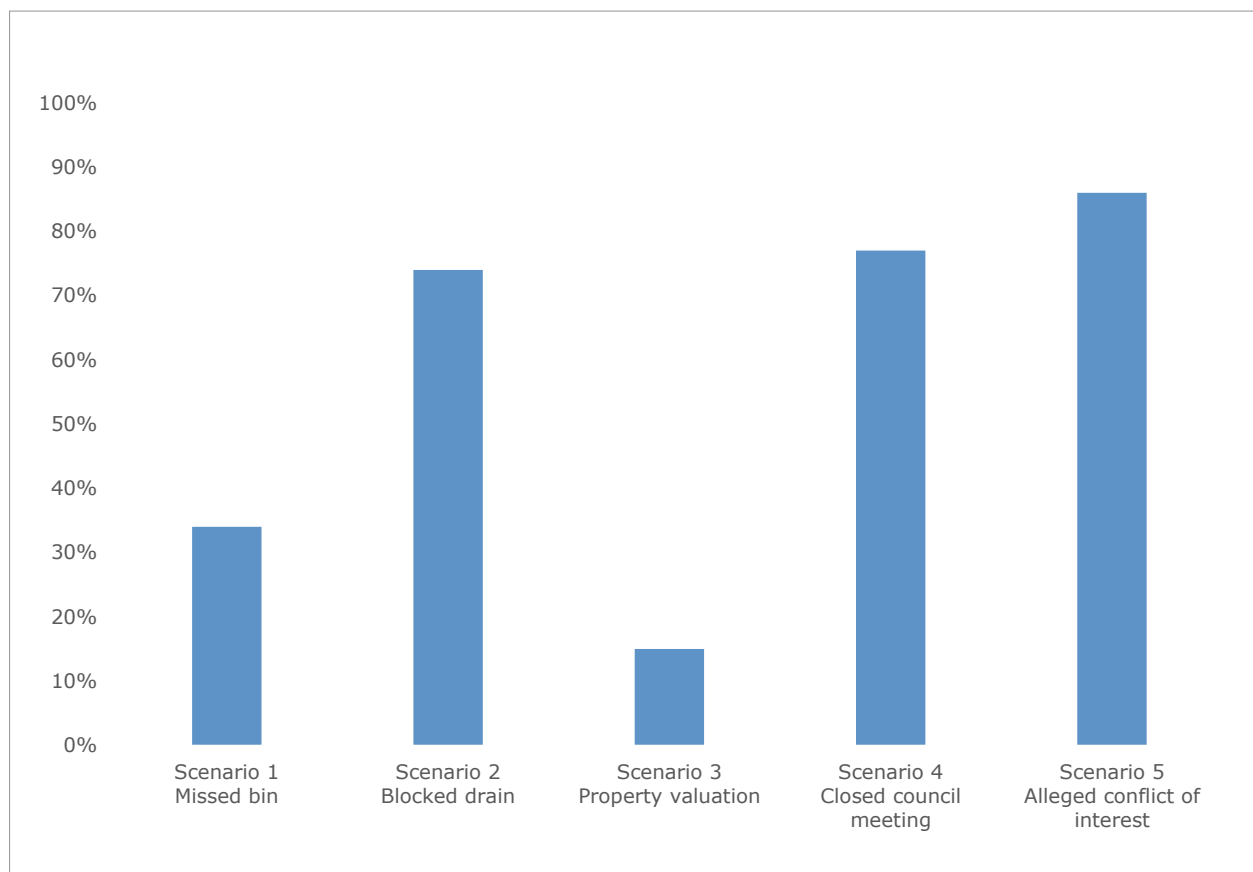
- *A request for works or services (such as reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure), unless it is a second request and there was no response to the first request or where the response or quality of works were unsatisfactory.*
- *A complaint about an event, service or business for which we are not responsible.*
- *Disagreement with our policy or a lawfully made decision.*
- *The lodging of an appeal or objection.*
- *Reports about neighbours, noise, dogs, unauthorised building work or similar issues.*
- *Trivial, frivolous or vexatious complaints which will not be investigated.*

Council E (a metropolitan council)

We do not consider requests for service as complaints unless there is expressed dissatisfaction with the quality, timeliness or action taken for a previous request for service, or decision made. If contact is made about repeated requests for service or a customer requests the matter to be treated as a formal complaint we do. This also includes complaints about staff conduct. Requests to review an infringement are not treated as a complaint and are dealt with under a separate review process. Requests for a missed bin are also not treated as a complaint (unless it is ongoing), noise, food safety and a number of other complaints are considered.

37. The impact of these narrow definitions was evident when the 2019 Survey asked councils to consider five factual scenarios and classify them as either a complaint or a request for service. The five scenarios were:
- **Scenario 1:** A resident reports that he put his bin out the night before, but it was not collected.
 - **Scenario 2:** A business owner reports that the stormwater drain outside her shop is blocked again despite reporting the same issue one month ago.
 - **Scenario 3:** A property owner disagrees with the property valuation on her rates notice and would like a revaluation (an issue where people have a statutory right of review).
 - **Scenario 4:** A tender submitter is upset that a contract for engineering services was awarded at a closed council meeting.
 - **Scenario 5:** A business owner reports that a councillor has a conflict of interest in relation to a planning decision.
38. All five scenarios involve expressions of dissatisfaction and should be classified as complaints according to the definition recommended by the Ombudsman and the Australia/New Zealand Standard. Graph 2 on the following page shows the percentage of councils that classified each scenario as a 'complaint'. There was no agreement amongst councils about any of the scenarios.
39. Only five councils correctly identified all five scenarios as complaints.
40. This highlights ongoing confusion about how to classify expressions of dissatisfaction and the need for ongoing work with councils.

Graph 2: Percentage of councils that classified each scenario as a ‘complaint’ (as per responses provided by councils)



Perceptions of complaints

41. During the Ombudsman’s first enquiry, council staff indicated there was some reluctance to adopt a broad definition of complaint because there is a perception in the sector that complaints are ‘bad’ and councils want to keep reportable complaint numbers low.
42. Over half of the councils (43 councils or 54 per cent) told the first enquiry that defining a complaint as ‘any expression of dissatisfaction’ was too broad. One council said it was unfair to count complaints from people who were ‘unreasonably persistent’ or people who were disgruntled simply because they did not get the ‘answer’ they wanted. Another said it collected more than 60,000 rubbish bins each week and it was impossible to provide a faultless service.

43. During this enquiry, the Municipal Association of Victoria noted that the word ‘complaint’ is still seen as a negative term by councils. The narrow definitions adopted by some councils suggest these perceptions continue to influence the way they define and count complaints.

Why definitions matter

44. From one perspective, these issues can look like semantics. A resident with a missed bin collection is unlikely to care whether their council defines their contact as a 'complaint' or a 'request for service', as long as the council fixes the problem.

45. However, definitions have a practical impact when it comes to measuring and learning from complaints. The enquiry team identified that some councils with a narrow definition of complaint may be understating their complaint numbers. One example is Melbourne City Council which is regularly in this office's top ten councils in terms of 'contacts'. Its definition of 'complaint' excludes expressions of dissatisfaction with infringements (which have a statutory right of review) and missed bins. It told the enquiry it had received 88 complaints on 2018, but close to 300,000 requests for service.

46. If councils do not record expressions of dissatisfaction as complaints accurately and consistently:

- Vital feedback from the public is not counted.
- Councils and communities lack accurate data about what people think about council services and what needs to change.
- Councils and communities cannot accurately benchmark their performance against other councils (see paragraphs 174-188 for further discussion of this issue).

47. As the Ombudsman said in her 2015 Report, the definition of complaint should be focused on a person's dissatisfaction with a council, rather than a desire to minimise the number of complaints a council receives or assumptions about the validity of complaints:

The goal is not to receive zero complaints. The goal is to record instances where a service has not been delivered, and analyse this data to see if improvements can be made.⁸

Enabling complaints

48. The Ombudsman's 2015 Guide encouraged councils to recognise the value of complaints by making it easier for people to complain. This section looks at councils' progress since that time.

Positive commitment

49. The 2015 Guide recommended councils take steps to build a positive and receptive culture around complaints. Amongst other things, it recommended councils:

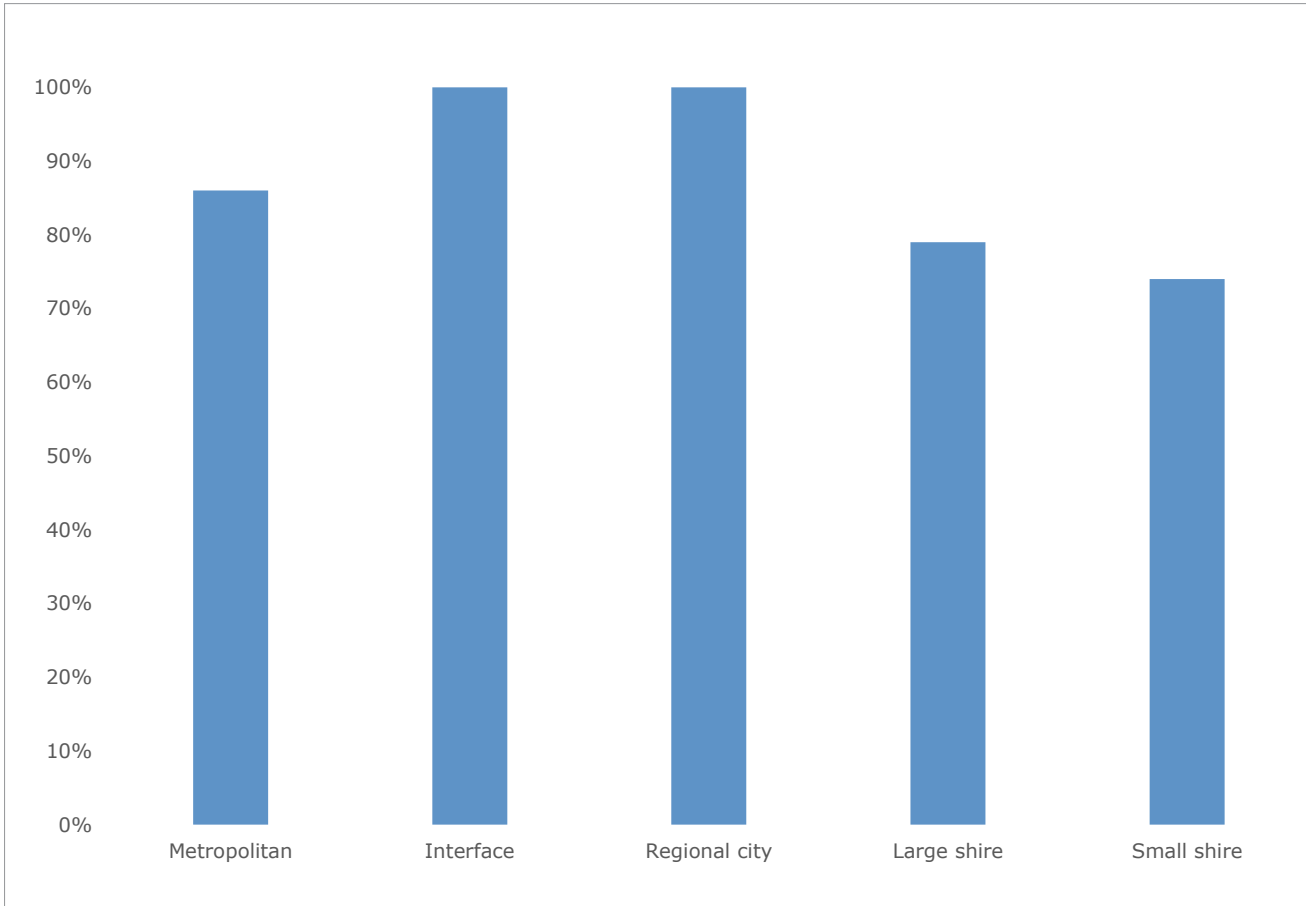
- develop and implement a complaint handling policy
- ensure every person employed in or providing a service on behalf of the council can explain how to make a complaint and how it will be handled
- provide induction and ongoing complaint handling training to staff.

50. The 2019 Survey shows that most councils are now implementing such steps, although challenges remain for smaller regional councils.

51. Sixty-seven councils (85 per cent) reported that they have a complaints policy, up from 57 councils (72 per cent) in the Ombudsman's first enquiry. However, complaints policies were still less common in large shire and small shire councils (see Graph 3 on the following page).

⁸ Victorian Ombudsman, *Councils and complaints – A report on current practice and issues* (2015) 8.

Graph 3: Percentage of councils with a complaints policy – 2019, by council type (as per responses provided by councils)



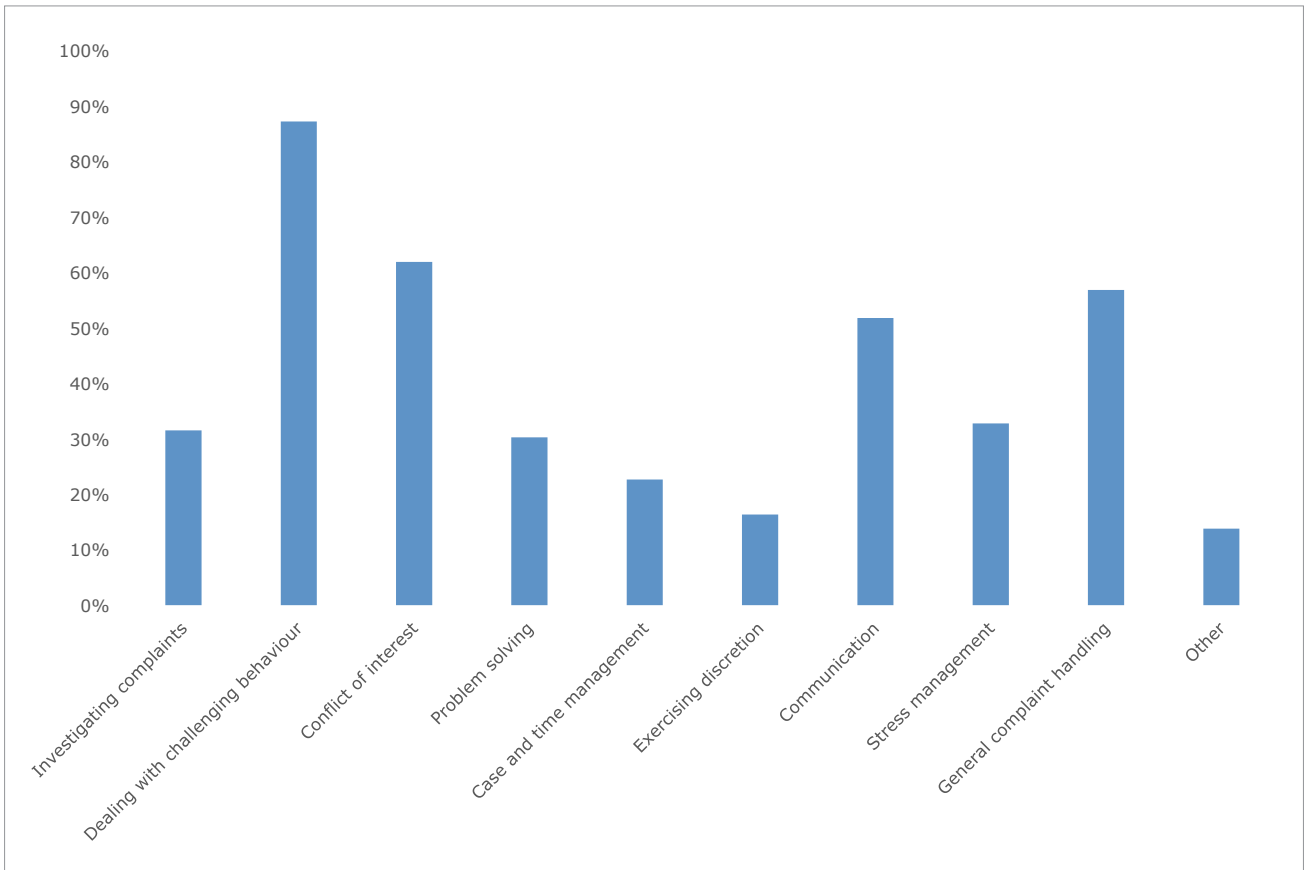
52. Some councils now employ dedicated officers or teams to handle complaints. Sixteen councils (20 per cent) reported having a dedicated complaints officer or team. This is more common in regional city councils, where four out of 9 councils have adopted such arrangements.
53. Other councils reported relying on a mix of frontline staff and managers to handle complaints. Thirty-four councils (43 per cent) said ‘all staff’ handle complaints.
54. Almost all councils (76 councils or 96 per cent) said at least some staff receive training relevant to complaint handling. However, once again this can be more of a challenge for regional councils. One small shire council said staff need regular ‘tune ups’ and reminders, rather than extended training.

‘Provision of training in regional areas would be very beneficial to small rural councils.’

- Small shire council

55. The types of training reported by councils are shown in Graph 4 on the following page.
56. The Victorian Ombudsman began offering workshops on good complaint handling in local government in 2016, and workshops on Responding to Challenging Behaviour in 2018. The response of councils to those workshops has been positive. Between July 2018 and August 2019, 68 staff from 12 councils attended Good Complaint Handling workshops, while 111 staff from 15 councils attended workshops on Responding to Challenging Behaviour.

Graph 4: Types of training received by council staff – 2019 (as per responses provided by councils)



57. However, evidence to the enquiry suggests that, while councils are making progress with policies and training, changing attitudes and behaviours to complaints is an ongoing endeavour.

58. Some councils said some staff are reluctant to deal with complaints, particularly when the person complaining exhibits challenging behaviour (see paragraphs 137-147 for further discussion about this issue).

59. The Victorian Local Government Inspectorate also told the enquiry that councils see themselves as service providers for the community, rather than complaint handlers. The Inspectorate said complaint handling needs to be built into processes for frontline staff in a way that makes them feel empowered to handle complaints effectively.

‘Some staff fear complaints and speaking directly with the complainant or coming to the counter, leaving the brunt of the customer to the customer service staff.’

– Metropolitan council

Public information

60. The 2015 Guide also recommended councils make information about how to complain easy to find, including by:
- publishing their complaint handling policy online and making it available in hard copy format on request
 - implementing a website search function that retrieves the complaint handling policy and related information when a person types the term 'complain[t]'
 - including a prominent link on the council's home page for making a complaint, including information and links to the relevant policy
 - providing detailed information online on common complaints and other relevant agencies.
61. The 2019 Survey shows progress in this area has been mixed.
62. Of the 67 councils who reported a complaints policy, 51 councils (75 per cent) said they publish their policy on their website.
63. Other councils provided various reasons for not publishing their policy. Some said their policy was in draft form, was still being implemented or was under review. One council said their policy was drafted for the benefit of council officers and was quite detailed. This council and three others said they publish alternative information about their complaint handling process on their website.
64. The 2019 Survey also asked councils if they publish information about how to complain, or a direct link to make a complaint, on their website's homepage. Just over half of the councils (46 councils or 58 per cent) said they follow this practice.
65. Nine councils said they were either considering or taking steps to publish such information, but others said they made a conscious decision not to adopt this advice. Some councils said they publish such information elsewhere on their website. Eleven councils said they do not use the term 'complaint', again suggesting some discomfort with the term. One regional city council expressed concern that it would direct too much contact to the council's complaints area and create a strain on resources.

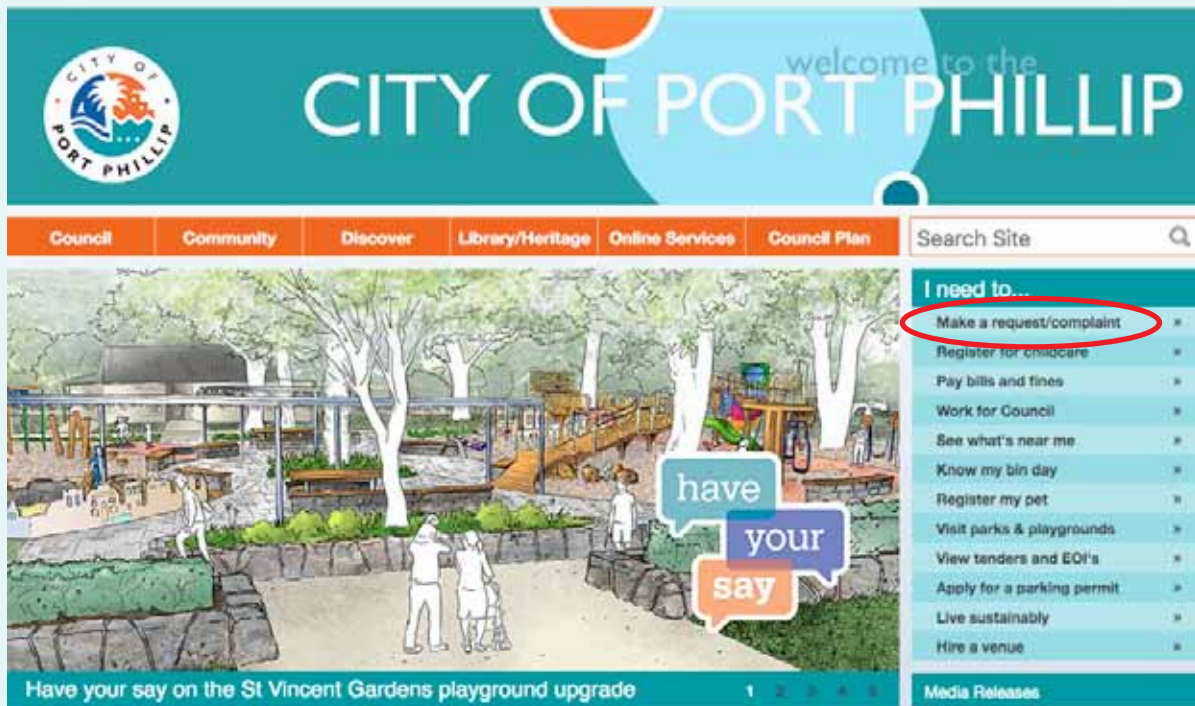
'Council feels that [having a direct link to make a complaint on its homepage] would lead to all customer contact being submitted via the complaints portal and processing of these communications would have a significant impact on the resources in this area.'

- Regional city council



Good practice example - Port Phillip City Council

Port Phillip City Council includes a link on its website homepage to information about how to make a request or complaint.



Website users can follow the links through to the council's Complaints Resolution page. The page begins by setting out the council's commitment to complaints, stating:

Managing complaints is an important part of Council's commitment to continuous service improvement. Your comments provide us with valuable feedback.

The page contains a link to the council's complaint policy and goes on to explain how people can make a complaint, how soon they can expect a response from the council and what to do if they want to escalate their concerns.

Accessibility

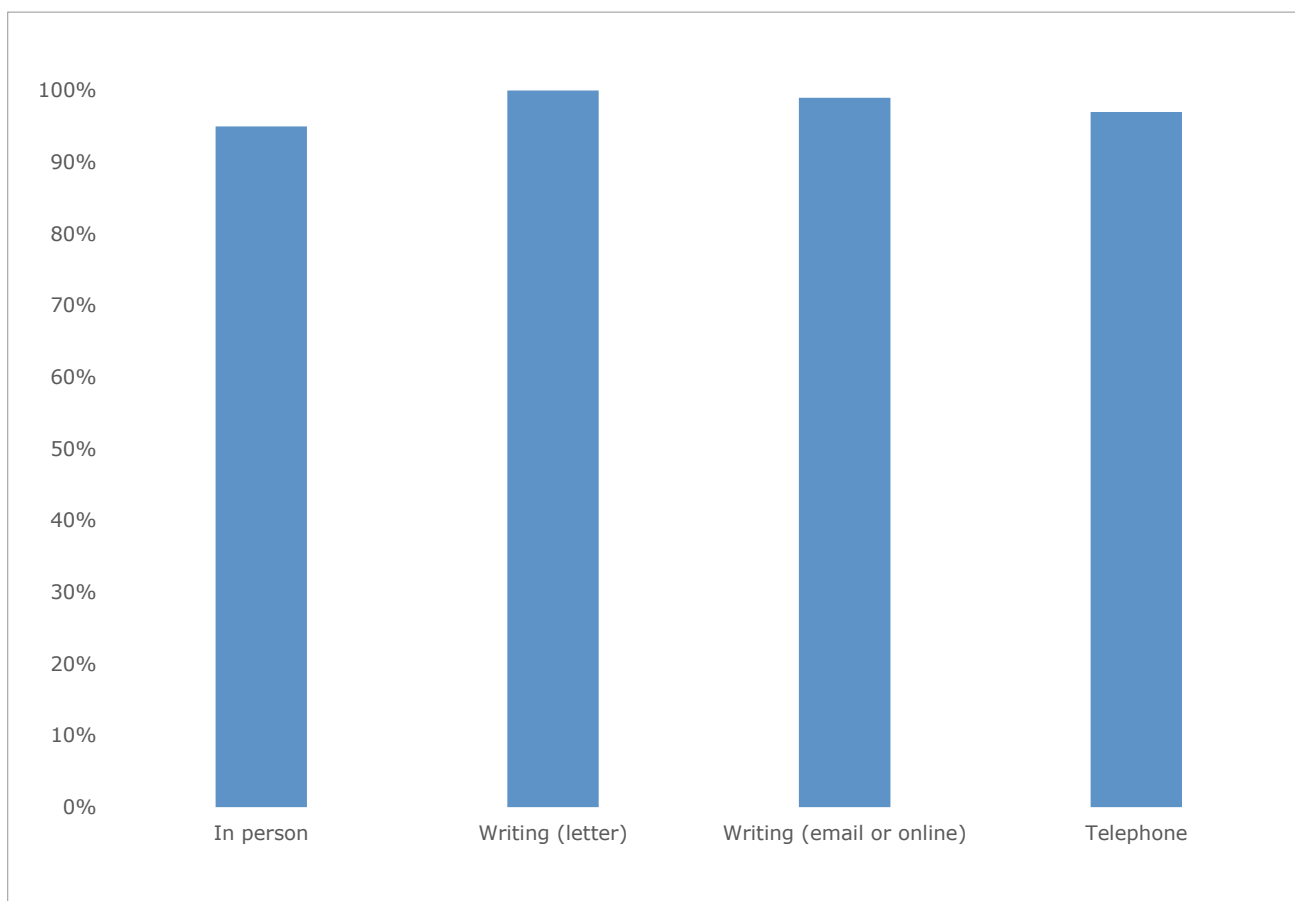
66. The 2015 Guide also recommended councils make their complaint handling system accessible and easy for all people to understand and use. Amongst other things, it recommended councils:

- accept complaints, at a minimum, by telephone, in writing by letter, in writing via email or online, and in person.

- consider the characteristics and needs of their communities, engage with stakeholder and advocacy groups and provide support and special arrangements for people with specific needs.

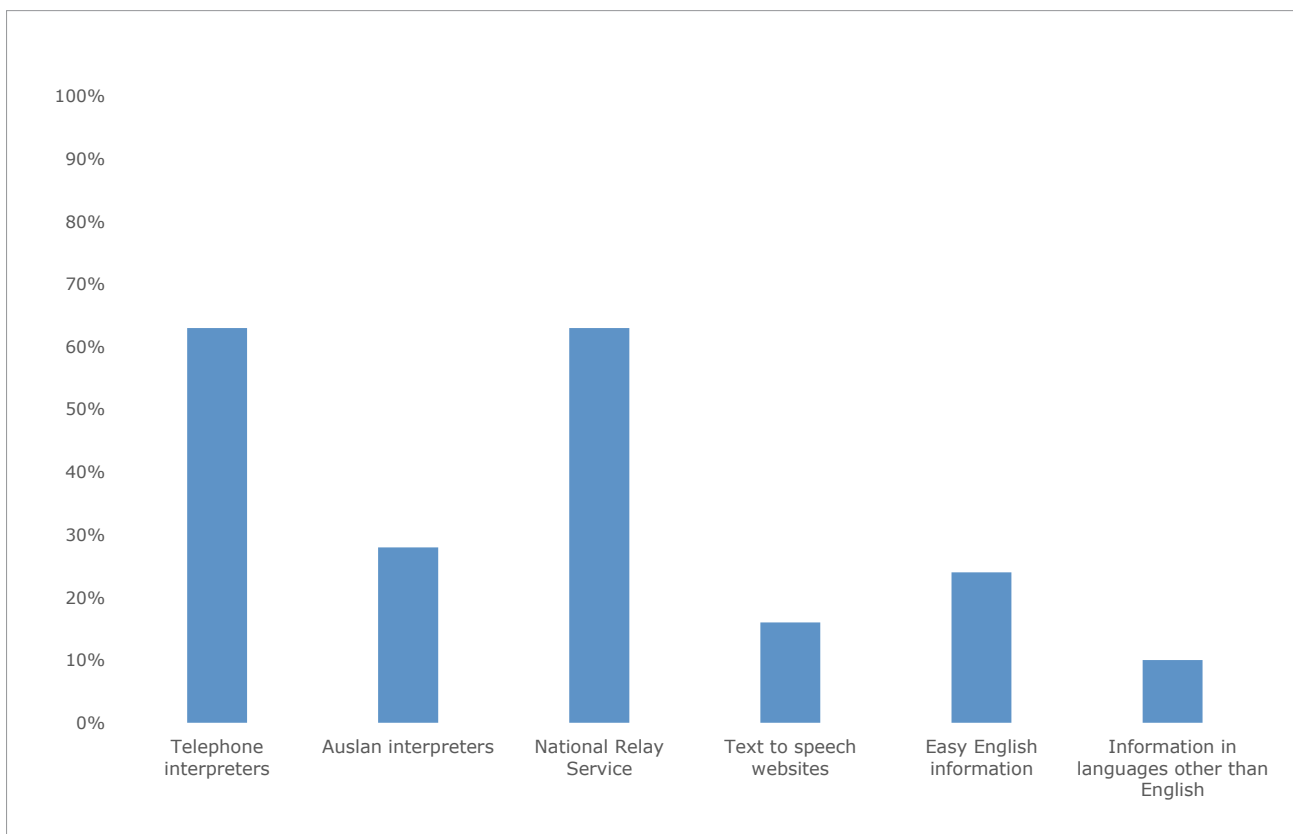
67. The 2019 Survey found almost all councils now accept complaints through a variety of methods (see Graph 5 below).

Graph 5: How councils accept complaints – 2019 (as per responses provided by councils)



-
68. There is considerable room for progress, however, in making complaint systems accessible for people with different communication needs.
69. Under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic), it is against the law for local councils to discriminate against a person based on a personal attribute protected by law. Councils have a positive duty to take proactive, reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate discrimination.
70. Discrimination does not need to be intentional; any unreasonable requirement or restriction based on a personal characteristic can be discriminatory. Every individual's ability to engage with local government is also protected by the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) (see sections 8, 15 and 18).
71. One way councils can promote equality is by ensuring their complaint handling processes are accessible and fair and do not exclude people who may wish to make a complaint, but require specific services or support to do so because of their disability, age or language barriers.
72. Since the Ombudsman's first enquiry, this office has developed a greater focus on accessibility for people with different communication needs, including people with a disability, people who speak languages other than English, and people who have difficulties reading.
73. The 2019 Survey asked councils to self-report about whether they use various tools that can increase accessibility for people with a disability or other communication differences, such as:
- telephone interpreter services for people who communicate in languages other than English
 - Auslan interpreter services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing
 - the National Relay Service, a service for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, that allows them to make or receive phone calls
 - text to speech web functionality (ie websites that work with specialised software that reads the text aloud)
 - information about how to complain in Easy English (a style of writing for people with lower levels of English literacy, including people with an intellectual disability, that combines short phrases and images)
 - information about how to complain in languages other than English.
74. Graph 6 on the following page shows the percentage of councils that reported using these tools. Around two thirds of councils (63 per cent) said they offer a telephone interpreter service or the National Relay Service to help people make complaints. However, few councils (10 per cent) were translating information into languages other than English. Nineteen councils (24 per cent) said they publish information in Easy English, but the survey responses suggest some councils may have confused this with 'plain English'.

Graph 6: Percentage of councils using accessibility tools – 2019 (as per responses provided by councils)



75. Smaller regional councils were less likely to use accessibility tools for people with different communication needs. For example, 95 per cent of metropolitan councils said they provide a telephone interpreter service for people who wish to complain, compared with 47 per cent of large shire councils and 21 per cent of small shire councils.

76. Stakeholders who spoke with the enquiry also raised the need for councils to make their systems more accessible. Disability Justice Australia, an advocacy organisation for people with disabilities, said people with disabilities commonly experience:

- staff who are not trained to assist a person with communication difficulties
- staff failing to inform them they can have a support person with them when engaging with the council

- council policies and procedures that require a Year 12 reading level and are not available in Easy English formats.

77. The Office of the Disability Services Commissioner, which takes complaints about disability services, suggested some practical steps to make council websites more accessible for people with disabilities including:

- clear banners, tabs or buttons to draw attention to the complaints process
- examples of complaints that are ‘out of scope’ for the council, and a list of other relevant complaint bodies
- using a skilled communications person to design easily accessible information.

78. The enquiry found examples of good practice at some councils, including regional councils, that are already taking steps to improve their accessibility.



Good practice example – East Gippsland Shire Council

In 2017, East Gippsland Shire Council contacted the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to seek support in developing a best practice approach to dealing with challenging customers and providing customer service.

Amongst other things, the council incorporated human rights obligations in policies and procedures; ensured its complaint handling included consideration of human rights obligations; identified opportunities for professional development; and incorporated human rights values into performance reviews.

The council reported:

This exercise not only enhanced our knowledge about the Charter but put a new lens on how we interact with our citizens and customers and how we view complaints.*

The council also worked with Scope, one of Australia's largest disability service providers, to ensure its customer service centres are accessible to people with different communication needs. The council's customer service centres were awarded Scope's Communication Access Symbol, which informs members of the public that staff will treat everyone with dignity and respect and can communicate successfully with people with communication difficulties.

* Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *2017 report on the operation of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* (2018) 63-64.

Responding to complaints

79. The 2015 Guide also encouraged councils to respond to complaints fairly and objectively. It focused on areas such as timeliness, good communication, fairness, appropriate remedies where mistakes have been made, and options for review. This section looks at how councils have adapted their practices for responding to complaints.

First steps

80. Councils' initial response to complaints is a chance to demonstrate their commitment to complaint handling and to clarify issues, processes and expectations.

81. The 2015 Guide recommended, amongst other things, that councils:
- acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days
 - carry out an initial assessment of all complaints to determine their urgency and how to deal with them
 - handle complaints made to councillors in the same way as other complaints
 - where there is confusion about whether the council or another agency is responsible for the issue, try to reach agreement with the other agency rather than leaving it to the person to resolve.



Good practice example – Casey City Council

Casey City Council told the enquiry it changed the way it acknowledges emails after realising its practices were contributing to complaints:

Customers were making secondary contact as they had not received an acknowledgement from their email enquiries. It was recognised that emails were being distributed across the organisation to the relevant service areas and were being responded to in an inconsistent time frame (sometimes not at all). This process was reviewed and the Customer Service Team now manage email correspondence (as part of a consolidated contact channel centre). All emails now are responded to and outline what the customer can expect next for their service request and/or complaint.

82. The 2015 Guide also recommended a tiered response to complaints – resolving them early at the frontline where possible and selecting those that require further investigation.
83. The 2019 Survey asked councils how quickly they acknowledge complaints. Almost all councils (78 councils or 99 per cent) said they now acknowledge complaints within 10 business days. One of the two remaining councils said it plans to implement a 10 day target once a new policy is approved.

Managing expectations

84. The 2015 Guide also stressed the importance of what complaint handlers sometimes call ‘managing expectations’. The Guide noted that conflict in complaint handling often arises because of different expectations on the part of councils and people who complain about how the complaint will be handled and the likely outcome.

85. The 2015 Guide recommended councils ask people at the outset about the outcome they are seeking, and what they expect to achieve from their complaint. It recommended councils explain how their complaint process works, how long it takes, who will be handling the complaint and the likely outcomes, and what the council cannot do and why (eg legal restrictions). Where a person has unrealistic expectations, the Guide recommended offering realistic ones by explaining in positive terms what the council can do.

86. Council responses to the 2019 Survey suggest this remains an ongoing challenge. The Survey asked councils about aspects of complaint handling that staff found most challenging. Sixty-four councils (81 per cent) nominated managing the expectations of people who complain.

‘Disappointment is equal to the space between a complainant’s expectations and the outcome achieved.’

– Local Government Inspectorate, meeting with enquiry team

Timeliness

87. This enquiry found councils have made good progress in relation to targets for timeliness.
88. The 2015 Guide recommended councils aim to resolve straightforward complaints within 28 days. Where this is not possible, it recommended an officer communicate with the person and provide an update. It also recommended that councils review and escalate complaints where needed to expedite a resolution.
89. Almost all councils now set target timeframes for responding to complaints. In response to the 2019 Survey, 73 councils (92 per cent) said they aim to resolve complaints within 28 days. Some councils were using slightly different timeframes. Five councils said they did not have a timeframe for resolving matters. Some of these councils commented that the time taken to resolve a complaint will depend on the circumstances and complexity of the case.

Confidentiality

90. Councils collect personal, sometimes sensitive, information when they deal with complaints. The information can be about the person making the complaint or third parties such as neighbours or council officers. The very fact that a person has made a complaint can itself be sensitive, particularly where the person is complaining about a neighbour or local business. In some cases, councils are also subject to statutory confidentiality requirements.

91. The 2015 Guide noted that councils are required to maintain confidentiality when handling complaints. It recommended councils share information with officers on a 'need to know' basis and use it only for the purposes of dealing with the complaint and addressing systemic issues. It also recommended councils only release information and data about complaints in a de-identified format.
92. Some 2019 Survey responses mentioned steps to protect the confidentiality of complaint information. Three councils said they were storing information about certain types of complaints, such as children's services or aged services or staff complaints, in separate databases. Some small shire councils were considering challenges involved in reporting complaint information publicly, even in a de-identified format. They noted that with low complaint numbers and small communities, they need to be careful not to inadvertently identify the person complaining. Paragraph 182 discusses these challenges further.

Discretion and fairness

93. Councils, like other government agencies, operate within a framework of laws and policies which guide their decisions and actions. These laws and policies often give council staff some discretion so they can take into account individual circumstances. As the Ombudsman said in a 2018 report: 'Fair systems of public administration need thoughtful exercise of discretion, not blanket rules, rigidly applied.'⁹

⁹ Victorian Ombudsman, *Investigation into Maribyrnong City Council's internal review practices for disability parking infringements* (2018) 3.



Good practice example – Yarra Ranges Shire Council

Yarra Ranges Shire Council provided the following case example in its survey response. It highlights a case where staff could have followed the council's standard practice, but instead used discretion to resolve the complaint:

[The council] received a complaint requesting that council maintain a road that was currently the responsibility of property owners to maintain. The standard response to this is 'if the road is not on our road register we will not take on any roads that are not [council] responsibility'.

As a result of the customer making a complaint, the complaint was assigned to the responsible officer who conducted a full investigation to investigate who accesses the road to understand why we would not take on maintenance of this particular section of road.

As a result, it made sense that [council] take on maintenance of this section of road and it has now been added to the road register for road maintenance.

The complaint process allowed investigation, discretion and fairness to be used to assess the specific circumstance and capacity of council to take on maintenance responsibility.

94. The 2015 Guide recommended council officers consider three questions:
- Do you consider the outcome to be fair and reasonable, not simply whether it meets the minimum standards required by the relevant law and policy?
 - Have you considered any discretions available to you within law and policy in arriving at the outcome?
 - Would it help if you called or met with the complainant to further clarify any issues before you finalise the outcome?
95. Councils did not identify use of discretion as an issue in the 2019 Survey. When the Survey asked councils about aspects of complaint handling that staff found challenging, only 11 (14 per cent) nominated 'use of discretion'.
96. However, other evidence suggests there is scope for councils to give their staff greater discretion in their work and to build skills in this area. Only 13 councils (16 per cent) said staff currently receive training about exercising discretion.
97. One council provided a good example of a case where staff used discretion to resolve a complaint (see example above).
98. However, two recent investigations by the Victorian Ombudsman highlighted other instances where councils could have exercised discretion to ensure their practices were not only lawful, but fair.

Investigation 1: Internal review of disability parking infringements*

In 2017, several community legal centres complained to the Ombudsman that a metropolitan council was taking an 'unfair, arbitrary, [and] overly rigid' approach to appeals about parking infringements.

The centres provided five examples. In each case, the person had a valid disability parking permit but failed to display it properly. In one case, the person had forgotten their permit on the day. In another, the person accidentally displayed an old, expired permit. In a third case, the person's permit had slipped down the dashboard. Council parking inspectors fined each person \$150.

The people asked the council to withdraw the infringements, which it can do under the law where there are 'exceptional circumstances'. However, the council followed its strict internal guidelines and upheld the fines.

The Ombudsman acknowledged the council has a responsibility to prevent misuse of disability parking permits and the importance of taking a consistent approach. However, the report said this should not be prioritised at the expense of exercising discretion on a case by case basis according to individual circumstances.

The council argued its officers had exercised discretion in each case but the investigation could see no evidence of this in the records. The council later acknowledged its internal guidelines had been drafted in a way that seemed to remove any discretion.

The council said it would review the guidelines and clarify the importance of staff exercising discretion. It refunded one of the people but refused to provide ex gratia payments to four others.

Investigation 2: Rates and charges on undevelopable land[^]

In 2018, the Ombudsman received a series of complaints from landowners whose families purchased land at Ninety Mile Beach in the 1950s and 1960s. The property developer who sold the land promoted the area as a new Gold Coast. However, it later emerged that much of the land was unsuitable for development – flood prone or consisting of beach dunes too unstable for building.

Landowners were upset that council planning rules stopped them developing their land, but the council continued to charge them rates and waste infrastructure charges.

The Ombudsman noted the long and complex history of the issue and observed:

The imposition of rates and other charges on land that cannot be developed under any circumstances is not contrary to law and indeed was a decision taken by the council on legal advice. But while the investigation accepts that the council has acted in good faith, in all of the circumstances of the subdivision's history, these charges are ultimately unfair.

The Ombudsman recommended the council review its rating strategy with a view to:

- reducing rates on the undevelopable land to zero
- cease levying its waste infrastructure charges on the undevelopable land
- refund some rates and charges (on request) as 'a gesture of goodwill'.

The council supported the recommendation in principle, subject to legal advice.

* Victorian Ombudsman, *Investigation into Maribyrnong City Council's internal review practices for disability parking infringements* (2018).

[^] Victorian Ombudsman, *Investigation into Wellington Shire Council's handling of Ninety Mile Beach subdivisions* (2019).

Outcomes and reasons

99. This enquiry identified that councils take different approaches to informing people about the outcome of their complaint and their reasons.

100. The 2015 Guide provided advice about what councils should do at the end of an investigation of a complaint. It recommended that councils write an outcome letter for all complaints where an investigation has been undertaken. It listed the elements of good letters, including:

- explaining the steps the council took to investigate or resolve the matter
- explaining the outcome
- providing reasons for the decision
- translating information into languages other than English where appropriate
- providing the name of an officer who can discuss the matter, or options for review.

101. The Guide recommended that where councils use template letters, they ensure the letter is tailored to each complaint and includes the council's reasons.

102. The 2019 Survey identified that some councils follow the 2015 Guide's advice and always provide a written outcome letter where there has been an investigation. Other councils said the response will depend on the preference of the complainant and the nature of the complaint. One council stated that it responds by email or mail, depending on the preference of the person who made the complaint. It said if the person requests a telephone call, it provides a response over the telephone but also 'backs it up' in writing.

103. Other councils noted that many complaints can be resolved quickly and easily, and said they take a more flexible approach in these cases.

'At times our customer service team is able to resolve the complaint on the spot with the customer either on the phone or in person. This does not require a written outcome.'

- Small shire council

104. Some councils said they expect staff to keep written records when they provide outcomes verbally. However, one council indicated it leaves communication methods to the discretion of council staff.

105. Councils' responses suggest this part of the 2015 Guide needs to be clarified to:

- address situations where councils are able to resolve a complaint easily and quickly, without a full investigation.
- consider the communication needs of the person who complained. A written outcome letter may be helpful for people with good written literacy, but inappropriate for people with other communication needs.
- outline good record keeping practices where complaints can be resolved verbally.



Good practice example – Brimbank City Council

Brimbank City Council's survey response indicated that council staff take a sensible, flexible approach to providing outcomes depending on the complexity of the complaint. However, the council requires that staff always make a record of what happened:

Our complaints are to be responded to in writing. However, we do allow an exception to this requirement in the case of low level/straight forward complaints. In such cases, a telephoned response is acceptable subject to our Complaints team being provided with written advice of the contact made which must include:

- *when the complainant was contacted*
- *what was conveyed to the complainant*
- *what was the complainant's response, ie were they happy with the outcome or unhappy, and if unhappy, what options were discussed for further pursuance.*

Complaints will not be closed if the Complaints team does not have a) a copy of a written response or b) written advice relating to a verbal response.

Anonymous complaints

106. During the Ombudsman's first enquiry, some stakeholders expressed concern about anonymous complaints. They noted the potential for anonymous complaints to be vexatious or misconceived, and suggested they should be considered only if they raise health and safety concerns.

107. The 2015 Report argued there are sometimes good reasons why people choose to remain anonymous. It said anonymous complaints should be treated on their merits, provided the person provides sufficient information.

108. Almost all councils now accept anonymous complaints. Seventy-six councils (96 per cent) said they accept anonymous complaints, up from 73 councils (92 per cent) in the first enquiry. Two other councils said they accept anonymous complaints in most areas. Only one council, a large shire council, said it does not act on anonymous complaints.

'If the complainant remains anonymous and the complainant is abusive or derogatory of council staff or councillors no further action will be taken.'

– Small shire council

109. While this office maintains it is good practice to accept anonymous complaints, it recognises it is not always practical to treat them like other complaints:

- It is not possible to investigate the complaint if the person provides insufficient information and cannot be contacted for further details.
- It is not possible to report the outcome to the person.

110. Thirty-two councils (41 per cent) said they do not always treat anonymous complaints like other complaints for these reasons. This office recommends warning people about these practical limitations in public information about complaints, and when speaking with people in person or on the telephone.

111. There was less concern during this enquiry about people using anonymity to make vexatious complaints. One small shire council said it was handling this issue by accepting anonymous complaints, but not acting on abusive complaints.

Complaints about contractors

112. This enquiry found ongoing differences with the way councils treat complaints about third party contractors.

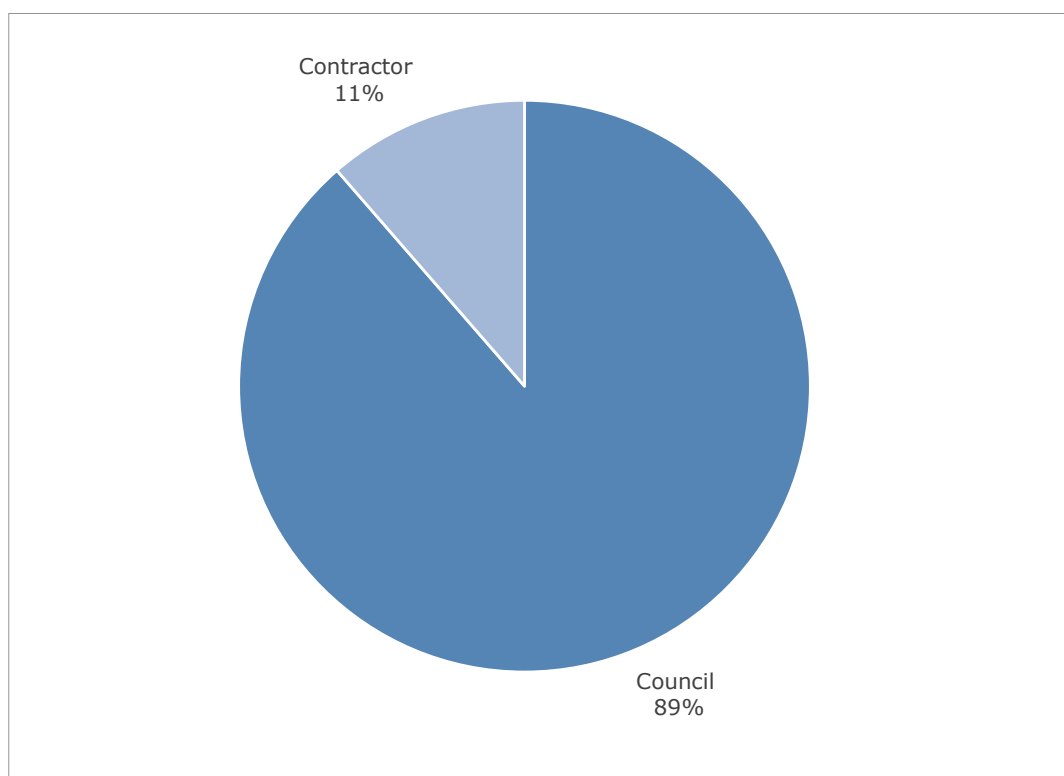
113. The Ombudsman's first enquiry found that some councils handled and responded to complaints about contractors themselves. Others expected contractors to respond to the person with the complaint, depending on the nature of the complaint and the contractor.

114. The 2015 Guide said: 'Councils are ultimately responsible for all complaints about their services, irrespective of whether those services are delivered by the council directly, or by a third party contractor.' The Guide said that, where a council allows contractors to handle complaints, it is crucial they monitor the function and have clear oversight of the contractor's complaints process, including by:

- reviewing and approving the contractor's complaint handling process
- auditing the contractor's complaint handling
- requiring the contractor to collect complaint data
- requiring the contractor to inform complainants they can have their complaint reviewed by the council.

115. The 2019 Survey identified that 70 councils (89 per cent) now handle complaints about contractors themselves, while nine councils (11 per cent) rely on contractors to handle their complaints. Some of these councils qualified their responses and said their practices vary depending on the situation and the contractor.

Graph 7: Handling of complaints about council contractors – 2019 (as per responses provided by councils)



116. The nine councils that allow contractors to handle complaints themselves use various methods to oversee those practices:

- Four councils said they review the third-party contractor's complaint handling process.
- Six councils said the contractor informs the person that they can have their complaint reviewed by the council if they are dissatisfied.
- Three councils said they audit the contractor's complaint handling.
- Three councils said they require the contractor to collect complaint data and provide it to the council.

117. Two of the nine councils said they take none of these steps to oversee their contractors' complaints handling process.

Remedies

118. The 2015 Guide said that where a council has made a mistake, it should be prepared to admit the mistake and act to correct it. It listed options for redress including:

- an apology
- an explanation of why the error occurred and the steps taken to prevent it happening again
- a reversal of a decision
- an ex gratia payment or compensation
- disciplinary action taken against a staff member
- providing the means of redress requested by the complainant.

119. The 2019 Survey did not ask councils about the types of remedies they provide. However, it did give councils an opportunity to provide an example of a complaint that led to changes or improvements to services. An example from one council is on the next page.



Good practice example – Melbourne City Council

Melbourne City Council provided a case example of a situation where it provided remedies to the person who made the complaint, and looked at its broader systems so the same thing did not happen to other people in future:

A customer lodged a complaint alleging that the actions taken by an officer in relation to a disabled parking permit issued by another Council led to a 'show cause' letter from that Council to cancel the permit. The customer had concerns that the officer involved in the issuing of the infringement acted inappropriately and sought to have the customer's disabled partner's parking permit revoked.

After investigation, the allegation of inappropriate conduct by the officer was not substantiated but we discovered that the infringement was issued in error.

We found that the officer made a general enquiry about the permit type and currency with the other Council and advised that an infringement had been issued for inappropriate use. The determination to issue a 'show cause' letter was a decision taken by the other Council.

The infringement was issued in error due to a misinterpretation of the rules of the specific disabled permit and this led to the chain of events that followed.

Our remedies included:

- *making an apology to the customer*
- *revoking the infringement*
- *a process review*
- *retraining staff regarding the new process and the types and uses of disabled parking permits*

The other Council reinstated the permit with an apology. The customer advised that he was satisfied with the outcome.

Internal review

120. The Ombudsman also encourages councils and other agencies to offer internal and external review options where people are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint.
121. Evidence suggests there has been an increase in the number of councils offering internal review since 2015, but it is still not a universal practice.
122. The Ombudsman's first enquiry identified that just over a third of councils (29 councils or 37 per cent) did not appear to have any internal review policy.
123. The 2015 Guide recommended councils put a process in place to allow people to seek an internal view of their complaint outcome, and ensure reviews are conducted by senior officers not previously involved in the matter.
124. The Ombudsman also recommended the Minister for Local Government consider including a requirement that councils have an internal review function in the Local Government Act.

125. The 2019 Survey asked councils if they inform people of the option of an internal review if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint. Around three quarters of councils (63 councils or 80 per cent) said they inform people about this option. This was less common in metropolitan councils (see Graph 8 below).

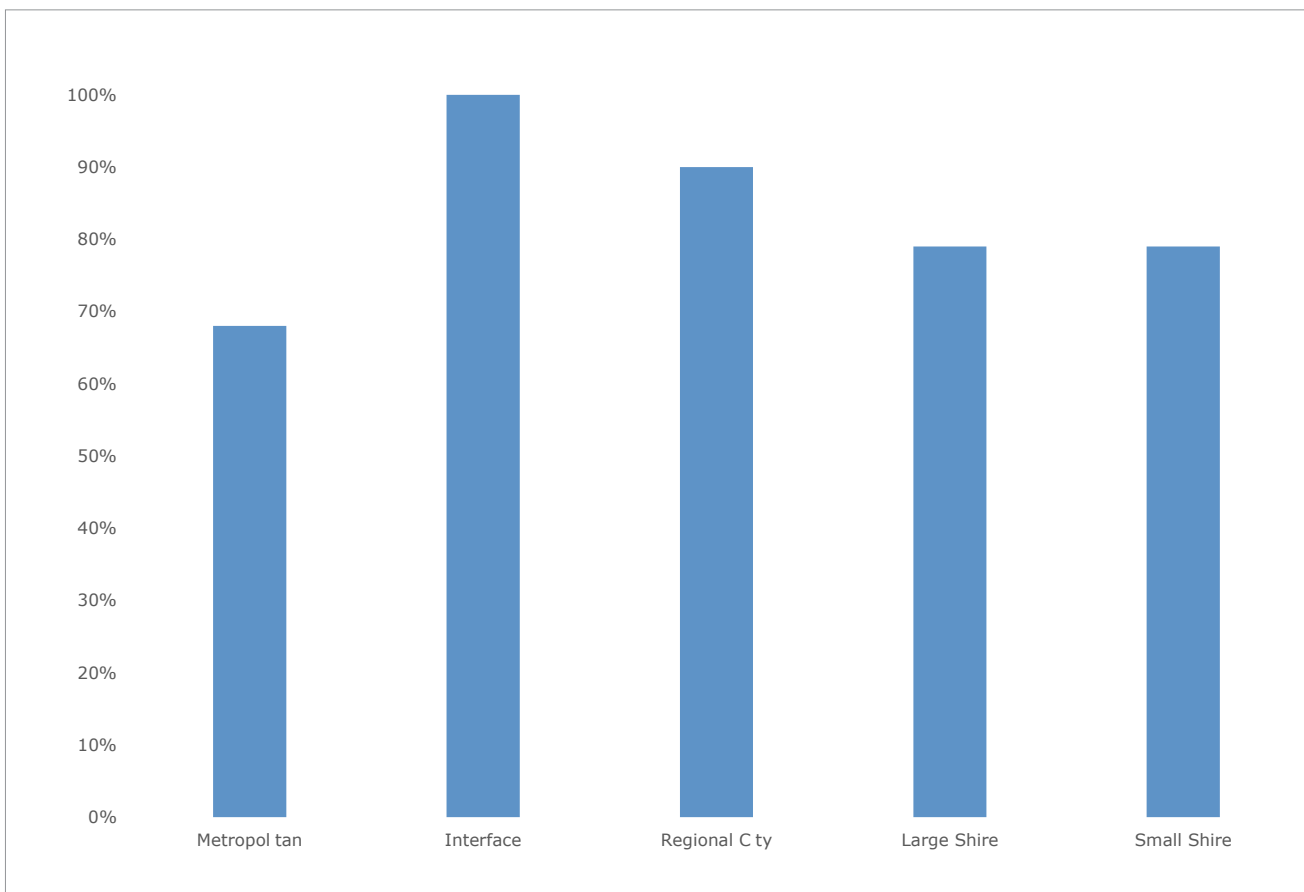
- Four councils said their complaints process is already a form of review, because it involves senior managers and there is no need to escalate complaints further.
- One council said it refers people to its policy and council guidelines which outline their options for review.

126. Councils that do not offer internal review provided various reasons:

- Four councils said they do not have a policy or are in the process of developing a policy.
- Seven councils said there is no consistent practice across the council to inform people about the option of internal review.

127. Where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint and requests an internal review, almost all councils use a senior officer, not previously involved in the complaint, to conduct the review. Seventy-three councils (92 per cent) said, when someone requests an internal review, it is conducted by a senior officer not previously involved in the matter.

Graph 8: Percentage of councils that inform people of internal review options - 2019, by council type (as per responses provided by councils)



128. However, one small shire council noted this is not always practicable in small councils because it can be difficult to find a senior officer who is not already involved in the matter.

‘[G]iven we are a very small council we generally advise they progress straight to external review because often we don’t have enough staff that are not connected to the issue to undertake a further review.’

– Small shire council

129. During this enquiry, one stakeholder queried whether internal review processes can ever be sufficiently independent. Ratepayers Victoria said complainants should have an option to seek external review because internal review by another council officer is not an independent process.

130. This office maintains there are still benefits in internal review process. As the Ombudsman’s 2015 Report noted, these processes increase fairness to the person who complained and councils’ accountability.

External review

131. This enquiry also identified a small increase in the number of councils providing advice about external review options.

132. The 2015 Guide recommended councils inform people about any external avenues for pursuing their complaint, including the Victorian Ombudsman. The Guide recommended councils provide information about external review options:

- on their website
- in general correspondence with members of the public about matters that can give rise to complaints
- when providing the outcome of an internal review.

133. In 2019, 71 councils (90 per cent) said they inform complainants they can contact the Ombudsman or other avenues of external review if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of an internal review. This is a small improvement since the first enquiry, when 65 councils (82 per cent) said they advised people about review by the Ombudsman.

134. Fifty-three of these councils said they provide this information in their outcome letters, while 52 councils said they provide information on their website.

135. Councils that do not provide external review information provided various reasons:

- Some said they encourage people to contact the council so they can resolve the matter.
- Some said they consider providing information on a case by case basis, or there is no consistent process across the council.

136. Nine councils said they had identified this as an area for improvement or were reviewing their websites and letters to ensure they provide this information in future.

Challenging behaviour

137. Many councils report ongoing difficulties responding to challenging behaviours of some people who complain. These behaviours can range from aggression and abuse towards council officers, through to expecting unrealistic outcomes.

138. The 2015 Guide recommended councils adopt policies and procedures for managing unreasonable complainant conduct and provide training and support for staff.¹⁰

139. The 2019 Survey identified that more councils have since formalised approaches to the problem. Almost two thirds of councils (48 councils or 60 per cent) said they have a policy on dealing with dealing with unreasonable or challenging behaviour, up from 35 councils (44 per cent) in the first enquiry. Most councils (69 councils or 87 per cent) also said staff receive some training on the topic, up from 43 councils (54 per cent) in the first enquiry.

140. However, formal support remains less common in small shire councils. Almost two thirds of small shire councils (63 per cent) said they do not have a policy on the issue. Staff in small shire councils are also less likely to receive training in this area, with 74 per cent receiving training for dealing with challenging behaviours compared with 91 per cent of metropolitan councils and 89 per cent of interface councils.

141. Despite these steps, council survey responses suggest this issue continues to create challenges for council staff. When the 2019 Survey asked councils to name aspects of complaint handling that staff find most challenging, three quarters of councils (60 councils or 76 per cent) named dealing with challenging behaviour. A third of councils (29 councils or 37 per cent) nominated this as an area where staff would like further training.

142. Some councils named particular challenges:

- Responding to people with mental health concerns or substance addiction.
- Dealing with challenging behaviour in small regional communities. One council reported people sometimes approach council staff out of hours with complaints. Another council said staff are aware of the ‘personal and well-being challenges’ of local residents and there is concern about contributing to poor mental health outcomes.
- Training for staff about stress management and resilience.

‘We have one [person] at the moment with 92 requests under 2 years. This complainant presents at our counter and is aggressive at times and our staff are looking for guidance.’

We are seeing an increase in customers presenting with mental health issues impacted by drugs. This is particularly challenging for our customer service team.’

- Metropolitan council

143. In 2018, this office published a separate Good Practice Guide about dealing with challenging behaviour.¹¹ This Guide looks at ways to avoid and de-escalate challenging behaviour, as well as ways to manage and limit it when it becomes unreasonable. It also provides specific advice on responding to challenging behaviour that might be associated with disability or mental illness, in a way that takes account of human rights and anti-discrimination laws.

¹⁰ ‘Unreasonable complainant conduct’ is a term used by Ombudsman officers to refer to behaviour that, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the parties to a complaint. It includes behaviour such as abuse or threats. It also includes other types of unreasonable conduct, such as unreasonable persistence (eg refusing to accept a decision even though the agency has investigated the matter, explained the outcome and answered questions) and unreasonable demands (eg insisting on an immediate response or investigation by the head of the agency, when this is not warranted).

¹¹ Victorian Ombudsman, *Good Practice Guide to Dealing with Challenging Behaviour* (2018).

144. The Guide notes that although some behaviours can be hard to deal with, there can be a legitimate grievance at the heart of the complaint. It stresses that agencies need to deal with complaints on their merits, regardless of the person's behaviour.

145. Some councils already do a good job of striking a balance between the need to protect their staff and resources, and the rights of people who complain. The case example below is one example.

'When deciding whether a complaint is 'trivial, vexatious ... etc' you need to look at the substance of the complaint versus the style to ensure the real issue is identified. Don't focus on behaviours, focus on the underlying issues.'

- Office of the Disability Services Commissioner, meeting with enquiry team

146. However, organisations noted the need for ongoing advice for councils about these issues. The Office of the Disability Services Commissioner stressed the importance of focusing on the issues in the complaint, not the person's behaviour. The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission suggested a need for further guidance about situations where a person demonstrates challenging behaviour, without disclosing their disability or mental illness.

147. There is scope to update the Ombudsman's 2015 Guide to include more information about the particular challenges reported by councils.



Good practice example

The Ombudsman's 2018 Good Practice Guide to Dealing with Challenging Behaviour included the following case study. The name of the agency has been omitted, and some details have been changed, to protect the privacy of the people involved:

A man complained to the Ombudsman that an agency was not addressing his complaints about fire risks near his home. The man told us he was a bushfire survivor and had other health problems. He said the agency had banned him from its office and he was not allowed to speak with its staff.

We contacted the agency. The agency told us it had been dealing with the man for many years and tried to deal sensitively with him. It said he could visit its office, but it had taken out intervention orders to protect staff in the past when the man had been abusive.

The agency offered to respond to the man's complaint to our office. It sent us a copy of the response, which explained what it was doing to address the fire risks and which staff would speak with him when he visited its office.

Although the man was not happy with the response, we were satisfied the agency's actions were reasonable. The agency had only limited his access to the extent necessary to protect its staff and it was continuing to respond to his concerns.

Learning and improving

148. Finally, the Ombudsman's 2015 Report and Guide also encouraged councils to recognise complaints are a form of free feedback that, like feedback from customer surveys and community consultations, can be used to improve services. This enquiry looked at what action councils have taken to realise these benefits.

Recording complaints

149. To learn from complaints and improve services, councils first need to ensure they capture and record accurate data.

150. This report has already discussed problems caused by some councils' narrow definition of a complaint, which can lead to councils understating dissatisfaction with their services (see paragraphs 26-40).

151. The Ombudsman's first enquiry also identified recording and analysis of complaints as an area that required 'significant improvement'. At the time, forty-one councils (52 per cent) were not recording the number of complaints they received. Thirty-eight councils (48 per cent) said they used multiple systems to record complaints.

152. The 2015 Guide recommended councils develop systems for categorising, recording and tracking complaints, including a common complaint database. It noted councils did not necessarily need sophisticated systems, and an electronic spreadsheet may be sufficient for small councils or councils with limited resources.

153. The Guide recommended councils record:

- the complainant's details
- how the complaint was received
- a description of the complaint
- the complainant's desired outcome (if known)
- the council officer responsible for handling the complaint
- any action taken, including contact with the complainant, response times and the outcome
- any recommendations for improvement, and who is responsible for implementing them.

154. The 2018 research report by the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals Australia and the University of Newcastle (see paragraph 9) argued organisations also need to capture the tangible and intangible costs and benefits of complaints, such as staff time and satisfaction. It recommended:

- integrating customer management and complaint management systems so organisations do not have to compare data from separate systems
- expanding data collection to include information such as the numbers of hours of staff time spent on complaints, the time taken to resolve complaints, levels of satisfaction after the complaint and any follow up action taken by the organisation to avoid the problem in future.¹²

155. The 2019 Survey found that basic recording and reporting remains a challenge for many councils.

¹² Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals Australia and University of Newcastle, *Return on Investment of Effective Complaints Management Report* (2018).

156. When the 2019 Survey asked councils to report the number of complaints received in 2018, 12 councils (15 per cent) were unable to provide any data. A further 35 councils (44 per cent) warned their data may not be accurate or reliable.

157. Councils provided various reasons why it was difficult to provide data:

- The absence of a complaints policy or record keeping system for complaints.
- An inability to differentiate between complaints and requests for service in the council's records systems. Of the 50 councils that log complaints and requests for service on the same system, five councils use a system that is unable to distinguish between the two.
- Use of multiple systems to record complaints. Forty-eight councils (61 per cent) said they have multiple systems for recording complaints, rather than a central repository.
- Concern that staff may not always be recording complaints in council systems. Almost a third of councils (35 per cent) said that recording complaints was one of the aspects of complaint handling that staff find most challenging.

158. On the following page are lists some of the comments made by councils in their survey responses.

159. Amongst those councils that record complaints, the amount of information they capture varies. Some councils were able to break down complaints by issue. However, almost a third of councils (25 councils or 32 per cent) said they did not record the outcome of complaints.

160. Many of these councils, however, said they were in the process of establishing new policies or systems so they can record data accurately in the future.

Examples of council definitions of 'complaint'

'These are approximate figures ... We don't currently track complaints to have the data.'

- Metropolitan council

'We cannot supply accurate data for complaints. Some channels are not captured in our database, however, a new policy and system configuration will soon provide this.'

- Interface council

'[W]hilst we have a centralised complaint process for those teams that do not use core systems, they are not consistent in their recording of complaints.'

- Interface council

'It is difficult to differentiate between a complaint, service request and a general whinge or grumble.'

- Regional city council

'Level 1' complaints are not recorded on the Complaints Register maintained by the Complaints Team. They are recorded in Council's Customer Relationship Management system. This method of recording makes it difficult to accurately report the total number of complaints received by council.'

- Regional city council

'[The council's] Customer Relationship Management system has the capacity to differentiate between complaints and requests for service, however, it appears that these features are not widely used across the organisation ... therefore the ... statistics cannot be relied upon ... A project to overhaul this system and educate the workforce ... is currently being coordinated.'

- Large shire council

'Complaints are not identified clearly enough in our systems to easily report on. A very manual process to pull them out for reporting is required.'

- Small shire council

'The two different systems for dealing with complaints make it difficult to calculate an exact number of complaints received.'

- Small shire council

'Council does not keep a formal register of complaints so the number given is an estimate.'

- Small shire council

'Some customers will ring [supervisors] themselves, therefore action is taken but not always recorded. In addition, council receives complaints through inward mail and other means.'

- Small shire council



Good practice example – Ballarat City Council and Ararat Rural City Council

Some councils were able to provide the enquiry with a breakdown of complaints by subject matter.

Ballarat City Council provided data about the number of complaints about issues such as drainage, footpaths, landfill, roads and waste collection.

Ararat Rural City Council provided a list of its 11 highest categories of complaint, including:

- Roads – Gravel Road Defect
- Animal Management – Stray Dogs
- Trees – Tree Trimming
- Waste Management – Missed Bin Collection
- Trees – Trees Over Road.

Analysis and service improvement

161. This enquiry identified that councils can do more to learn from complaints to improve their services.

162. The 2015 Guide recommended councils:

- analyse complaints quarterly to identify systemic issues, prevent repeated mistakes and monitor the performance of third-party contractors.
- provide their analysis to senior managers quarterly so they can act on any recommendations to reduce complaints and improve services.

163. The 2018 research by the Society of Consumer Affairs Professional Australia and the University of Newcastle further recommends that organisations:

- continually monitor complaints, with senior level reporting and oversight, so they can respond proactively to emerging issues
- involve their complaints area in strategic planning to ensure that customer feedback from complaints is captured, considered and communicated.¹³

164. In response to the 2019 Survey, most councils (69 councils or 87 per cent) were able to provide an example of a complaint that led to changes to their practices or services. Some of these are summarised on the following page.

165. However, councils did not appear to be analysing complaints in a systematic way. The 2019 Survey asked councils if they regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. Less than half of councils (35 councils or 44 per cent) said they analyse complaints in this way regularly.

166. The survey responses show that trend analysis and reporting is a particular issue for large and small shire councils. Only six large shire councils (32 per cent) and four small shire councils (21 per cent) regularly analyse complaints for this purpose.

167. These councils reported using various methods including:

- asking staff to comment on areas for improvement when they investigate complaints
- preparing annual, quarterly or monthly reports on complaints
- reporting to the council managers or executive.

¹³ Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals Australia and University of Newcastle, *Return on Investment of Effective Complaints Management* (2018).



Examples of complaints that led to service improvements

Simpler disability parking permit application process

'[A client with a disability] complained about the requirement to undergo a medical assessment to support their renewal application for a disabled parking permit. Following review, Council simplified its renewal process and introduced a 'lifelong' disabled category with reduced medical assessment requirements for permit renewals.'

- Warrnambool City Council

More accessible community consultation

'All document and letter templates now include an interpreter symbol following a complaint received from a resident who received consultation documentation without the symbol and did not speak English as a first language.'

- Manningham City Council

'Council received a complaint about scheduling public consultation sessions only in evenings where older members of the community or those with family commitments could not attend or were not comfortable attending. Council has since introduced a public engagement policy and process which requires Council using live streaming of these sessions with an ability for online discussion.'

- West Wimmera Shire Council

Fewer missed bins

'Council reduced complaints/defects associated with missed bin collections from 167 in 2017 to 125 in 2018, a reduction of over 25%. This reduction was achieved through service improvement and increased awareness via the contractor of where and why bins were being missed.'

- Ararat Rural City Council

Better maintenance

'Due to the customer complaints received in relation to Corella interference with trees and council assets, the street sweeping program was increased over a particular part of the season to manage the concentration of debris that arose from this natural event.'

- Greater Shepparton City Council

'Council received regular complaints about the standard of mowing at some recreation reserves, especially during Spring. As a result we have now revised our practice and budget to allow for a greater number of crews to be deployed to allow for an increase in mowing frequency.'

- Latrobe City Council

More parking spaces

'Complaints relating to a lack of designated long vehicle parking led to new signage identifying recommended long vehicle parking areas within the Mansfield township.'

- Mansfield Shire Council



Examples of complaints that led to service improvements – continued

Reduced bureaucracy for fence requests

'A complainant recently had to come in to one of our offices to complete a form and show identification to obtain their neighbour's contact details for fencing purposes. The complainant then wrote into Council explaining her frustration about the need to come into council to complete a form, she explained that she had many properties and when contacting other councils she could simply complete a form and send [it] via email ... I reviewed other councils' processes in relation to names for fencing purposes [and] looked up the privacy guide to ensure if we change the process that we would not breach any privacy. The review changed the entire process and no longer requires customers to come into the counter and produce ID.'

- Banyule City Council

Staff time saved by new green waste voucher process

'We had a number of our customers complain about our green waste voucher service as they would frequently lose the vouchers or be unsure how many they had used. By capturing the volume of requests, we were able to ascertain what their issues were, made changes to the process by including the vouchers on every rates notice and reminding people every quarter of how many they had used and how to access the service. It has reduced calls on this issue by about 75% and reduced internal processing time by approx[imately] 7 business hours a month.'

- Nillumbik Shire Council

Faster planning processes

'A service review of the Urban Planning Department was undertaken in part due to the complaints received. Improvements were introduced as a result of the review with timeframes significantly reduced from 42 days to 3 days when assessing applications. The number of complaints has also decreased significantly.'

- Glen Eira City Council

Better communication about service requests

'A frequent complaint from our community was that Council had not responded to their initial request and, in their opinion, the matter was still outstanding. Investigations often showed that Council staff had investigated the matter and determined a course of action or decided that no action could be taken.

...

While our Service request standards require staff to contact a resident where action taken is not evident, this was not always happening for a number of reasons.

We therefore established a project to look at how we could better keep residents in the loop. The outcome was that in May 2018 we introduced automated messages that are sent to the resident by email or SMS. The messages are triggered by the status code that is used in the request system to reflect the progress of the request such as 'Under inspection' 'Complete' etc.'

- Brimbank City Council

Complaint handling performance

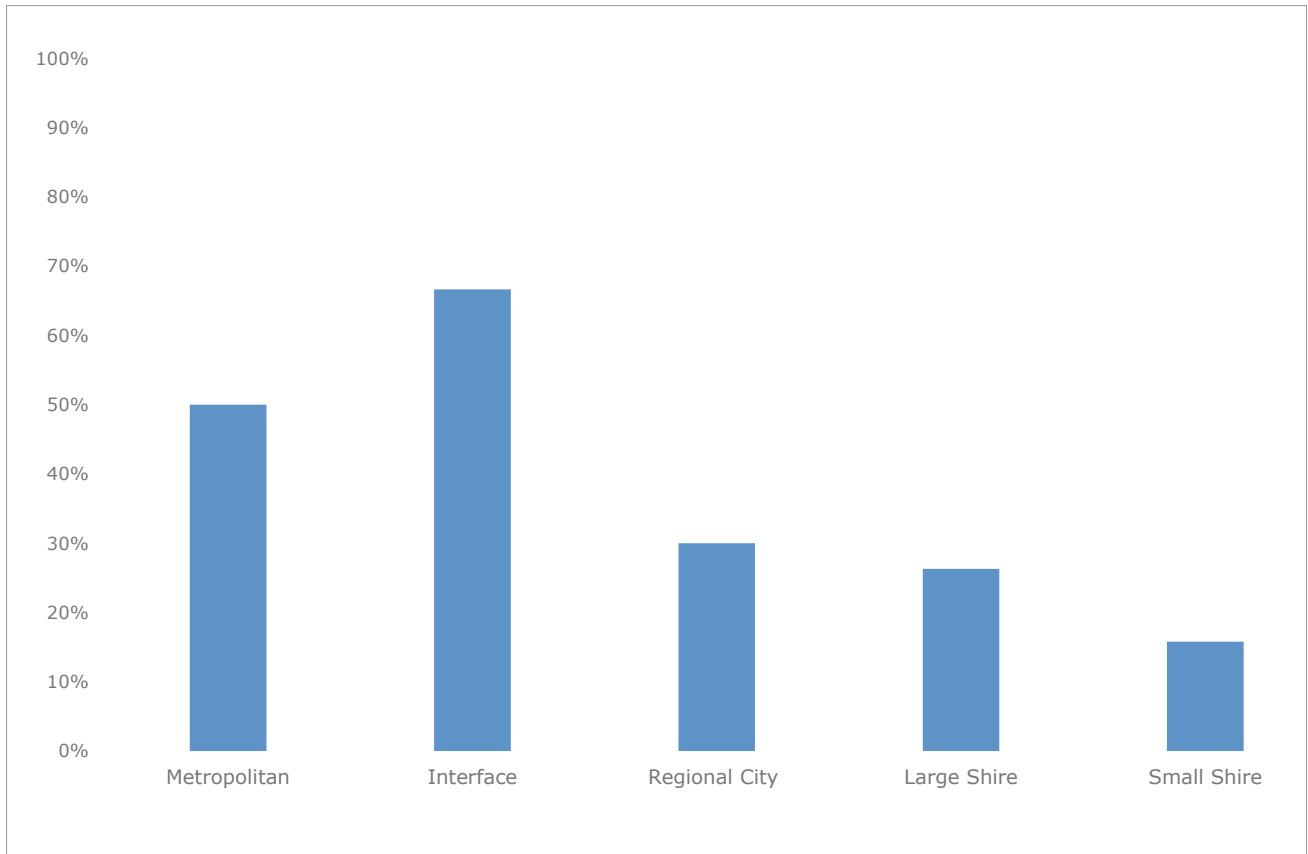
168. This enquiry found minimal progress with the way councils monitor their effectiveness at handling complaints.
169. The Ombudsman's first enquiry identified that two thirds of councils (51 councils or 66 per cent) had no Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for complaint handling. Several councils told the Ombudsman they would like guidance on developing KPIs for complaint handling.
170. The 2015 Guide recommended all councils adopt KPIs against which they can measure their complaint handling performance. It listed several KPIs for councils' consideration:
- complaint outcomes eg complaints upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld
 - timeframes, such as the time taken to resolve matters
 - any service changes resulting from complaints
 - the number of complaint outcomes altered following internal review
 - customer satisfaction with the complaint handling system
 - the number of complaints escalated to the Victorian Ombudsman where the council's decision was overturned or altered, or changes to a council policy or procedure were proposed.
171. The 2015 Guide also recommended council staff report annually to their council on their complaint handling performance, and review their complaint handling system every four years.
172. The 2019 Survey found little improvement across councils as a whole. Fifty-one councils (65 per cent) reported no KPIs for complaint handling, almost the same number as in 2015 (fifty-two councils or 66 per cent). Fifty-seven councils (72 per cent) said council staff do not report to council on their complaint handling performance.

173. However, more councils were reviewing their complaint handling system. Sixty-nine councils (87 per cent) said they review their system at least every four years (see Graph 9 on the following page).

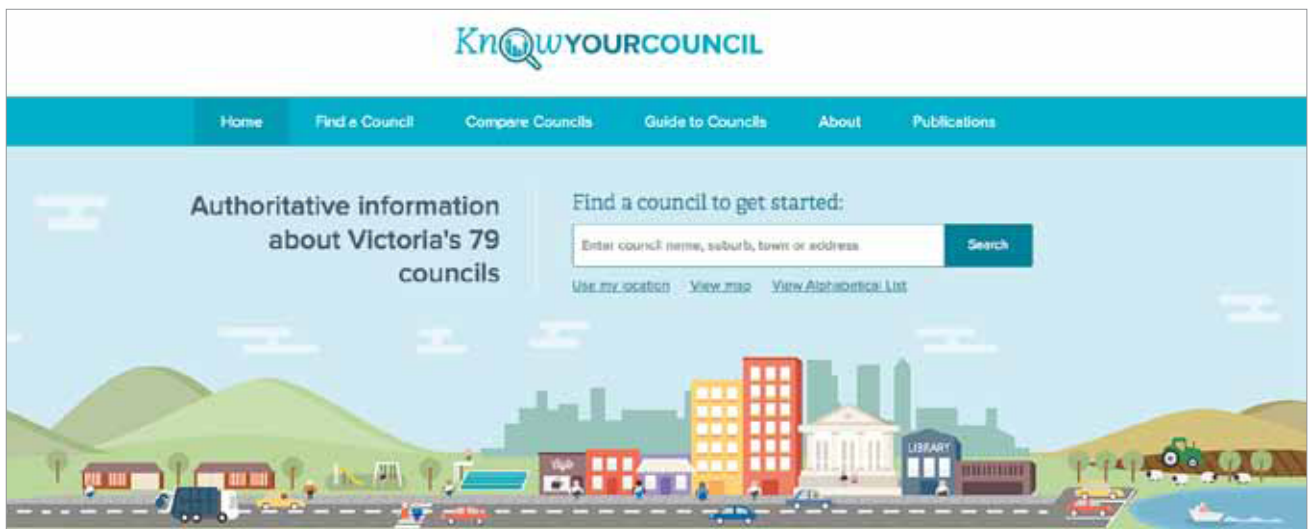
Public reporting and benchmarking

174. The Ombudsman's 2015 Guide also recommended councils demonstrate accountability by publishing information about their performance against complaint handling KPIs in their Annual Reports.
175. At the time, few councils (15 councils or 19 per cent) were making complaint data available to the public, and sometimes only in response to Freedom of Information or other requests.
176. Since that time, public reporting of other aspects of council performance has become a feature of local government in Victoria. As paragraph 6 and footnote 3 noted, in 2014 Local Government Victoria introduced common performance reporting requirements for local councils, known as the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework. Under the Framework, councils collect information against 59 'performance indicators' and 24 'checklist items' on issues such as maternal and child health, planning, food safety, roads, waste collection and library and aquatic facilities.
177. The Framework requires councils to publicly report their performance against the indicators in their Annual Reports and to Local Government Victoria. In November 2015, the Minister for Local Government launched a website, www.knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au, that members of the public can use to view their council's performance and compare it with other councils (see image on the following page).

Graph 9: Councils with complaint handling KPIs - 2019, by council type (as per responses provided by councils)



Local Government Victoria's Know Your Council website, August 2019



178. The Framework does not include performance indicators for complaint handling as a whole. However, some of the indicators measure council performance in areas that may attract complaints, such as missed bin collections.

179. The enquiry identified two challenges with public reporting and benchmarking in relation to complaint handling.

180. First, the 2019 Survey found few councils make complaints data public. The number of councils that said they make their complaint data public (15 councils or 19 per cent) is unchanged since 2015. Four of those councils advised they only make data available on request.

181. Many councils explained they do not publish data because of concerns about data quality (ie they do not record complaints or cannot guarantee the accuracy of their data).

182. Eight councils cited concerns about privacy, particularly in small rural communities where people might be identified even where information is anonymised.

‘If released publicly, the data will be used as a measure of Council’s performance and consequently it is not appropriate for the data to be released unless Council is confident that the data is in fact, an accurate representation of Council’s performance.’

- Metropolitan council

‘[W]ith a relatively low number of formal complaints and small communities we need to be careful about inadvertently identifying complainants.’

- Small shire council

‘Being a rural community the complaint, if made public, would easily identify where it came from and from whom.’

- Small shire council

183. Second, councils’ different definitions of ‘complaint’ (see paragraphs 33-40) mean it is not possible to accurately compare the performance of different councils.

184. This became clear when the enquiry team tried to compare complaint and request for service numbers reported by councils in the 2019 Survey. For example, the enquiry team compared the data reported by a metropolitan council with a large shire council. The metropolitan council uses a narrow definition of ‘complaint’ and reported 88 complaints. The smaller shire council uses the recommended broad definition. It reported 735 complaints, over eight times as many.

185. Attempts to compare councils of the same type also produced incongruous results:

- A metropolitan council that uses the recommended broad definition of complaint reported 5,764 complaints in 2018. A neighbouring council, which excludes issues such as missed bin collections from its definition, reported only 134 complaints.
- One interface council reported 8,295 complaints in 2018, while another reported just 32 complaints.
- One regional city council reported 606 complaints in 2019, while another reported just 12 complaints.
- One large shire council reported 735 complaints, compared with another council that has no definition of complaint, which reported just five.
- One small shire council that uses a broad definition of complaint reported 1,180 complaints, compared with another council that reported 17 complaints.

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186. Appendix D sets out the numbers reported by each council, per council type, and shows the broad variance between the data reported by different councils.
187. The enquiry heard that four councils in Melbourne's north (Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik and Moreland) have initiated a joint project to develop consistent complaint handling procedures, including a common set of KPIs, data capture and benchmarking.
188. These types of initiatives are welcome. However, without a state-wide consistent system for defining and recording complaints, attempts by councils and the public to gauge council performance remain incomplete and unreliable.

Future steps

189. The evidence in this report shows good progress by councils in some aspects of complaint handling since the Ombudsman's first enquiry, but continued room for improvement in others. This section looks at what the Victorian Ombudsman and the State Government can do to encourage and equip councils to better respond and learn from complaints in the future.

Ombudsman guidance and feedback

190. The enquiry was an opportunity to ask councils about the usefulness of this office's guidance and feedback about complaint handling. The enquiry focused on two types of guidance:

- the Ombudsman's 2015 Guide
- data provided to councils about complaints to the Victorian Ombudsman.

The 2015 Good Practice Guide

191. In the course of this enquiry, the enquiry team identified several areas where the 2015 Guide needs to be updated and improved. Examples include accessibility (see paragraphs 66-78) and providing outcomes to people who complain (see paragraphs 99-105).

192. The 2019 Survey also asked councils how they thought the Guide could be improved. While many councils were complimentary about the Guide, suggestions included:

- more advice about KPIs and data recording, particularly as they relate to the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework
- more practical tools such as template letters, checklists, forms and training materials

- more case studies and examples, including about how to apply the definitions of 'complaint' and 'request for service'
- more advice about responding to challenging behaviour
- tips for selecting appropriate remedies for complaints
- advice for elected councillors about responding to complaints
- advice tailored to the particular challenges faced by councils in regional Victoria.

193. Some councils also suggested publishing the Guide in formats that are easier to search and update.

194. Stakeholders such as Disability Justice Australia, the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission also highlighted the need for more information about human rights and accessibility:

- Ensuring complaint handling systems are accessible for people with different communication needs, such as people with a disability and people who speak languages other than English.
- Considering human rights under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act when dealing with complaints.
- Dealing with challenging behaviours that may be associated with a disability or mental illness.

195. The Ombudsman intends to revise the Guide, taking into account this feedback.

Ombudsman complaint data

196. The Victorian Ombudsman records data about the number of people who escalate their concerns about councils to the Ombudsman, including the issues they have raised and the outcome of their complaint.
197. The Ombudsman does not speak with councils about every complaint we receive. In most cases, Ombudsman officers can:
- assist the person to resolve the matter themselves, for example by advising them who to contact in the council about their concerns or referring them to more specialist complaint bodies for assistance
 - reach a view about the fairness and reasonableness of the councils' actions based on the information provided by the person, without seeking further information from the council.
198. The Ombudsman provides de-identified data to councils about all of the approaches it receives on request and each year in the Ombudsman's Annual Report.
199. For a number of years, councils have expressed concern about the presentation of this data in the Ombudsman's Annual Reports. The data sometimes comes as a 'surprise' to councils, because the Ombudsman has only contacted them about some of the complaints received throughout the year. Councils are particularly sensitive to the way this information is sometimes reported in the media.
200. The 2019 Survey invited councils to provide feedback about how the Ombudsman can improve the way she reports complaint data to councils and the public. Common suggestions included:
- Reporting on the number of complaints that were investigated and substantiated, not just the number of complaints that were received.
 - Reporting on trends and common themes in complaints and how councils have improved their services, to drive improvement across councils.
 - Recognising that some councils are dealing with unreasonably persistent people who make continued complaints about the same issues, which can inflate the number of complaints.
 - Providing feedback to councils more often and in different forms such as newsletters.

201. Some of the comments made by councils are set out below.

‘The reporting does not reflect the complaints that were substantiated ... The media and our community will pick up on the figure and report how we perform based on that alone.’

– Metropolitan council

‘The Victorian Ombudsman Annual Report 2018 highlighted that the Victorian Ombudsman received a total of 83 complaints relating to [our council]. Council was only aware of 10 complaints. In the interest of continuous improvement and accountability in complaint handling performance, further and better particulars relating to all complaints the Ombudsman receives about Council will assist in the understanding of complaints, identifying opportunities for change [and] strengthen our customer centricity, interactions and service.’

– Metropolitan council

‘As well as reporting on the number of complaints made about councils, it would be useful to know how many complaints led to enquiries and investigations from the Ombudsman, and if the complaint was upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.’

– Small shire council

‘We believe that a query to the Ombudsman’s office from a member of the public should not constitute a complaint statistic where the complainant is referred to the agency for investigation and resolution. These statistics can give rise to bad public perceptions and adverse reaction in our experience.’

– Regional city council

‘One size does not fit all. Small communities [are] sometimes dealing with vexatious and continuing complainants. The issue never seems to go away even though the complainant has been to all external agencies and received the same answer.’

– Small shire council

202. In response to councils’ feedback, the Ombudsman will be changing the way the office reports data in its Annual Reports.

203. Similar to previous years, the Annual Reports will show how many contacts or ‘approaches’ this office has received about each council. However, this data will be grouped according to what this office did with the complaint. These groups are:

- Complaints where this office referred the person back to the council or to another specialist complaints agency.
- Complaints where this office decided not to pursue the matter after assessing information provided by the person.
- Complaints where this office contacted the council to assess or resolve the complaint.

204. This office will also compare councils by council type. This will ensure councils are only compared to other councils which are similar in size and situation.

205. The Ombudsman will also consider ways to address councils’ comments about more regular reporting about complaints and common trends.

The State Government's role

206. The State Government also plays a critical role in the performance of councils in Victoria. Councils are established and regulated by the *Local Government Act 1989* (Vic). Local Government Victoria provides policy advice to the Minister for Local Government. Its website also says it 'works with councils to support responsive and accountable local government services'.

207. The Ombudsman's 2015 Report made two recommendations to the Minister for Local Government considering legislative changes in the Local Government Act:

- a broad definition of 'complaint', consistent with the Ombudsman's recommended definition, to overcome the problems caused by inconsistent, sometimes narrow definitions used by councils
- a requirement that councils have a complaint handling policy and procedures, and an internal review function for reviewing council complaint handling decisions.

208. The 2015 Report also noted Local Government Victoria could assist councils by developing standard resources to help councils manage local community expectations regarding issues where councils are bound by State Government legislation, such as infringements, planning and rates. The Report recommended that Local Government Victoria develop, or coordinate the development of, standard fact sheets or advice for councils relating to these issues.

Legislative reform

209. Shortly after the Ombudsman made her recommendations, the State Government announced it was reviewing the Local Government Act in its entirety. The review involved public consultation including a discussion paper, public submissions, community forums, consultation with councils and peak stakeholders and technical working groups.

210. The State Government introduced a new Local Government Bill into Parliament in 2018, however, it lapsed as a result of the 2018 state election.

211. The 2018 Bill largely adopted the Ombudsman's recommendations, although it included a modified, narrower definition of 'complaint'.

212. The evidence in this enquiry continues to support the case for legislative reform to ensure basic good practice and consistency amongst councils.

213. The Queensland Parliament has already adopted this approach following a report from the Queensland Ombudsman on complaint management systems of local councils.¹⁴ Queensland's local government laws now require all councils to adopt a process for resolving 'administrative complaints', based on a broad definition of that term (*Local Government Act 2009* (Qld) section 268 and *Local Government Regulations 2012* (Qld) regulation 306).

¹⁴ Queensland Ombudsman, *Complaints Matter: A review of the complaints management systems of local councils in Queensland* (2010).

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214. The Ombudsman and enquiry team met with the Minister for Local Government during this enquiry to discuss the problems arising from different definitions and reporting of complaints across councils. The Ombudsman later wrote to the Minister foreshadowing recommendations for the Local Government Bill. The Ombudsman also recommended the Minister consider introducing supplementary regulations to spell out the processes for managing and resolving complaints, internal reviews and data reporting.
215. The new Local Government Bill was awaiting introduction when this report was finalised. Local Government Victoria advised it expects the Bill to be introduced later in 2019.

Common resources for councils

216. In response to the Ombudsman's 2015 Report, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning agreed to the recommendation that Local Government Victoria develop standard fact sheets and advice for local councils on issues such as rates, planning and infringements.
217. During this enquiry, Local Government Victoria advised that information about rates is already provided on council rates notices. It noted the planning area in the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning already provides information about planning, and Fines Victoria provides information about infringements.
218. In email correspondence with the enquiry team, Local Government Victoria stated it 'intends to develop fact sheets relating to other legislative matters as part of the Local Government Act review, that are likely to include directing the reader to the relevant areas of Government that are responsible for those matters.'

219. This enquiry identified some additional areas where Local Government Victoria could assist councils by coordinating common resources. They include resources to boost the accessibility of council systems, such as Easy English publications. Common resources are likely to be particularly useful for councils in regional areas, where resources for complaint handling are more limited.

Performance reporting and benchmarking

220. The evidence in this enquiry also shows that, while councils have taken steps to better enable and respond to complaints, progress in the area of recording, analysing and reporting on complaint data is slow. This suggests a stronger approach is needed to drive improvement.
221. In Queensland, local government regulations impose legal obligations on councils to record and report on complaint handling in their Annual Reports (*Local Government Regulations 2012* (Qld) regulations 187 and 306). Councils must:
- record all administrative complaints
 - ensure 'internal reports are occasionally provided to senior management about the operation of the complaints management process'
 - ensure mechanisms are in place to 'identify, analyse and respond to complaint trends' and 'monitor the effectiveness of the complaints management process'
 - publish a statement in their Annual Report about how the council has implemented its complaint management process, including an assessment of its performance in resolving complaints. The Annual Report must also include 'particulars' of the number of complaints made to the council, the number of complaints resolved and the number of complaints not resolved.

222. Victoria's *Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2014* (Vic) also require councils to report information about their performance as part of the state's Local Government Performance Reporting Framework. However, as paragraph 178 noted, the Framework does not currently require councils to report their performance in complaint handling, with the exception of certain issues such as missed bin collections.

223. In May 2019, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office noted scope to improve the Framework. It described Local Government Victoria's implementation of the Framework as a 'commendable first step' for publicly reporting on council performance. However, it identified concerns including:

- Councils were not interpreting reporting rules consistently, reducing the accuracy and consistency of data.
- The Framework does not set performance targets for councils.
- The Framework has failed to reduce the reporting burden on councils because some State Government agencies continue to use their own, separate processes to collect council data. Some councils expressed concern that increasing compliance, enforcement and reporting standards were leading to escalating costs.¹⁵

224. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office also noted that councils were not making the best use of available data to inform decision making about services:

[C]ouncils' use of the [Framework] results within their businesses is limited, which shows that reporting is largely a compliance exercise rather than a tool to help drive performance improvements.¹⁶

225. Despite these concerns, the Framework remains the most appropriate vehicle in Victoria for introducing performance reporting and benchmarking in the area of complaint handling.

¹⁵ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Reporting on Local Government Performance* (2019).

¹⁶ Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Reporting on Local Government Performance* (2019) 9.

Conclusions

226. This enquiry identified some encouraging progress with the way councils have enabled and responded to complaints over the last five years.
227. More councils have formal complaint handling policies and training for council officers. There is more information available for the public about how to make complaints. More councils have targets for responding to complaints quickly, advise people about avenues for review, and support their staff to deal with challenging behaviour.
228. In other areas, there is still room for improvement. More needs to be done across councils as a sector to make complaint handling systems accessible to everyone in the community, especially people with different communication needs.
229. It is also concerning that councils have made little progress with systems to record and learn from complaints. In some cases, outdated recording and reporting systems are partly to blame. But too many councils still disguise the true level of dissatisfaction with their services by labelling dissatisfaction as 'requests for service' or 'matters with statutory rights of appeal', instead of recognising them for what they are - complaints.
230. This enquiry acknowledges councils have concerns about recording and reporting complaints, particularly the potential for complaints data to be used unfairly to criticise council services. The cost of data recording and reporting is also a concern.
231. However, it is also important to recognise the costs of failing to accurately record complaints. Transparency and accountability is lost because councils and their communities cannot accurately gauge community satisfaction or compare the performance of different councils. Councils also lose vital feedback that can be used to improve services. Reports of missed bin collections and statutory appeals about infringements and planning decisions yield useful information, just like other types of dissatisfaction. Recording these contacts as 'complaints' does not mean councils have to treat them any differently. It does mean councils build a more reliable and accurate picture of dissatisfaction with these functions, and what they can do to address those concerns.
232. Much of this responsibility for addressing these issues falls on councils themselves. This report has also outlined changes this office intends to make to support councils with this work.
233. The Ombudsman's 2015 Report also highlighted the role of the State Government in ensuring consistent good practice across councils. The new Local Government Bill and Local Government Performance Reporting Framework offer opportunities for the State Government to help drive improvement across councils state-wide. The recommendations in this report are intended to help drive this change into the future.

Recommendations

To the Minister for Local Government:

The following two recommendations are in alignment with the Ombudsman's recommendations in her 2015 report *Councils and complaints – A report on current practice and issues*, and in light of the subsequent *Local Government Bill 2018* and proposed 2019 Bill.

The 2018 Bill at clause 145 defined a 'complaint' as:

complaint includes the communication, whether orally or in writing, to the council by a person of their dissatisfaction with –

- (a) the quality of an action taken, decision made or service provided by a member of council staff or a contractor engaged by the council; or
- (b) the 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;

decision does not include a policy or decision made by the council or a member of council staff or a contractor engaged by the council that is otherwise subject to statutory review.

Recommendation 1

For the 2019 Local Government Bill:

- 1.1 Remove the definition of 'decision' as set out in clause 145 of the 2018 Bill.
- 1.2 Expressly *include* in the definition of 'complaint', complaints about 'a policy or decision made by a council or a member of council staff or a contractor engaged by the council that is otherwise subject to statutory review'.

- 1.3. Provide councils with an express *discretion* to enable them to refuse to deal with a complaint that is otherwise subject to statutory review. In exercising this discretion, councils should consider whether it is reasonable in the circumstances to expect the complainant to exercise their rights under the relevant statutory review process.

- 1.4 Retain the requirement in the 2018 Bill that councils have:

- complaint handling policies and procedures
- an internal review function for reviewing complaint decisions.

Minister's response: Accepted.

The forthcoming Local Government Bill 2019 will include provisions that incorporate these recommendations.

Recommendation 2

In connection with the 2019 Local Government Bill, create regulations:

- addressing the process for managing and resolving complaints about a council
- addressing the process for internally reviewing a complaint
- requiring councils to report on complaint data in their Annual Report.

Minister's response: Accepted.

The Local Government Bill 2019 will include a provision enabling regulations to be made in relation to complaint handling processes and reporting in councils' Annual Reports.

To Local Government Victoria:

Recommendation 3

Following the implementation of the recommendations above, develop an indicator for complaints in the Local Government Reporting Framework, including:

- if councils have a complaints policy, and
- complaints data collected in accordance with the recommended regulations in Recommendation 2.

Minister's response (addressing recommendations made to Local Government Victoria): Accepted.

The Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF) is an important part of the Government's commitment to accountability in local government. The Framework, including existing indicators, has been developed through extensive research, consultation and agreement with the local government sector and peak bodies.

Local Government Victoria will refer the recommendation to establish additional indicators to measure complaints-related performance to the next LGPRF Technical Working Group for consideration and potential implementation.

Recommendation 4

Lead the development of strategies to improve rural councils' ability to handle complaints and provide independent internal reviews, through the sharing of resources.

Minister's response (addressing recommendations made to Local Government Victoria): Accepted.

The Government is committed to introducing measures to enhance sustainable and economically viable local government in Victoria.

An example of this commitment is the Rural Councils Transformation Program. This program, which involves the delivery of four major projects across 19 rural and regional local governments, is a long-term commitment to transformation. The program aims to create shared service delivery models to maximise the benefits of economies of scale and critical mass which rural Councils would not have access to under other circumstances. The management of complaints, including processes for independent internal reviews, is expected to benefit from these shared services delivery models.

LGV will continue to consider, and implement as appropriate, other strategies to improve rural councils' ability to manage complaints.

Appendix A:

List of councils by type

List of councils by type

Metropolitan councils		
Banyule City Council	Hobsons Bay City Council	Moonee Valley City Council
Bayside City Council	Kingston City Council	Moreland City Council
Boroondara City Council	Knox City Council	Port Phillip City Council
Brimbank City Council	Manningham City Council	Stonnington City Council
Darebin City Council	Maribyrnong City Council	Whitehorse City Council
Frankston City Council	Maroondah City Council	Yarra City Council
Glen Eira City Council	Melbourne City Council	
Greater Dandenong City Council	Monash City Council	
Interface councils		
Cardinia Shire Council	Melton City Council	Whittlesea City Council
Casey City Council	Mornington Peninsula Shire Council	Wyndham City Council
Hume City Council	Nillumbik Shire Council	Yarra Ranges Shire Council
Regional city councils		
Ballarat City Council	Horsham Rural City Council	Warrnambool City Council
Greater Bendigo City Council	Latrobe City Council	Wodonga City Council
Greater Geelong City Council	Mildura Rural City Council	
Greater Shepparton City Council	Wangaratta Rural City Council	
Large shire councils		
Bass Coast Shire Council	Golden Plains Shire Council	South Gippsland Shire Council
Baw Baw Shire Council	Macedon Ranges Shire Council	Southern Grampians Shire Council
Campaspe Shire Council	Mitchell Shire Council	Surf Coast Shire Council
Colac Otway Shire Council	Moira Shire Council	Swan Hill Rural City Council
Corangamite Shire Council	Moorabool Shire Council	Wellington Shire Council
East Gippsland Shire Council	Mount Alexander Shire Council	
Glenelg Shire Council	Moyne Shire Council	

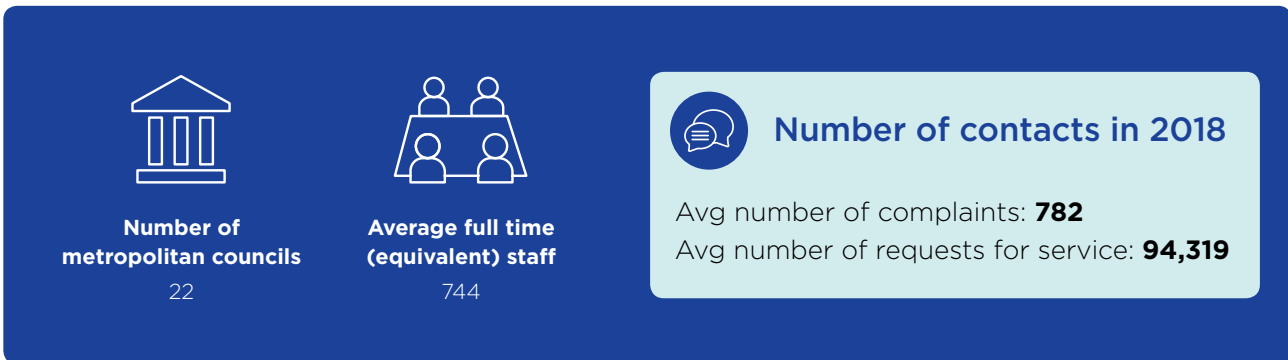
Small shire councils		
Alpine Shire Council	Hindmarsh Shire Council	Borough of Queenscliffe
Ararat Rural City Council	Indigo Shire Council	Strathbogie Shire Council
Benalla Rural City Council	Loddon Shire Council	Towong Shire Council
Buloke Shire Council	Mansfield Shire Council	West Wimmera Shire Council
Central Goldfields Shire Council	Murrindindi Shire Council	Yarriambiack Shire Council
Gannawarra Shire Council	Northern Grampians Shire Council	
Hepburn Shire Council	Pyrenees Shire Council	

Appendix B:
Key survey results by council type

Key survey results by council type

Metropolitan Councils

What they told us... dealing with complaints



All 22 metropolitan councils said they differentiate between complaints and requests for service.

Policy

Nineteen of the 22 metropolitan councils said they have a complaint handling policy. Thirteen said their complaint handling policy is on their council website.

Timeframes

All 22 councils said they aim to acknowledge complaints within 10 business days. Twenty said they aim to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Independent review

Twenty of the 22 councils said where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Fifteen said they inform complainants of the option of internal review.

Twenty-one councils said they inform complainants they can contact the Victorian Ombudsman or other avenues of external review if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of an internal review. Eighteen councils

said this information is on their website and 12 said they provide information about the Victorian Ombudsman in complaint outcome letters.

Learning from complaints data

Twelve metropolitan councils said they regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. Sixteen said staff report on the outcomes of complaints their council receives.

Only three of the 22 metropolitan councils said they make their complaints data public. One of these councils said they make their complaints data public in published reports, and all three said they release complaints data on request. An additional three councils which had said they do not make their complaints data public said they do release complaints data on request. One of these councils said they also make this data available in public reports.

Interface Councils

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of interface councils

9



Average full time (equivalent) staff

752



Number of contacts in 2018

Avg number of complaints: **2,319**

Avg number of requests for service: **98,020**

All nine interface councils said they differentiate between complaints and requests for service.



Policy

All nine interface councils said they have a complaint handling policy. Five said their complaint handling policy is on their council website.



Timeframes

Eight councils said they aim to acknowledge complaints within 10 business days. Seven said they aim to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

All nine said where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. All nine said they inform complainants of the option of internal review.

All interface councils said they inform complainants they can contact the Victorian Ombudsman or other avenues of external review if they are dissatisfied

with the outcome of an internal review. All said this information is on their website, and eight said they provide information about the Victorian Ombudsman in complaint outcome letters.



Learning from complaints data

Eight interface councils said they regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. Only two said staff report on the outcomes of complaints their council receives.

Only two of the nine interface councils said they make their complaints data public. One council makes complaints data public in published reports, the other said it releases this data on request.

Regional City Councils

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of regional city councils

10



Average full time (equivalent) staff

571



Number of contacts in 2018

Avg number of complaints: **250**

Avg number of requests for service: **29,922**

All 10 regional city councils said they differentiate between complaints and requests for service.



Policy

All 10 councils said they have a complaint handling policy. Eight said their complaint handling policy is on their council website.



Timeframes

All 10 regional city councils said they aim to acknowledge complaints within 10 business days. Nine said they aim to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Nine of the 10 councils said where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Nine also said they inform complainants of the option of internal review.

Eight regional city councils said they inform complainants they can contact the Victorian Ombudsman or other avenues of external review

if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of an internal review. Three said this information is on their website and six said they provide information about the Victorian Ombudsman in complaint outcome letters.



Learning from complaints data

Five councils said they regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. Four said staff report on the outcomes of complaints their council receives.

Only two of the 10 councils said they make their complaints data public. Both councils said they make their complaints data public in published reports. Another council said it releases its complaints data on request.

Large Shire Councils

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of large shire councils

19



Average full time (equivalent) staff

250



Number of contacts in 2018

Avg number of complaints: **113**

Avg number of requests for service: **33,569**

Eighteen of the 19 large shire councils said they differentiate between complaints and requests for service.



Policy

Fifteen of the 19 large shire councils said they have a complaint handling policy. Fourteen said their complaint handling policy is on their council website.



Timeframes

All 19 councils said they aim to acknowledge complaints within 10 business days. Eighteen said they aim to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Seventeen of the 19 councils said where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Fifteen large shire councils said they inform complainants of the option of internal review.

Eighteen large shire councils said they inform complainants they can contact the Victorian Ombudsman or other avenues of external review if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of an internal review. Eleven said this information is on their website and 14 said they provide information about the Victorian Ombudsman in complaint outcome letters.



Learning from complaints data

Six of 19 large shire councils said they regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. Eight said staff report on the outcomes of complaints their council receives.

Five of the 19 councils said they make their complaints data public. Four of these councils said they make their complaints data public in published reports, while one said they provide it on request. Another council which had previously said they do not make their complaints data public said their complaints data may be made public in published reports and on request.

Small Shire Councils

What they told us... dealing with complaints



**Number of
small shire councils**

19



**Average full time
(equivalent) staff**

113



Number of contacts in 2018

Avg number of complaints: **150**

Avg number of requests for service: **4,168**

Fifteen of the 19 small shire councils said they differentiate between complaints and requests for service.



Policy

Fourteen of the 19 councils said they have a complaint handling policy. Eleven said their complaint handling policy is on their council website.



Timeframes

All councils said they aim to acknowledge complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Eighteen of the 19 councils said where complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Fifteen councils said they inform complainants of the option of internal review.

Fifteen councils also said they inform complainants they can contact the Victorian Ombudsman or other avenues of external review if they are dissatisfied with

the outcome of an internal review. Eleven said this information is on their website and 13 said they provide information about the Victorian Ombudsman in complaint outcome letters.



Learning from complaints data

Four of the 19 councils said they regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. Seven said staff report on the outcomes of complaints their council receives.

Only three out of the 19 small shire councils said they make their complaints data public. Two said they make their complaints data public in published reports and one said it makes it data public on request. Another council which had previously said it does not make its complaints data public said it makes its complaints data public in published reports.

Appendix C:
Individual council survey results

Individual council survey results

Alpine Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints

Type
Small Shire

Population
12,337

Staff
103



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **Not provided**

Alpine Shire Council says it does not currently differentiate between complaints and requests for service:

'The council does not currently have the systems or processes in place to measure complaints, however it is taking steps to enable this with the planned introduction of a new Customer Request Management system.'



Policy

At the time of the survey, Alpine Shire Council said it did not have a complaint handling policy:

'... The council is also working on, and has in draft form, a Complaints Handling Policy for defining and managing complaints received. Council will incorporate a differentiation between a complaint and a request for service in this draft policy. Council previously utilised the 'Ombudsman Complaint Handling Guide' prior to the policy being in place.'



Timeframes

Alpine Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Alpine Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option for internal review.

Alpine Shire Council says it does not inform its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review.



Learning from complaints data

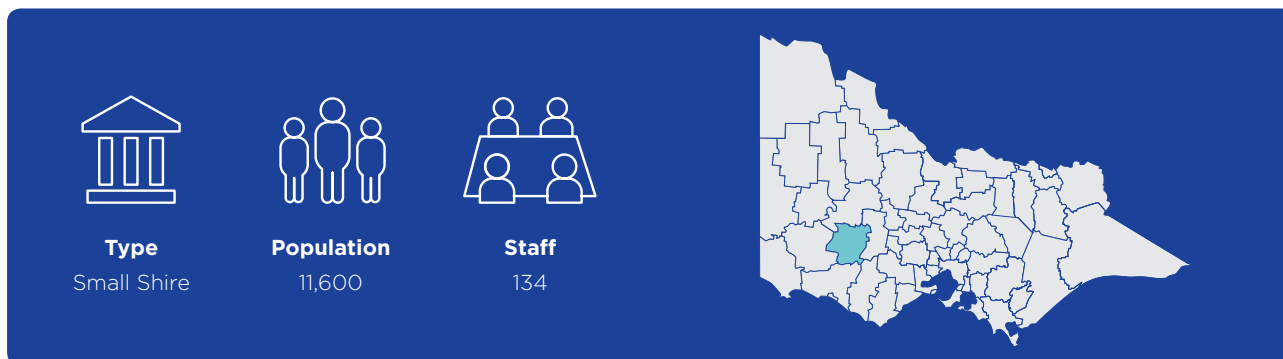
Alpine Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director, the CEO of the council or Councillors.

Alpine Shire Council says it does not make its complaint data public:

'Council currently does not capture reporting data specific to complaints. The introduction of a new CRM system will enable complaint data capture and reporting.'

Ararat Rural City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **1,180**

Number of requests for service: **9,946**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Ararat Rural City Council says it calculated its complaints from types of customer requests which are derived from a defect or a complaint:

'A significant portion of Ararat Council's customer requests have a complaint component attached to them. i.e. a resident complaint that their bin collection has been missed contains both a complaint and an implied request for service to complete an out of cycle bin collection at that residential property. These types of requests (defects) are processed by Ararat Rural City Council via councils Customer Request Management System ...

Council can calculate numbers of 'complaints' via the separation of request types where the request type is known to have a defect component ie

- missed rubbish collection
- storm water drain blocked
- road defect outside of intervention levels such as a pothole.'



Policy

Ararat Rural City Council says it has a complaint handling policy; however, the council says it is not on the council website:

'The current Complaints Handling Policy is an administration policy and available internally for distribution. It is also part of Ararat Rural City Council's induction program and reviewed under both internal and external audit programs. Due consideration is being applied to release this via council's website as a public policy.'



Timeframes

Ararat Rural City says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt:

'Ararat Rural City will attempt to contact the customer as soon as reasonably practical to triage the request. This will typically be within 2 business days based on current customer service standard expectations. As per our current policy, the maximum timeframe council to acknowledge a complaint is 10 business days.

Depending on the nature of the request and the technical implementation of a solution (if service is required) the resolution time can vary quite a lot. During 2018, 7783 (73.83%) of customer requests were classified as being closed within expected time frames.

The service standards Council adhere to under our Customer Request System are tighter than policy guidelines, the maximum timeframe Council aims to resolve complaints within the policy is 28 days.'



Independent review

Ararat Rural City says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review:

'This is certainly applied for complaints against staff members and in general is applied against all customer requests where it is obvious at the point of request closure that the customer is unhappy with the outcome.'

Ararat Rural City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters:

'If a complainant is not satisfied with the resolution or outcome of an internal review, they will be advised of any external avenues through which the complaint may be pursued. The complainant will in all cases be advised that they may contact the Victorian Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with the process or outcome of a complaint.'

The council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is not on the council website:

'The external complaints policy is not on Council's website ... Ararat Rural City Council is currently giving due consideration to release the Complaints Handling Policy via council's website.'



Learning from complaints data

Ararat Rural City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council:

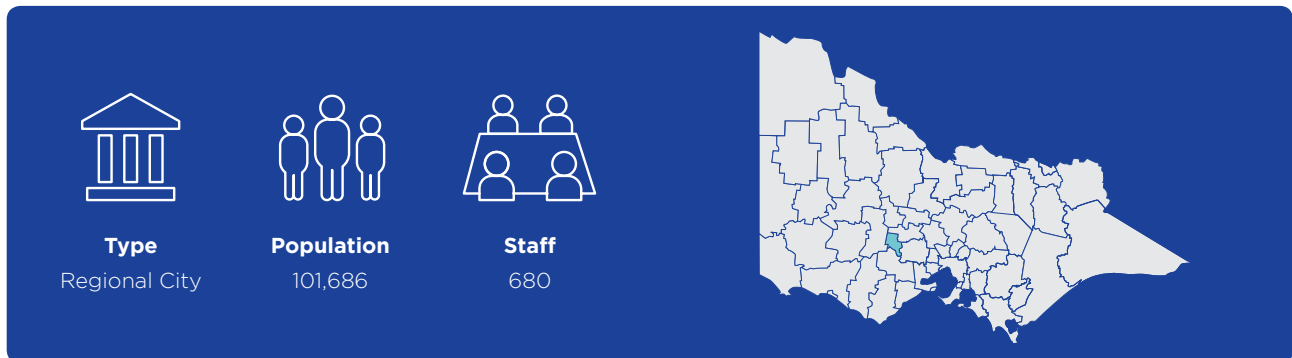
'Ararat Rural City have recently invested in a team specifically geared to tackle organisational transformation and continual improvement. Data mining against request types to analyse volumes and look for repeating defects is now occurring through a problem management framework.'

Ararat Rural City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Council maintains the confidentiality of the complainant in regard to individual requests, however it retains the option to make public the total volume of certain request types derived from a defect / complaint through annual reporting and ad-hoc reporting processes intended to improve council's delivery of service.'

Ballarat City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **606**
Number of requests for service: **20,741**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Ballarat City Council explained:

'[The number of complaints] is made up of:

- 17 general complaints
- 26 drainage complaints
- 12 footpath complaints
- 45 landfill complaints
- 20 street/roads complaints
- 455 waste collection complaints (not including missed bin collections)
- 31 escalated complaints.'



Policy

Ballarat City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Ballarat City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Ballarat City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says not all its complainants are informed about the option of internal review:

'There is an escalation process within the complaints procedure, however not all complaints receive a formal response. This escalation process is outlined on Council's website.'

Ballarat City Council says it does not generally inform its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. However, information about the Victorian Ombudsman is available on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Ballarat City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'There is no formal process to analyse complaints and trends. These have largely been identified via emerging issues within the business units.'

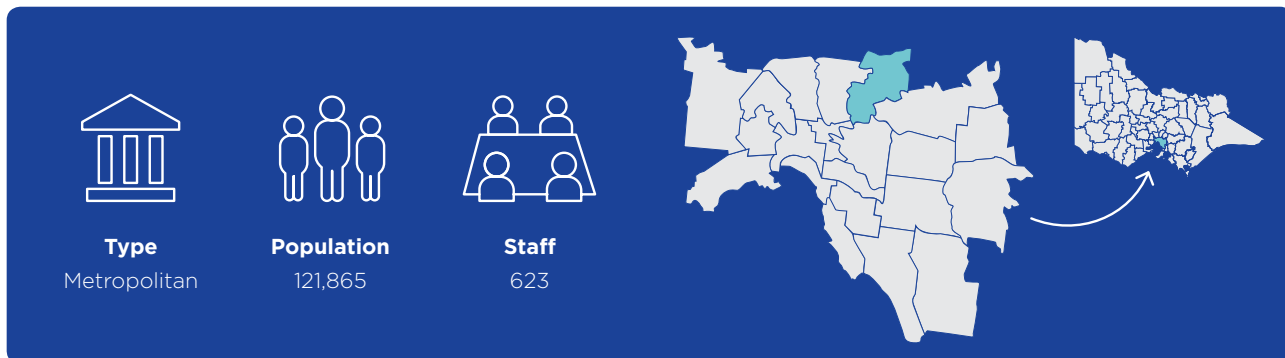
The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints that the council receives.

Ballarat City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council states:

'Council does not make its complaints data public; however Council does report the number of Protected Disclosures made in its annual report.'

Banyule City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **76,722**

As context for the totals provided above, Banyule City Council explained:

'We use different systems to capture requests/ complaints mainly in our CRM and document management systems. We have commenced capturing complaints in an excel spreadsheet, however we do not have oversight of all complaints. In 2018 we developed a Voice of Customer framework with a recommendation to commence capturing feedback (complaints and compliments). This project will be undertaken in 2019.'



Policy

Banyule City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Banyule City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Banyule City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Banyule City Council does not always inform its complainants about the option of internal review:

'... we do not do this consistently and are undertaking a complaint handling project this year.'

Banyule City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.

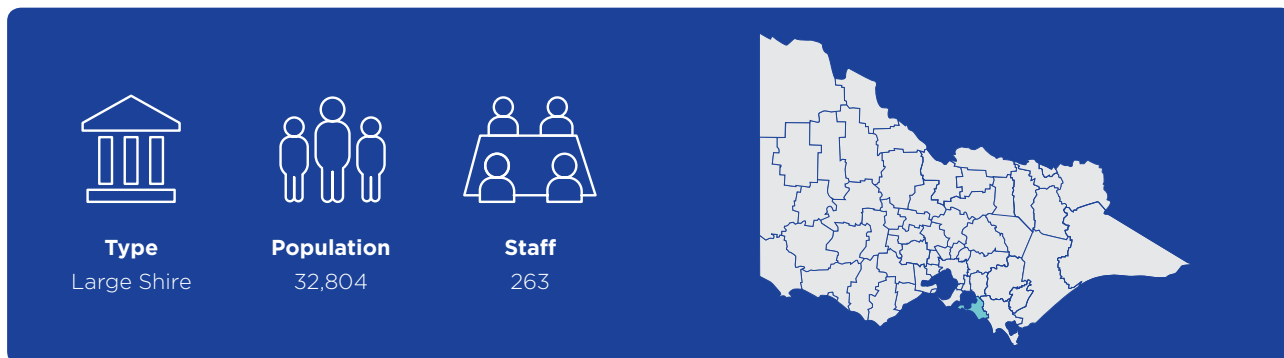


Learning from complaints data

Banyule City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Bass Coast Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **9**
Number of requests for service: **16,664**

To provide context for the totals listed above, council stated the following:

'There are three levels of handling a complaint:

- Level 1 is handled by frontline staff and logged as a request for service.*
- Level 2 is handled by managers and requires an investigation. This is recorded.*
- Level 3 is recorded and referred to Victorian Ombudsman or mediator. This is recorded.'*



Policy

Bass Coast Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Bass Coast Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Bass Coast Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Bass Coast Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is not always provided in complaint outcome letters; however, it is on the council website:

'The customer can nominate a preferred method of communication.'



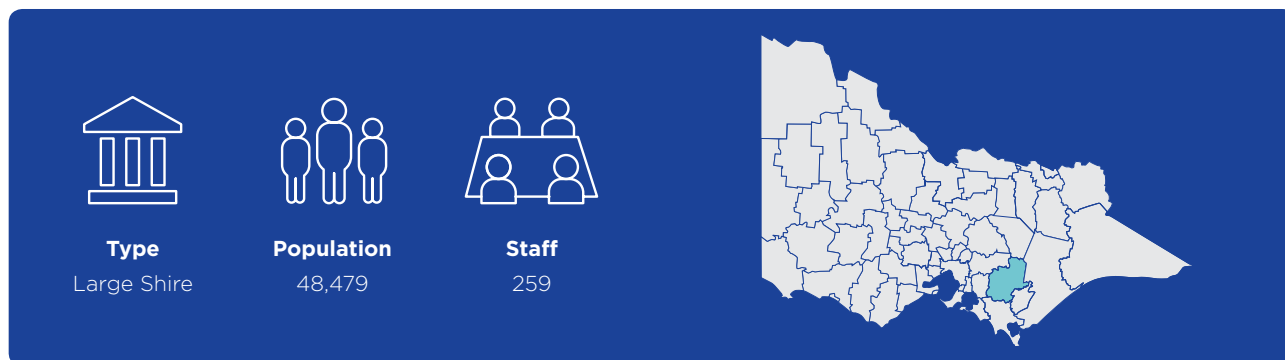
Learning from complaints data

Bass Coast Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints that it receives.

Bass Coast Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council explained this data is: *'... reported quarterly to the Audit Committee.'*

Baw Baw Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **96**

Number of requests for service: **25,024**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Baw Baw Shire Council explained:

'From February 2019, Council has upgraded its system so that it can record the number of complaints received.'

request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Baw Baw Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters; however, it is not on the council website:

'It is not specifically noted on the website, however it is contained in the Complaint Handling Policy on Council's website.'



Policy

Baw Baw Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on its website.



Learning from complaints data

Baw Baw Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Baw Baw Shire Council says it does not currently make its complaints data public:

'We have not previously been able to record or gather this data into a reporting format.'



Timeframes

Baw Baw Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

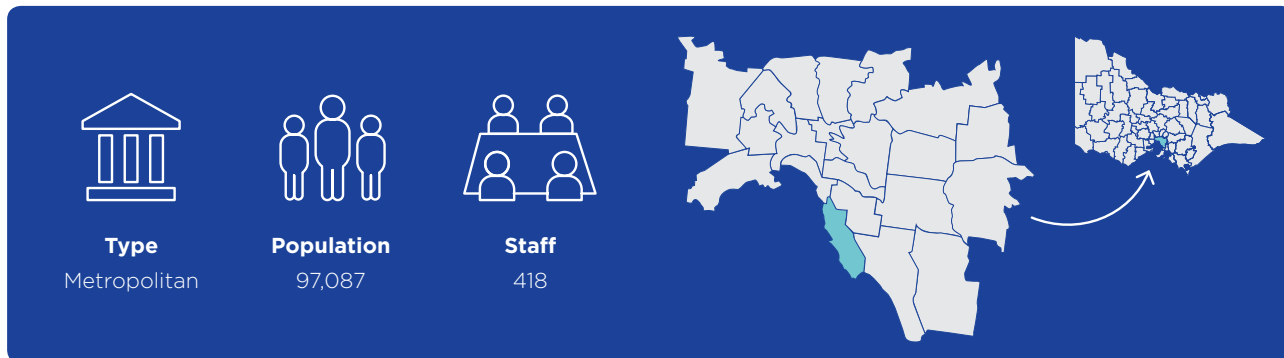


Independent review

Baw Baw Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and

Bayside City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **571**

Number of requests for service: **68,871**

'[the complaint] is escalated to a higher level or referred to the customer experience department for an objective review.'

Bayside City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is available on the council website, however it is not provided in complaint outcome letters:



Policy

Bayside City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website:

'... we have a Customer Experience Policy which is online which is supported by a Complaint and Escalation Procedure which is internal for staff to follow.'

'We advise the customer to contact Council if they have any further concerns in relation to their complaint.'



Learning from complaints data

Bayside City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'Root cause analysis and service improvement plan development trends reported to the Executive team.'



Timeframes

Bayside City Council says it aims to acknowledge and resolve all complaints within 10 business days.



Independent review

Bayside City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter:

Bayside City Council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or CEO of the council.

Bayside City Council says it does not currently make its complaints data public. The council says it is currently working on a new performance reporting framework.

Benalla Rural City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **11**
Number of requests for service: **2,152**

To provide for the totals listed above, Benalla Rural City Council explained:

'The [number of complaints] is not easy to identify as we do not have a centralised complaints data base. We are investigating a customer complaints module as part of an upgraded Complaints Management System.'



Independent review

Benalla Rural City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs complainants about the option of internal review.

Benalla Rural City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters; however, is not on the council website.



Policy

Benalla Rural City Council says it has a complaint handling policy; however, the council says it is not on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Benalla Rural City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

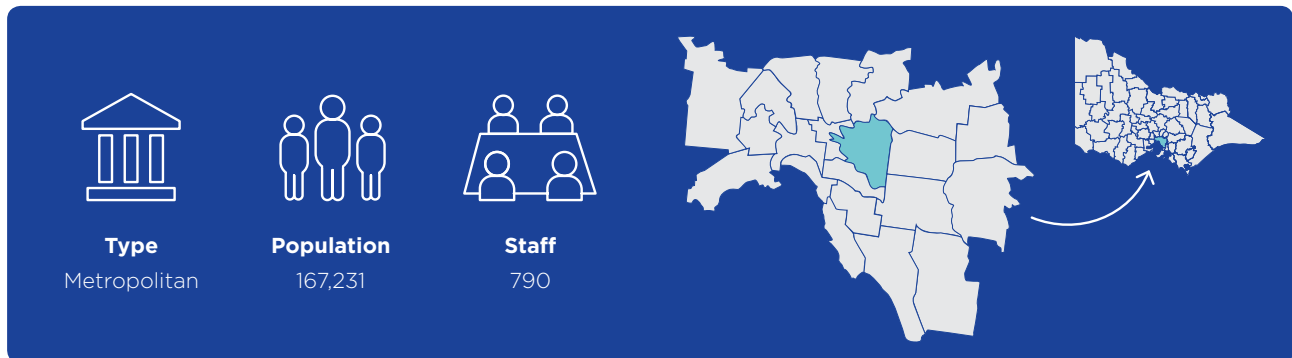


Timeframes

Benalla Rural City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Boroondara City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **5,764**
Number of requests for service: **192,225**



Learning from complaints data

Boroondara City Council says it analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement 'as required and at least on an annual basis.' The council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or CEO of the council, Councillors, the public and oversight agencies as required.

Boroondara City Council says it makes its complaint data public in published reports and on request.



Policy

Boroondara City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Boroondara City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



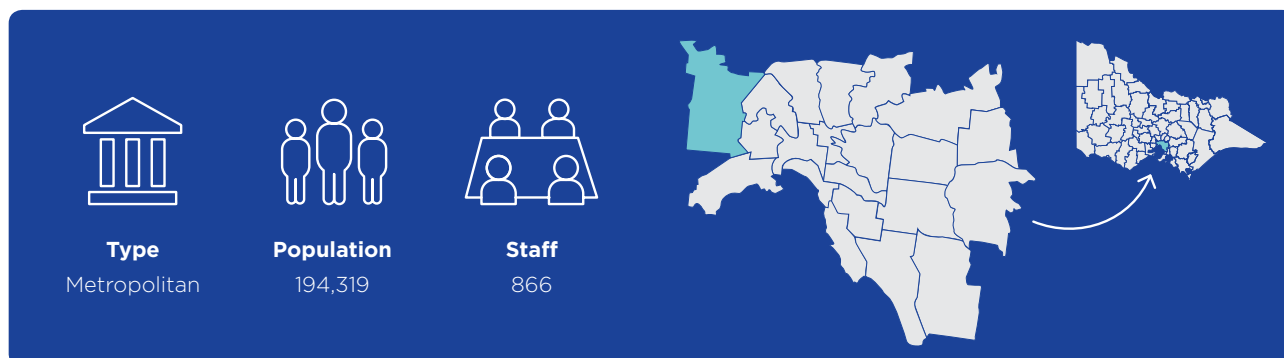
Independent review

Boroondara City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants of the option of internal review.

Boroondara City Council says it does not inform complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review.

Brimbank City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **224**
Number of requests for service: **57,365**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Brimbank City Council explained:

'Complaints include those relating to services provided and complaints made by staff members.'



Policy

Brimbank City Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy.



Timeframes

Brimbank City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Brimbank City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the

matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Brimbank City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



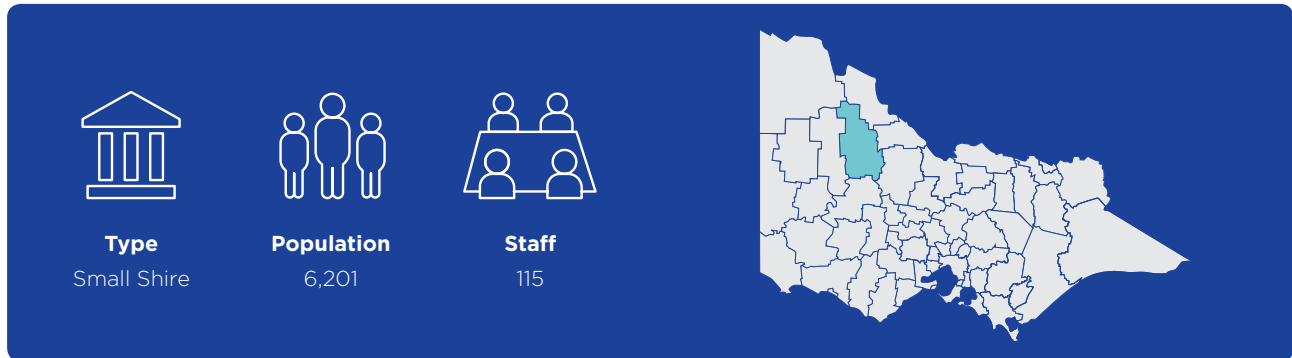
Learning from complaints data

Brimbank City Council says it analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement on an 'as needed' basis. The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director, or the CEO of the council.

Brimbank City Council says it does not currently make its complaints data public. The council says this is to be reviewed.

Buloke Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **1,740**

To provide context for the totals listed above, the council explained:

'The two different systems for dealing with complaints make it difficult to calculate an exact number of complaints received.'



Policy

Buloke Shire Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy.



Timeframes

Buloke Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Buloke Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Buloke Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



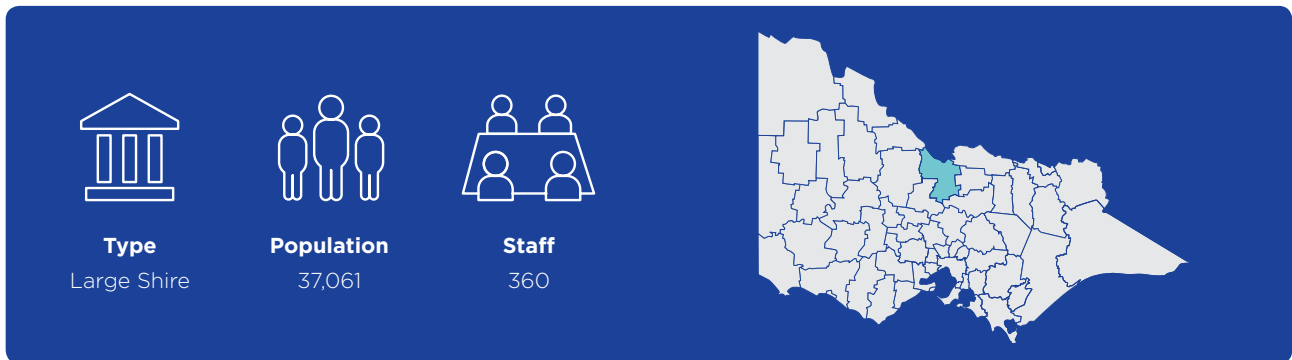
Learning from complaints data

Buloke Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council.

Buloke Shire says it does not make its complaints data public.

Campaspe Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **735**
Number of requests for service: **29,731**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Campaspe Shire Council explained:

'This year as seen the inclusion of all missed bins being reported against a complaint in the request management system. This would have significant contribution to the number of complaints registered.'



Policy

Campaspe Shire Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy.



Timeframes

Campaspe Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Campaspe Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Campaspe Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



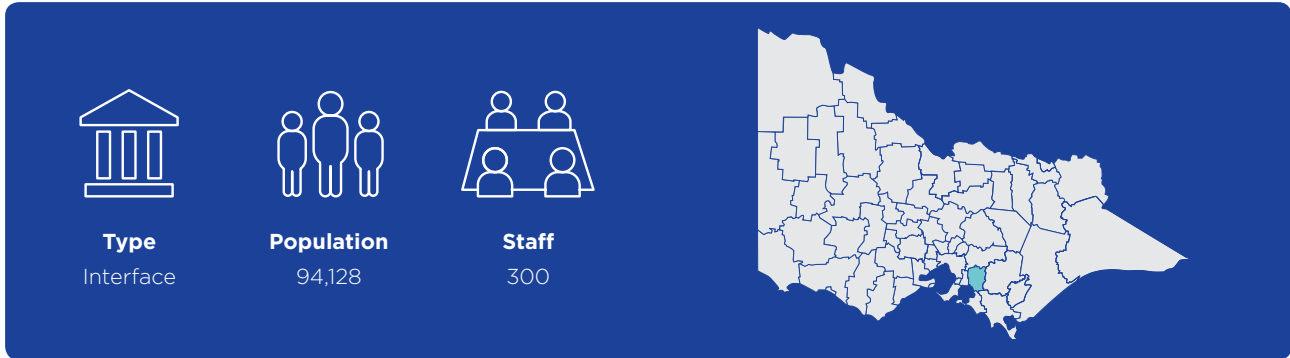
Learning from complaints data

Campaspe Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints that the council receives.

Campaspe Shire Council says it make its complaints data public in published reports.

Cardinia Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **32**
Number of requests for service: **41,000**

Cardinia Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Policy

Cardinia Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy; however, it is not on the council website:

'The current process is under review.'



Learning from complaints data

Cardinia Shire Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says it does this '[i]f a particular issue keeps arising'. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Cardinia Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'[This is] something we are considering in the future as part of our current review.'



Timeframes

Cardinia Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

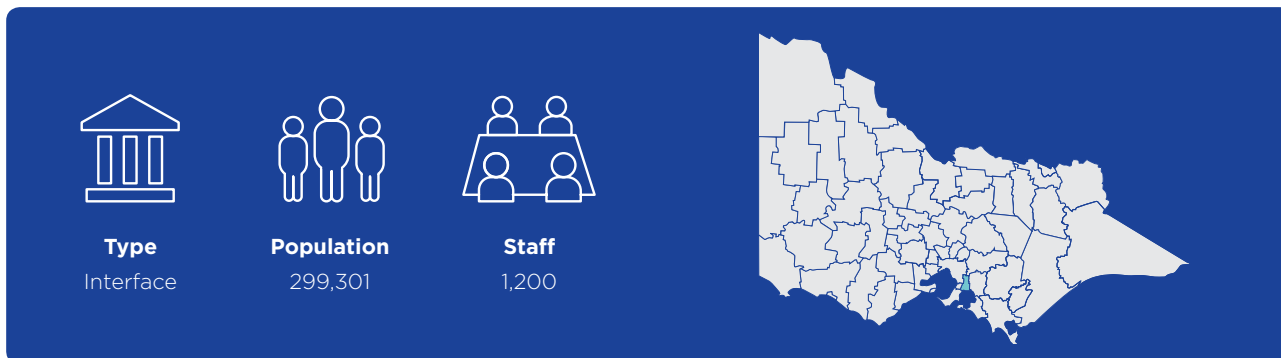


Independent review

Cardinia Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Casey City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **92**

Number of requests for service: **230,000**

'There is an Internal Complaint Handling Framework that outlines staff responsibilities and operational processes. On the website is the Complaint Handling Process which outlines the process from a customer perspective.'

To provide context for the totals listed above, Casey City Council provided the following additional information about the levels of complaints:

'Level 1 - unknown

Level 2 (escalated to Manager) - 92

Level 3 (Internal Ombudsman) - 23

Level 4 (Victorian Ombudsman)- 11'

The council explains:

'Level 3 (reviewed by the Internal Ombudsman) ceased in October 2018, therefore Level 4 (Victorian Ombudsman) is now referred to as Level 3.

'There is currently no central system to accurately report on the volume of all requests and Level 1 complaints.'



Timeframes

Casey City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days. The council did not provide a timeframe for resolving complaints:

'Level 1 complaints will be responded [to] as per individual service commitments and/or the customer service charter.'



Independent review

Casey City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Casey City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Policy

Casey City Council says it has a complaint handling policy; however, the complete policy is not available on the council website:



Learning from complaints data

Casey City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council states:

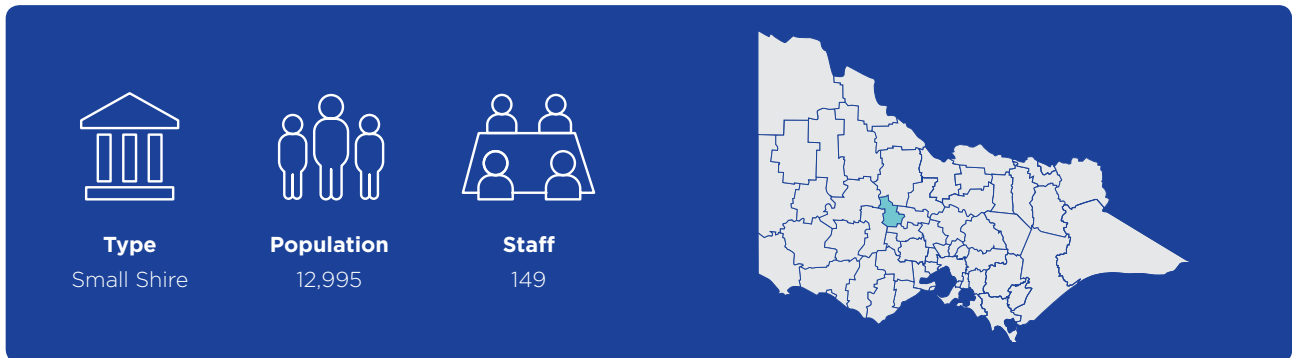
'A snap shot of the complaints and themes is provided as part of a quarterly report and are used for improvement initiatives.'

The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Casey City Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Central Goldfields Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **799**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Central Goldfields Shire Council explained it does not have a complaint register and not all requests for service are documented:

'... we are unable to accurately calculate the number of complaints received due to inadequate systems to support.'



Policy

Central Goldfields Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Central Goldfields Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Central Goldfields Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review:

Central Goldfields Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



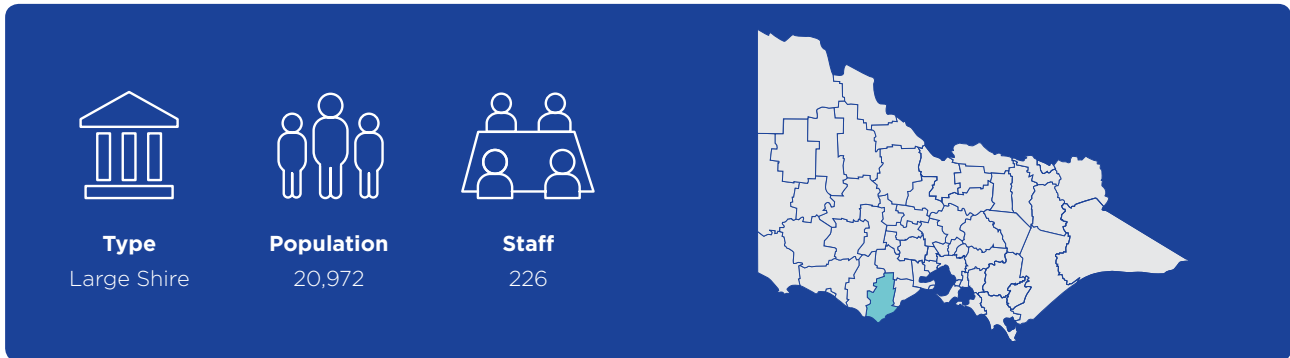
Learning from complaints data

Central Goldfields Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Central Goldfields Shire Council says it does not make its complaint data public. The council explained the relevant data is not collected.

Colac Otway Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **11**
Number of requests for service: **15,000**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Colac Otway Shire Council explained:

'It is thought the true number of complaints is higher than 11. It is also thought that the figure for requests for service includes some internal requests as well. A project to overhaul this system and educate the workforce about using the [Customer Request Management System] to its full capacity is currently being coordinated.'



Policy

Colac Otway Shire Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy:

'Colac Otway Shire does not currently have a complaint handling policy however, this is to be rectified as a priority, particularly following recent staff attendance at a workshop conducted by the Victorian Ombudsman on this topic.'



Timeframes

Colac Otway Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Colac Otway Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it does not always inform its complainants about the option of internal review:

'There is no documented process for this at Colac Otway Shire Council however, should the matter not be resolved, it is likely it would be internally escalated in an attempt to find a solution or make a determination.'

Colac Otway Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters; however, it is not on the council website:

'The website currently does not provide for complaint handling however, this is to be rectified in the near future.'

Colac Otway Shire Council says there is no documented procedure for providing information about the Victorian Ombudsman in complaint outcome letters, however it is practised.



Learning from complaints data

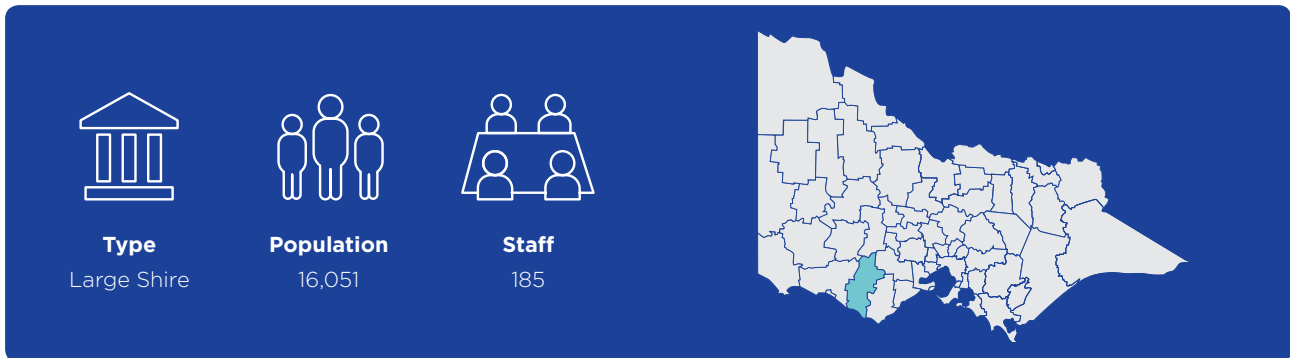
Colac Otway Shire Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement: The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Colac Otway Shire Council says it does not make its complaint data public:

'As reported in previous responses, Council currently does not keep complaints data in an organised fashion however, [Colac Otway Shire Council] intends to change its processes to better capture such data.'

Corangamite Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **35**
Number of requests for service: **21,001**

other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Corangamite Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Corangamite Shire Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.



Timeframes

Corangamite Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Corangamite Shire Council says it makes its complaints data public on request.



Independent review

Corangamite Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Corangamite Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and

Darebin City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **950**
Number of requests for service: **100,000**

To provide context to the totals listed above, Darebin City Council says these are approximate figures. They also do not include contacts made to the council regarding missed bins.



Policy

Darebin City Council says it does not have a current complaints policy:

'Whilst Council currently does not have an organisation wide policy, we do have Business Units that have a policy to manage complaints relating to specific community segments, for example, Disability.'

'Council has undertaken a significant amount of work and consultation to prepare a Complaints Policy, which is currently in its final stages.'



Timeframes

Darebin City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 24 hours and to resolve complaints within seven days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Darebin City Council says it does not currently have an internal review process in place.

Darebin City Council says it generally informs complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman or other avenues of external review if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their internal review; however, the council says there is no formal policy governing this.



Learning from complaints data

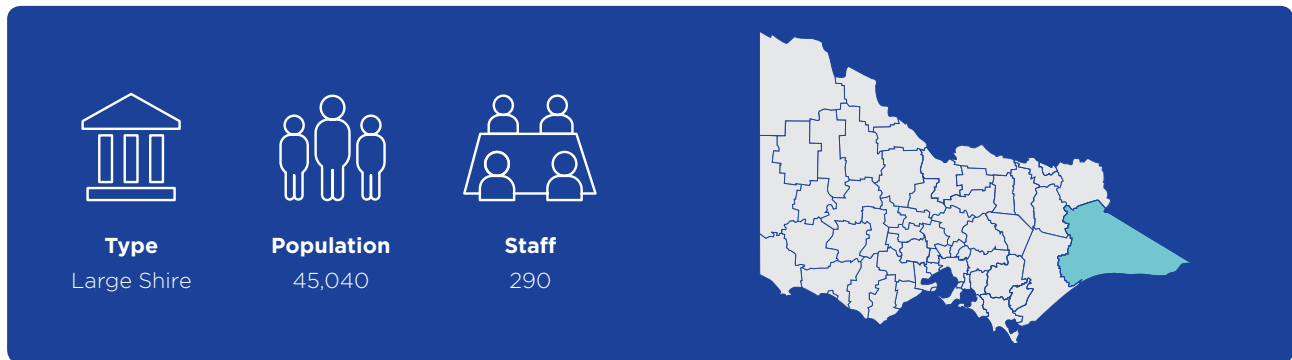
Darebin City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. Darebin City Council says it analyses complaints but does so 'inconsistently.' The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.




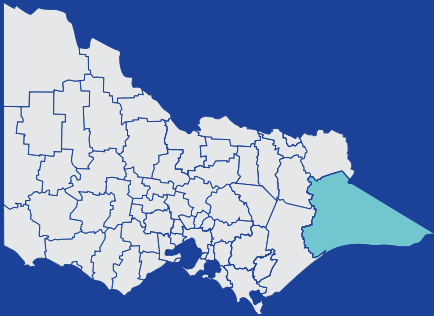
Darebin City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'We don't currently track complaints to have the data.'

East Gippsland Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



 Type Large Shire	 Population 45,040	 Staff 290	
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Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **188**

Number of requests for service: **320,393**

To provide context for the totals listed above, East Gippsland Shire Council explained:

'Council adopted the new Complaints Management Policy in 2018 and as a result only recently started differentiating [between] 'complaints' and 'request for service,' but had minimal ability to record / identify or analyse the data. We are in the progress of identifying ways to report better on this data as a key action as a direct result of a more robust framework and policy within Council.'



Policy

East Gippsland Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

East Gippsland Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

East Gippsland Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option for internal review.

East Gippsland Shire says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review; however, the council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is not on the council website:

'The website has our policy and procedure uploaded on it but does not specifically inform customers other than those that will choose to find, open and read the policy and then they will find out.'

The council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is not provided in complaint outcome letters:

'We are in the process of developing all staff training and a complaints management training program that will assist in getting to this stage where we are proactive and customer centric and create a culture that has best practice. Currently we do offer the customer the option to contact the Victorian Ombudsman but not consistently across Council.'



Learning from complaints data

East Gippsland Shire Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'Currently being done by the Customer Experience team [as a] work in progress'

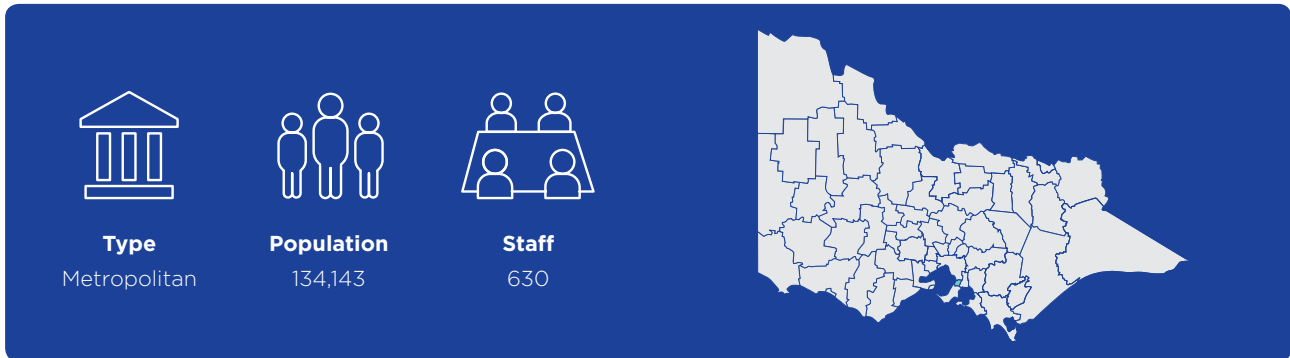
The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council.




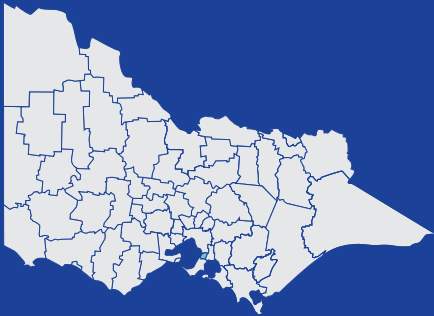
East Gippsland Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'We haven't had data on Complaints [in] the past or the policy. We are now in the process of developing reporting frameworks and standards, measures to understand what data we need and how we collate, report and analyse this data and once we have it, we will be sharing it with the public. Limitation: in order to gather data, we need better systems and databases that integrate.'

Frankston City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



 Type Metropolitan	 Population 134,143	 Staff 630	
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Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **102**

Number of requests for service: **13,626**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Frankston City Council says these contacts were received via front line staff.



Policy

Frankston City Council says it has a complaint handling policy; however, it is not on the council website. The council said the policy was in draft format at the time of this survey.'



Timeframes

Frankston City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Frankston City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted

by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Frankston City Council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Frankston City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council's website.



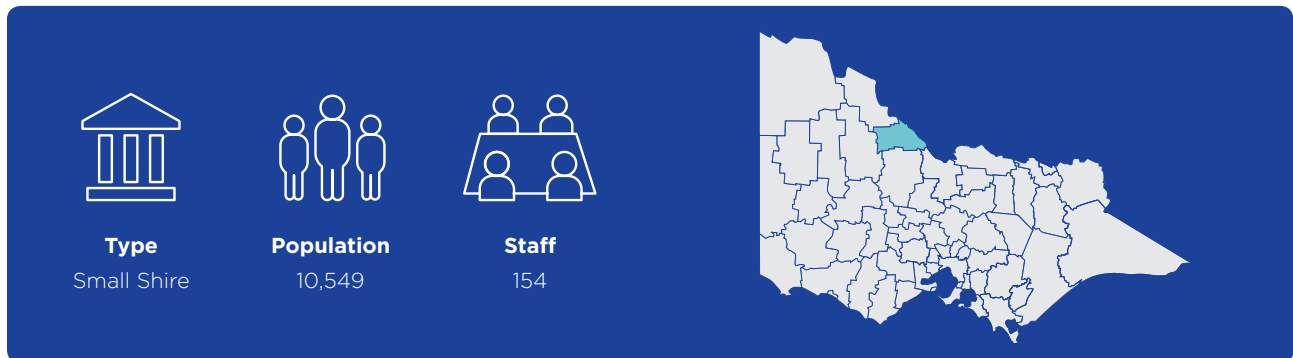
Learning from complaints data

Frankston City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or CEO of the council.

Frankston City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says it has '... no single source of truth due to legacy systems.'

Gannawarra Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **2**
Number of requests for service: **1,025**

Gannawarra Shire Council says it does not inform its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman or other options of external review.



Learning from complaints data

Gannawarra Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Gannawarra Shire Council says it makes its complaints data public in its Annual Report.



Policy

Gannawarra Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Gannawarra Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



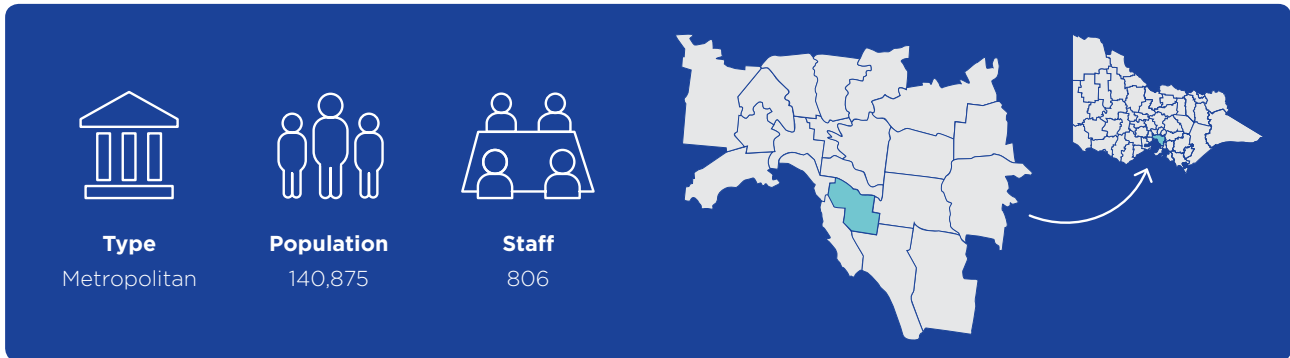
Independent review

Gannawarra Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it does not directly inform its complainants about the option of internal review:

'Complainants are referred to the Policy and Council guidelines which outlines the options for review.'

Glen Eira City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **532**
Number of requests for service: **177,591**

As context for the number of contacts listed above, Glen Eira City Council explained:

'532 complaints were made up of the following:

- '81 complaints received at Glen Eira Sports and Aquatic Centre*
- 46 complaints received for Home and Community Care*
- 405 complaints registered in Pathway Customer Service Tracking System.'*



Policy

Glen Eira City Council has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Glen Eira City Council aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 21 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Glen Eira City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review:

'The customer is provided with the information about how to take further action by making a request for an internal review. The internal review will be undertaken by the relevant Business Unit Manager. If the customer is subsequently dissatisfied with the outcome of that review, the customer may request a second review by the Director of the relevant Division.'

Glen Eira City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other avenues of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is communicated in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website:

'The Ombudsman's details are provided to anyone who may be dissatisfied with the outcome of an internal review. Other avenues of external review by relevant bodies may also be provided.'



Learning from complaints data

Glen Eira City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'Reports are provided monthly to the Executive Team for discussion and identification of areas for improvement. Fortnightly meetings are held at the Sports and Aquatic Centre to review complaints / feedback received. All Directorates regularly hold Management meetings that include discussion on reports received.'

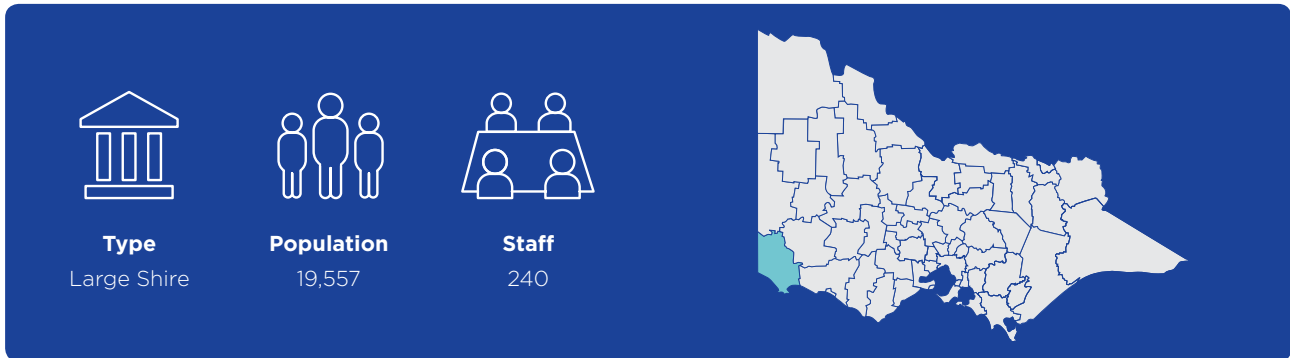
The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives:

'Reports are produced for review by the Executive Team and Management for the purposes of continuous improvement. This could be via training programs for the staff and/or the implementation of new technology eg on-line forms, applications etc to assist the community.'

Glen Eira City Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Glenelg Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Type
Large Shire

Population
19,557

Staff
240



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **10**
Number of requests for service: **150**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Glenelg Shire Council explained:

[There are] ongoing issues separating a 'request for service' and an actual 'complaint.'



Policy

Glenelg Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Glenelg Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Glenelg Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter.

'[All] complaints are handled by a senior officer previously not involved ...'

The council later explained complaints may also be escalated to the CEO of the council:

'... our procedure does indeed allow an internal review to be conducted by the CEO should director level response not meet the customer expectation.'

Glenelg Shire Council says it does not always inform its complainants about the option of internal review. The council explains:

'Not specifically outlined. The complaint process is an internal review in itself.'

Glenelg Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review; however, the council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is not provided in complaint outcome letters and is not on the council website.



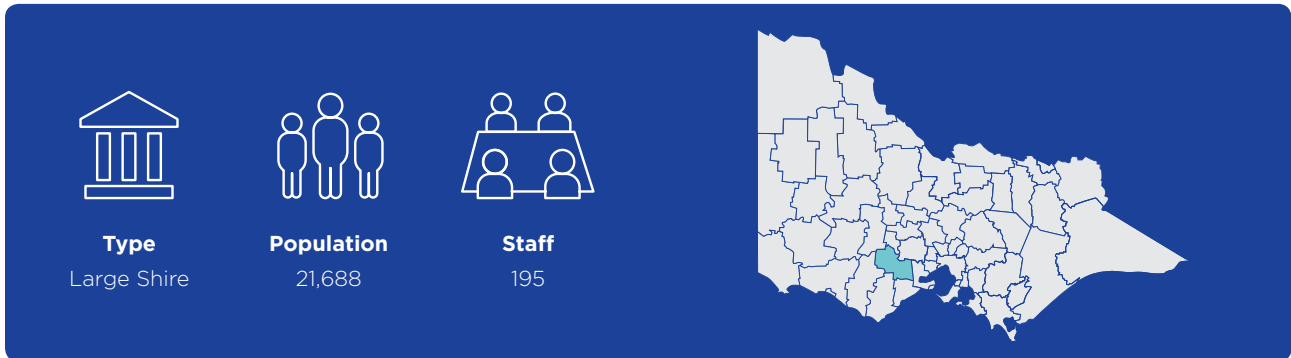
Learning from complaints data

Glenelg Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Glenelg Shire Council says it does make its complaints data public in published reports and on request.

Golden Plains Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **5**
Number of requests for service: **1,600**

To provide context to the totals provided above, the council explained:

'... we may not be capturing all complaints - specifically those which are received via email or the website or directly into departments.'



Policy

Golden Plains Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Golden Plains Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Golden Plains Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs complainants about the option of internal review.

Golden Plains Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Golden Plains Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Golden Plains Shire Council says it makes its complaints data public in published reports.

Greater Bendigo City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints

Type
Regional City

Population
110,477

Staff
696



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **485**

Number of requests for service: **40,858**

To provide context for the totals listed above, the Greater Bendigo City Council explained:

'The 485 complaints are included in the "request for service" figure.'



Policy

Greater Bendigo City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Greater Bendigo City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Greater Bendigo City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by

a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review, however the council added:

'Outcome letters are sent from specific work areas without them being necessarily consistent about this.'

The council says information about internal reviews is also available on the council website.

Greater Bendigo City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says it cannot confirm this information is provided consistently in complaint outcome letters. This information is also not on the council website. Bendigo City Council notes this as an area for improvement.



Learning from complaints data

Greater Bendigo City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement as part of its quarterly 'healthcheck':

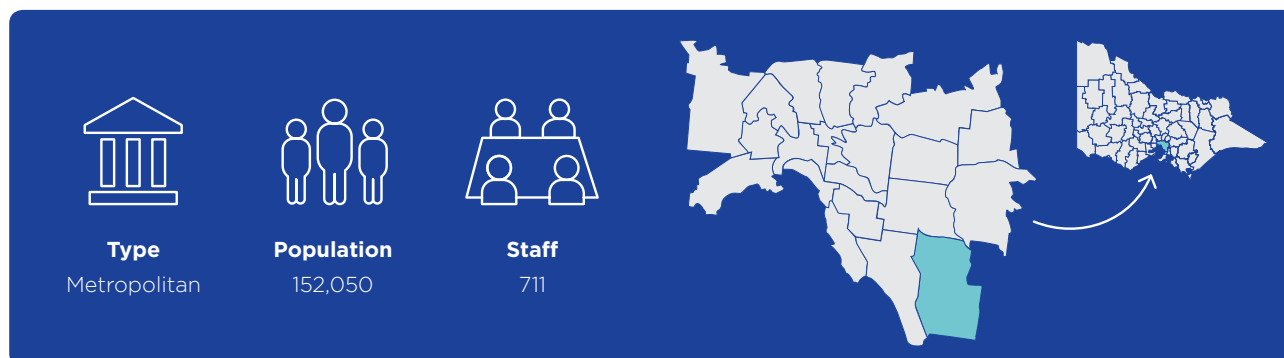
'We report to the Executive on this data in our quarterly healthcheck; but it does not roll up to Council.'

The council says staff do not otherwise report on the outcomes of complaints that the council receives.

Bendigo City Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Greater Dandenong City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **41,697**

To provide context for the totals listed above, the council says:

'... Council does not have a centralized complaint system. The majority of complaints will be entered into Merit as a small part of the 41,697 Merits received for the year. But others will be directly entered into Council's document management system (Objective) depending on how the complaint was received.'



Policy

Greater Dandenong City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Greater Dandenong City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Greater Dandenong City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Greater Dandenong City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is on the council website, however it is not a standard clause in complaint outcome letters.



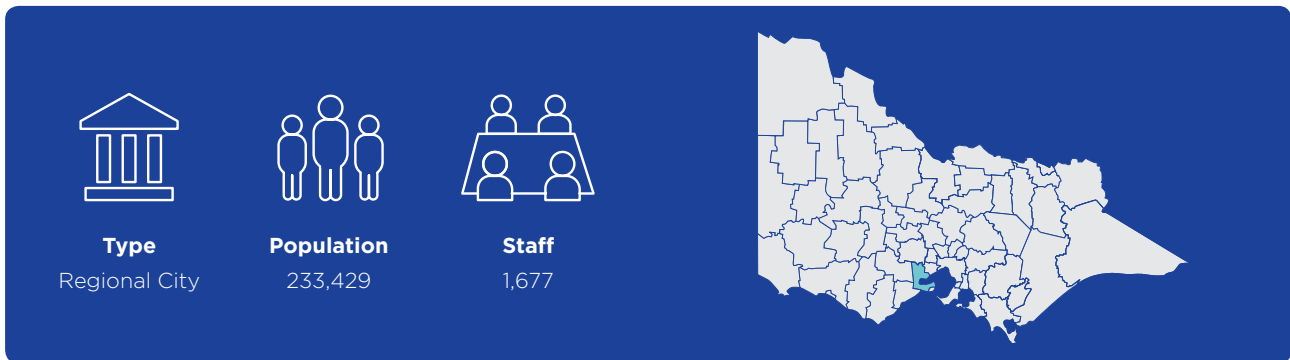
Learning from complaints data





Greater Dandenong City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on complaint outcomes the council receives.

Greater Dandenong City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says this is because it does not have a separate complaints register.

Greater Geelong City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



 Type Regional City	 Population 233,429	 Staff 1,677	
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Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **705**

Number of requests for service: **101,472**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Greater Geelong City Council explained:

'In addition to the figure presented there were 46 Ombudsman's complaints, 2 Protected Disclosures and 9,180 missed bin requests.'



Policy

Greater Geelong City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Greater Geelong City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints with 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Greater Geelong City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and

request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Greater Geelong City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Greater Geelong City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

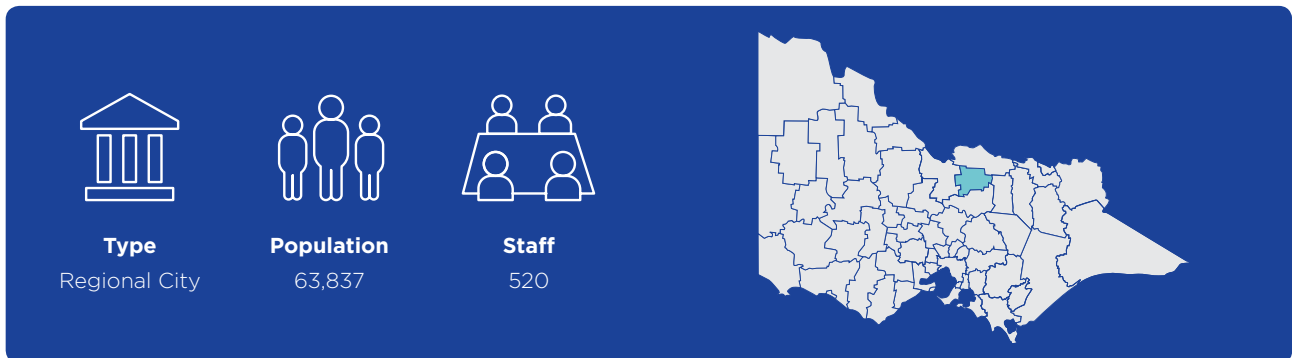
'[This] forms part of the Designated Complaint Officers' function.'

The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Greater Geelong City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says it is currently developing a relevant reporting template.

Greater Shepparton City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **212**

Number of requests for service: **15,426**

To provide context for the totals listed above, the Greater Shepparton City Council explained:

'... We are still establishing organisational behaviours to ensure that all customer complaints are captured through the official channels.'



Policy

Greater Shepparton City Council says it has a complaint handling policy, however it is not currently on the council website. At the time of the survey, the council said a draft had been prepared for Council consideration.



Timeframes

Greater Shepparton City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints with 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Greater Shepparton City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint

and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says its complainants are informed about the option of internal review, depending on the type of complaint.

Greater Shepparton City Council says it does not inform its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review.



Learning from complaints data

Greater Shepparton City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'Only where there appears to be a pattern developing and service requests are moving to complaints due to non-performance.'

The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Shepparton City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Not progressed enough to be able to provide certain figures, nor the ability to currently compare apples with apples in relation to data. We will in the future, once we are confident that we have secured all complaints to one source.'

Hepburn Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints

Type
Small Shire

Population
15,330

Staff
140



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **44**

Number of requests for service: **9,600**

'If a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and requests a review, the review will be conducted by a senior officer who was not involved in the original complaint. If a complainant is not satisfied with the resolution or outcome of Council's response to a complaint, they will be advised of any external avenues through which the complaint may be pursued, including that they may contact the Victorian Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with the process or outcome of a complaint, or review of a complaint.'



Policy

Hepburn Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is available on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Hepburn Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.



Timeframes

Hepburn Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

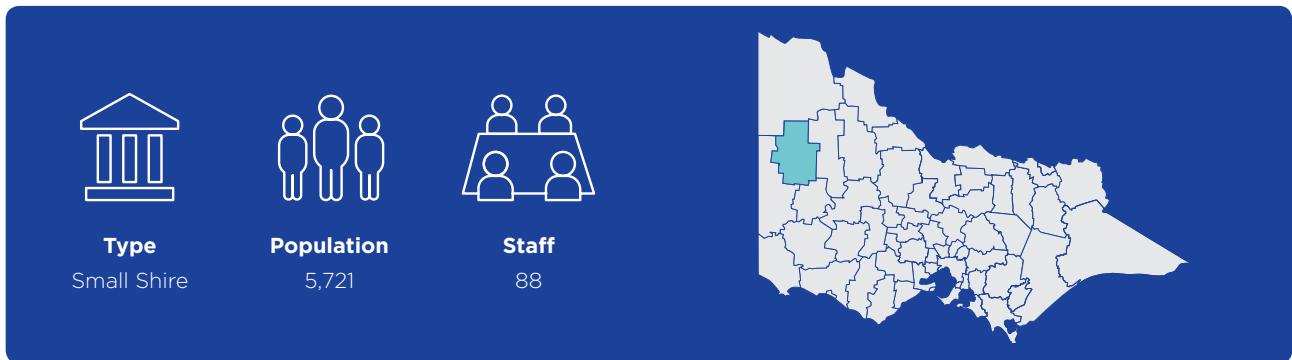
Hepburn Shire Council says, if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it does not inform its complainants about the option of internal review.

Hepburn Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review:

Hepburn Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Hindmarsh Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **30**

Number of requests for service: **400**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Hindmarsh Shire Council explained:

'Council does not keep a formal register of complaints, so the number given is an estimate.'



Policy

Hindmarsh Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Hindmarsh Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Hindmarsh Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by

a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants of the option of internal review.

Hindmarsh Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



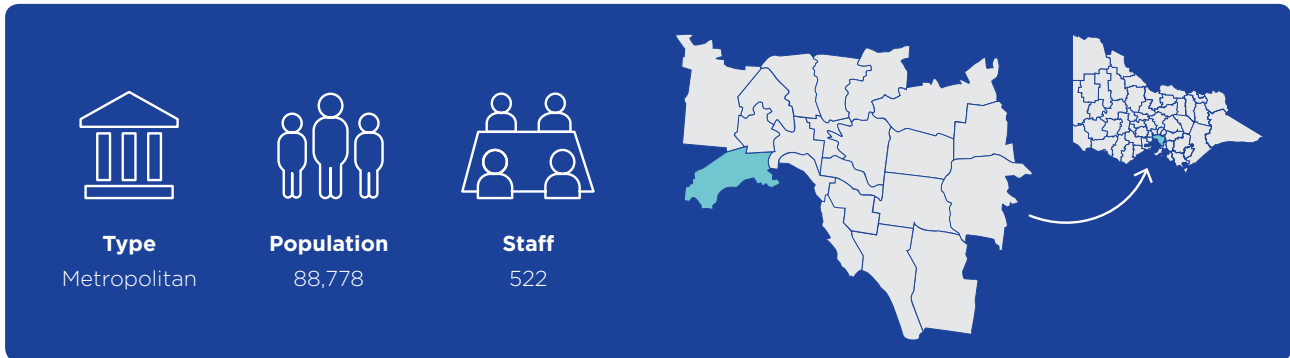
Learning from complaints data

Hindmarsh Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Hindmarsh Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public because it is confidential.

Hobsons Bay City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **36**

Number of requests for service: **41,853**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Hobsons Bay City Council explained that it commenced differentiating between 'complaints' and 'requests for service' on 7 August 2018.



Policy

Hobsons Bay City Council says it has a complaint handling policy. The council says the policy is not available on the council website because it has not yet been adopted by Council.



Timeframes

Hobsons Bay City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Hobsons Bay City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the internal review is

conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it does not inform its complainants about the option of internal review:

'All complaints are reviewed internally. Council states that a complainant may lodge an application for review with the ombudsman if not satisfied with the outcome.'

Hobsons Bay City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is on the council website. The council says it will review its current letter templates to include information about the Victorian Ombudsman.



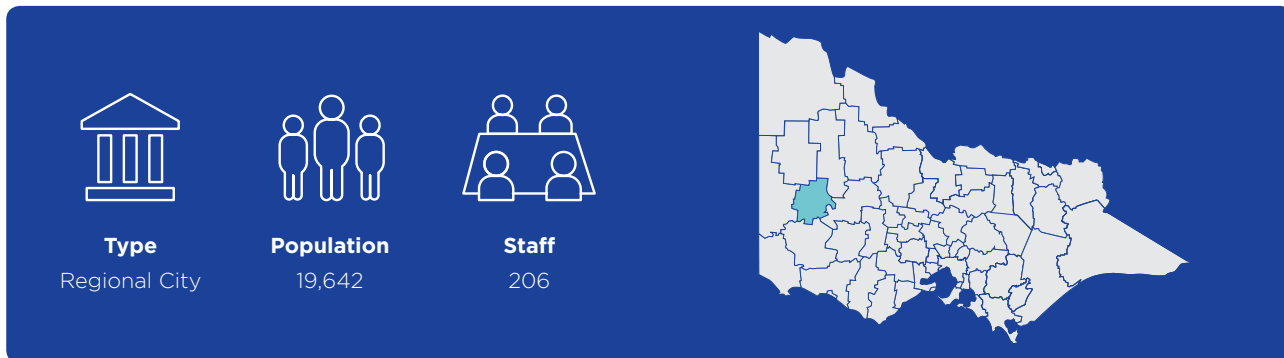
Learning from complaints data

Hobsons Bay City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council.

Hobsons Bay City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says it only began differentiating between 'complaints' and 'requests for service' in August 2018.

Horsham Rural City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **12**

Number of requests for service: **6,429**

Horsham Rural City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. This information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Horsham Rural City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Horsham Rural City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director, the CEO of council or Councillors depending on the circumstances.

Horsham Rural City Council says it does not make its complaints data public.



Timeframes

Horsham Rural City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



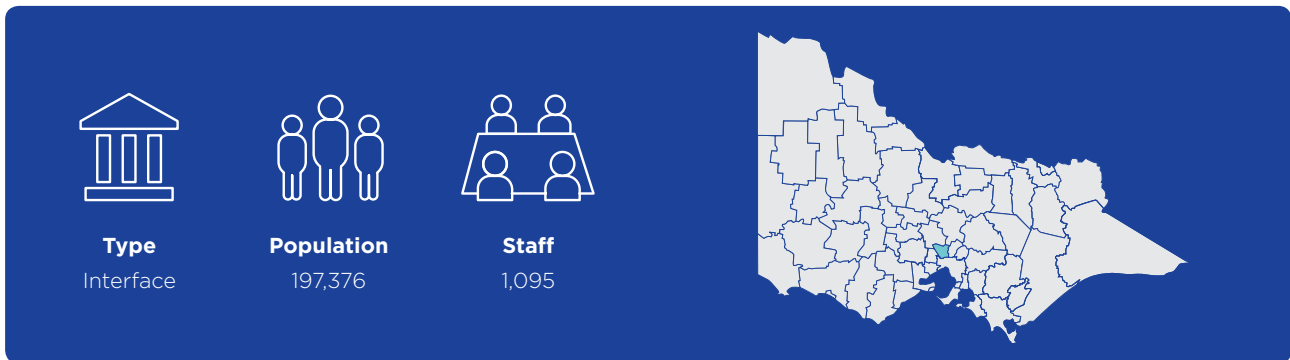
Independent review

Horsham Rural City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

'Our complaints and requests for service data is reported to the Executive Management Team but this hasn't been reported to the public.'

Hume City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **782**

Number of requests for service: **246,076**



Policy

Hume City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Hume City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Hume City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Hume City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is on

the council website. Information about the Victorian Ombudsman is not provided in complaint outcome letters:

'All correspondence advising customers of the outcome of their service request or complaint encourages customers to contact council in the event they are dissatisfied with the action/s taken. If customers are still unsatisfied, we advise them of a range of options they may choose to take - contacting the Victorian Ombudsman is one of many options offered, as well as contacting their local ward Councillor, MP or other relevant government authority (depending on the nature of their request/issue).'



Learning from complaints data

Hume City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

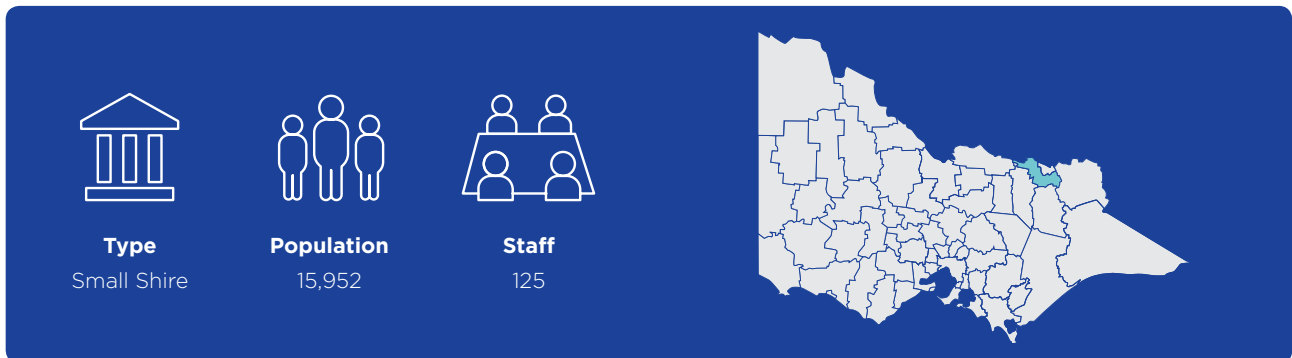
'[This is done] via the general continuous improvement processes in place and through the Service Planning process.'

The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Hume City Council says it makes its complaints data public on request.

Indigo Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **256**
Number of requests for service: **8,365**

of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is also on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Indigo Shire Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says this is done in monthly reports to the council's Executive Management Team. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.



Policy

Indigo Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Indigo Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Indigo Shire Council says it makes its complaints data public in published reports.



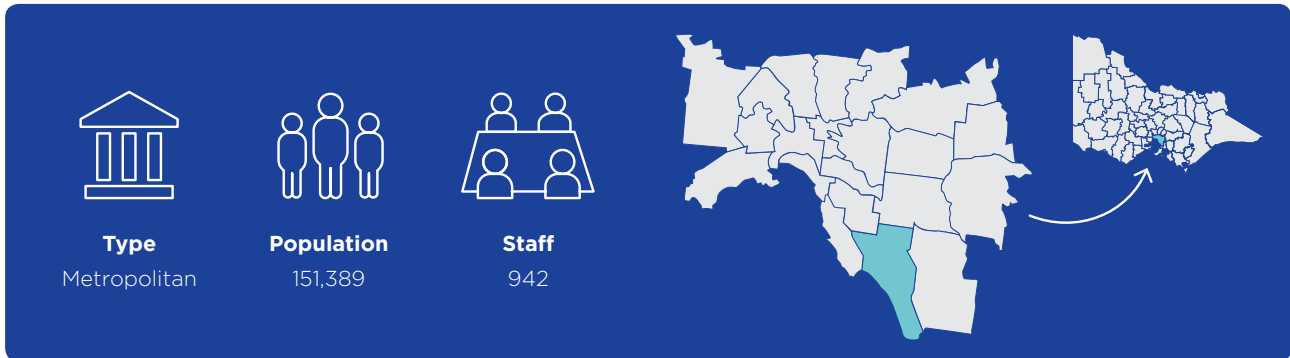
Independent review

Indigo Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Indigo Shire Council says it informs its complaints about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options

Kingston City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **150**
Number of requests for service: **56,000**

To provide context to the totals provided above, Kingston City Council explained that these figures are approximations based on the past financial year. The number of 'complaints' counts those complaints that came to the council via Councillors and through the Issues Resolution Office.



Policy

Kingston City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is available on the council website.



Timeframes

Kingston City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Kingston City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Kingston City Council says it provides information about the Victorian Ombudsman and other avenues of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman information is available on the council website however, it does not always include this information in complaint outcome letters:

'This information is not consistently provided across all business areas.'



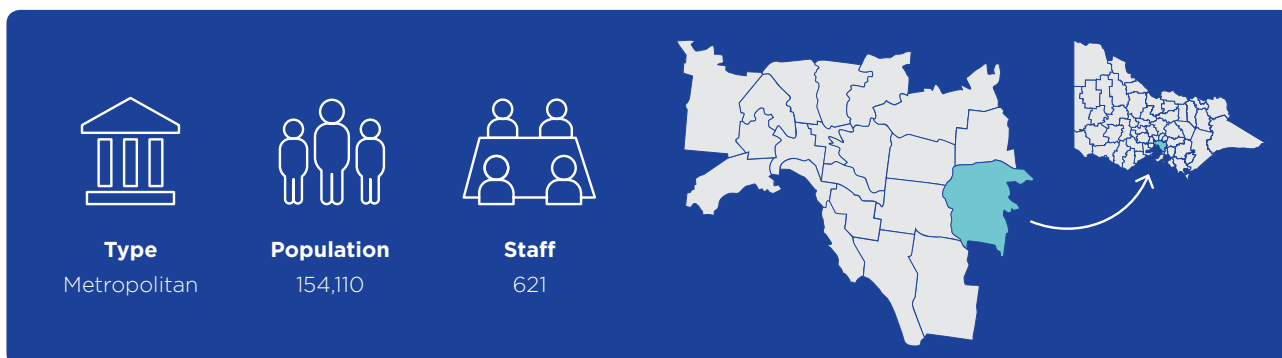
Learning from complaints data

Kingston City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Kingston City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says it is not yet in the position to collect complaints data.

Knox City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **1,217**
Number of requests for service: **153,562**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Knox City Council explains:

'We acknowledge there are likely to be deficiencies in the above data and that there are opportunities to continuously improve our process and data collection to ensure we have a complete view of complaints and service requests across all facets of our business.'



Policy

Knox City Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy; however, the council did provide this office with a complaint handling procedure.



Timeframes

Knox City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Knox City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it does not always inform complainants of the option for internal review:

'Council does not routinely inform complainants of an opportunity for internal review. Escalation options would be discussed on a case by case basis.'

Knox City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other avenues of external review. The council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is on the council website and is provided in complaint outcome letters on a case by case basis:

'Council does not always send "final outcome letters" but in the event that we do, this information would be included on a case by case basis depending on the nature of the outcome achieved.'



Learning from complaints data

Knox City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

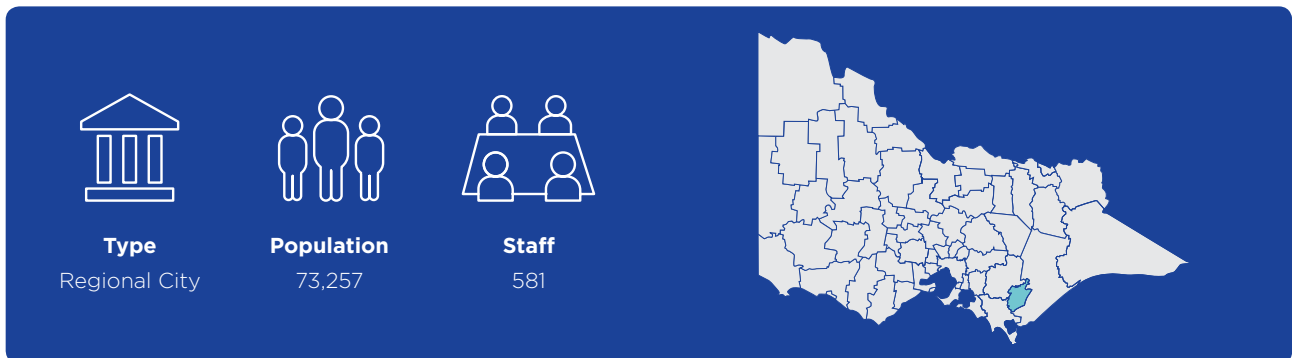
These reports are made to the relevant manager, director, the CEO of the council or Councillors

Knox City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'As previously acknowledged, there are likely to be deficiencies in Council's complaint data. If released publicly, the data will be used as a measure of Council's performance and consequently it is not appropriate for the data to be released unless Council is confident that the data is in fact, an accurate representation of Council's performance.'

Latrobe City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **162**
Number of requests for service: **Not provided**

To provide context for the totals listed above, the Latrobe City Council explained:

'The minimum number of complaints we received in 2018 was 162. This is the number of complaints recorded in one of our principal information management systems. However, not all complaints were required to be recorded in this system. Requests for service were not separately identified by any code or other identifier so could only be identified by manual review of each entry.'



Policy

Latrobe City Council says it has a complaint handling policy. The council says the policy is not currently on the council website:

'Council's Customer Complaint Handling Framework ("CCH Framework"), containing Council's complaint handling process, expressly provides for that document to be made available on Council's website. The endorsed and approved CCH Framework is at implementation stage and is currently in the process of being rolled-out throughout the organisation. Full implementation of all processes and provisions is currently set for completion on or by 26 April 2019.'



Timeframes

Latrobe City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints with 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Latrobe City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option for internal review.

Latrobe City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters. It is not on the council website:

'This information is set out in the decision letter to the customer once the matter has been determined and an outcome has been reached.'



Learning from complaints data

Latrobe City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

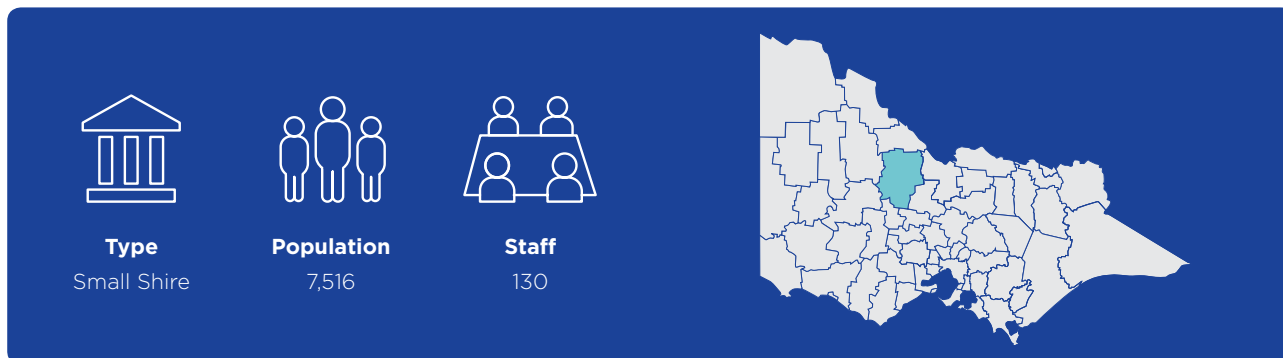
'Business units regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. Repetitive areas of complaint are prioritised and reviewed in line with our continuous improvement standards.'

Latrobe City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'This is currently under consideration as an addition to our Customer Complaints Handling Framework.'

Loddon Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **65**
Number of requests for service: **10,419**

of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Loddon Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.



Policy

Loddon Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Loddon Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Loddon Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Not currently. The implementation of a number of actions in our Customer Service Strategy will enable this.'



Independent review

Loddon Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Loddon Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options

Macedon Ranges Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints

Type
Large Shire

Population
46,100

Staff
310



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **142**

Number of requests for service: **22,165**

as an option of external review. The council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters. The council says this information is not on the council website because it has not been considered yet. The council says this is a possible future improvement.



Policy

Macedon Ranges Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Macedon Ranges Shire Council does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director, or the CEO of council and the complainant involved.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council says it makes its complaints data public in published reports.



Timeframes

Macedon Ranges Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



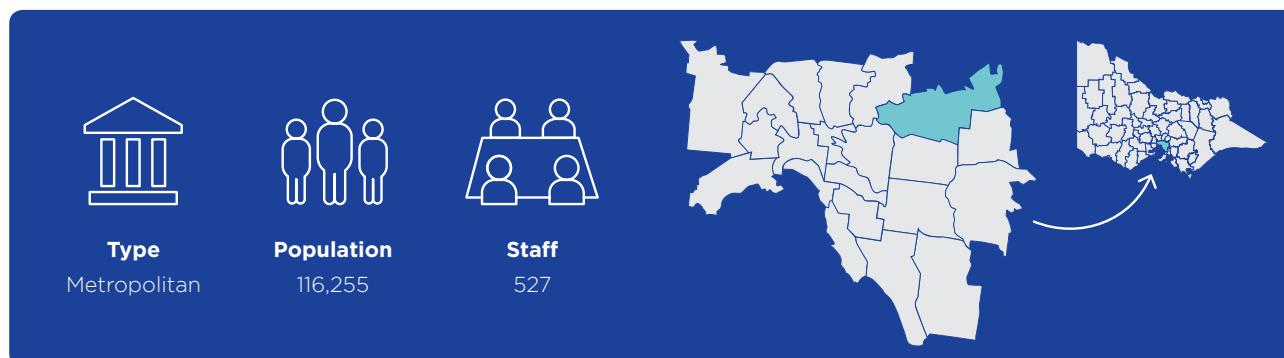
Independent review

Macedon Ranges Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman

Manningham City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **140**

Number of requests for service: **29,606**

and other options of external review. The council says this information is on the council website; however, it is not always provided in complaint outcome letters:

'While final outcome letters to complainants are supposed to contain this advice it is not consistently applied.'



Policy

Manningham City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Manningham City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council.

Manningham City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says this is due to the data's lack of accuracy:

'[This will] hopefully be rectified when the new CRM system upgrade is implemented.'



Timeframes

Manningham City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

The council did indicate that it may make this data public on request.



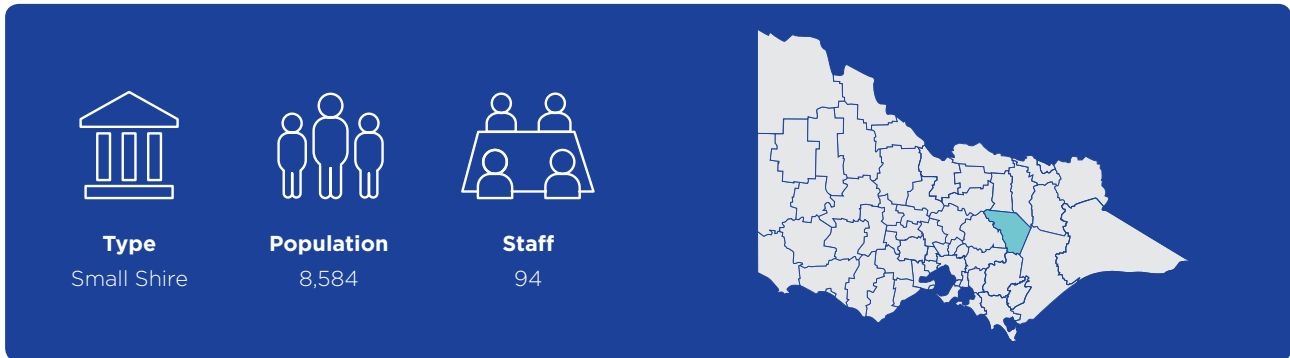
Independent review




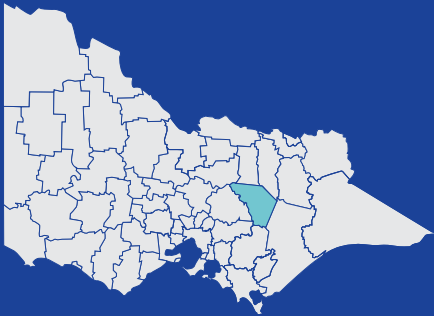
Manningham City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants of the option of internal review.

Manningham City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman

Mansfield Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



 Type Small Shire	 Population 8,584	 Staff 94	
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Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **113**

Number of requests for service: **1,538**

Mansfield Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Mansfield Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Mansfield Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the council's Senior Leadership Group (Team Leaders, Managers and the CEO).



Timeframes

Mansfield Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Mansfield Shire Council says it makes its complaints data public on request.

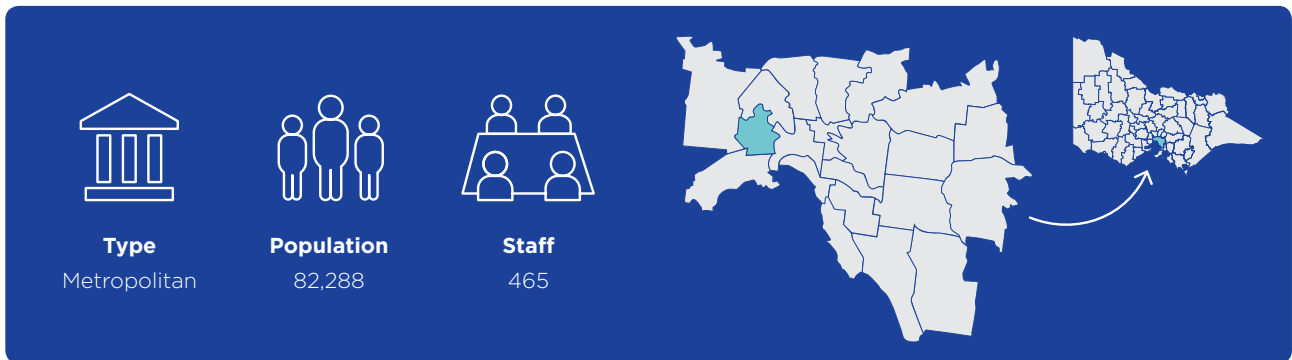


Independent review

Mansfield Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Mansfield Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Maribyrnong City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **532**
Number of requests for service: **43,603**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Maribyrnong City Council says these numbers are not always made up of individual complaints, as some complaints have more than one transaction.

request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Maribyrnong City Council says it informs its complainants of the option of internal review.

Maribyrnong City Council says it does provide information about the Victorian Ombudsman and other external review options to its complainants. The council says this information is not provided in complaint outcome letters or on the council website. The council says it seeks to resolve complaints internally.



Policy

Maribyrnong City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website. The council notes the complaint handling policy is currently under review.



Learning from complaints data

Maribyrnong City Council says it analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement on a monthly basis. The council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council, Councillors and the public.

Maribyrnong City Council says it makes its complaints data public on request.



Timeframes

Maribyrnong City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

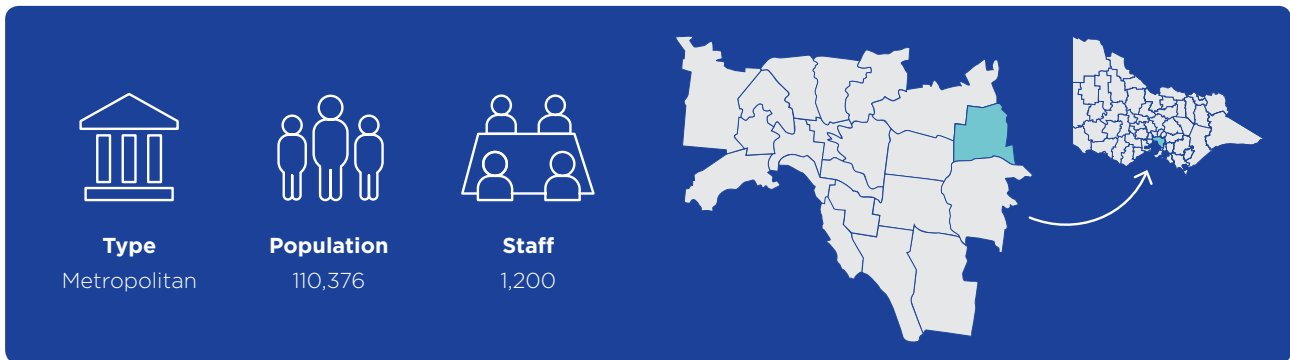


Independent review

Maribyrnong City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and

Maroondah City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **965**
Number of requests for service: **70,000**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Maroondah City Council explained:

'Currently we are centralising the collection of Complaints and also doing further work to define a complaint and a service request.'



Policy

Maroondah City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Maroondah City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Maroondah City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Maroondah City Council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Maroondah City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Maroondah City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

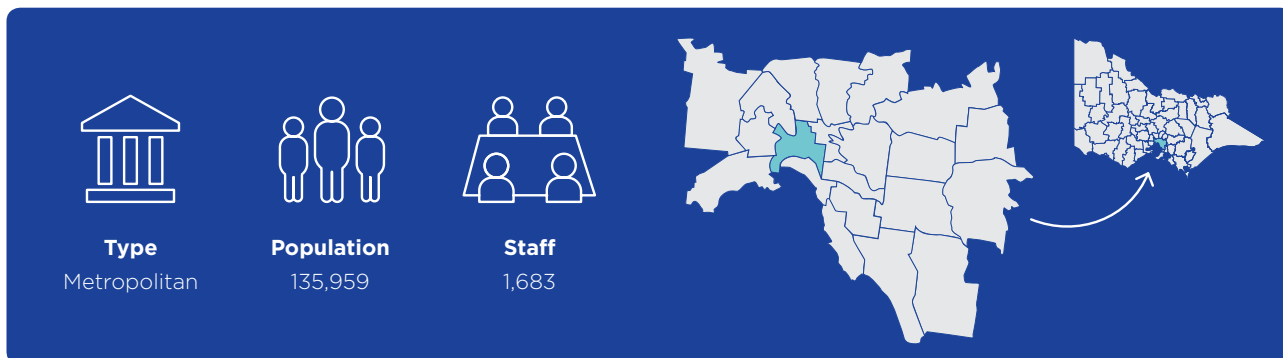
'Ongoing service improvements are made as a result of assessing complaints.'

The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Maroondah City Council says it does not make its complaints data public; however, this is currently under consideration.

Melbourne City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **88**

Number of requests for service: **295,204**



Policy

Melbourne City Council says it has a complaint handling policy; however, it says the policy is not on the council website:

'A condensed version of our policy is available on-line. The internal policy provides process guidance to staff and is quite detailed so is not published externally.'



Timeframes

Melbourne City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Melbourne City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter.

The council says it does not always inform its complainants about the option of internal review:

'The Customer Relations Manager (as complaints coordinator) will provide an independent review of complaints regarding services and other work areas. If a customer replies that they are dissatisfied with the outcome and further investigation is needed and presents new information or for some reason considers that we have misinterpreted the nature of the complaint, further enquiries will be made, and a response provided ...'

Melbourne City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. It says that information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is not on the council website:

'[Information about the Victorian Ombudsman] is provided once we have responded to the complaint. We aim to resolve the complaint to the extent that we can. We consider the Ombudsman the external review option.'



Learning from complaints data

Melbourne City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

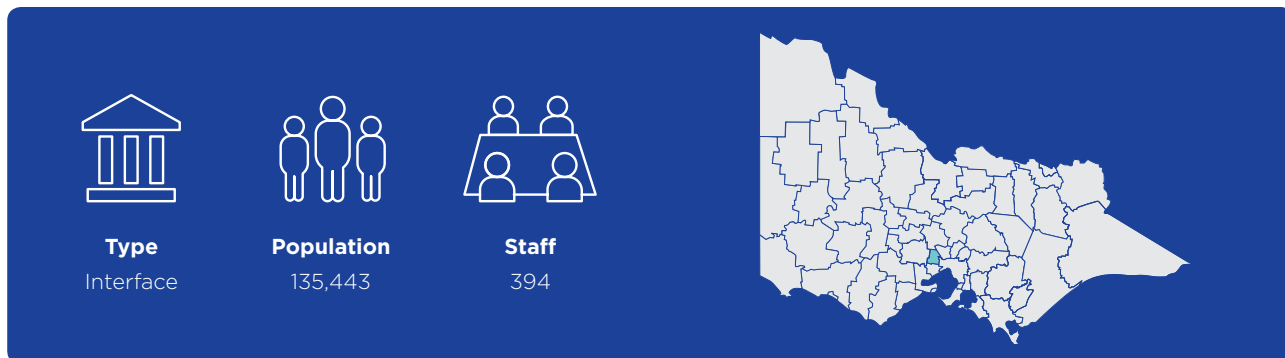
'The Complaint Co-Ordinator monitors complaint trends on an ongoing basis.'

The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or CEO of the council, the Councillors and, depending on who was involved, other officers involved in the investigation.

Melbourne City Council says it makes its complaints data public on request and provides data to media outlets when requested.

Melton City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **Not provided**

Melton City Council said it was:

'Unable to extract data due to the varying complexity of different categories and subject matters.'



Policy

Melton City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Melton City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days. The council says there is no set timeframe for resolving complaints:

'No time frame specified. Length of time will depend on the circumstances. If a complaint cannot be resolved within the time previously specified, the complainant will be informed of the expected date of resolution.'



Independent review

Melton City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Melton City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman as an option of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Melton City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'General trends analysed to identify areas of most interest to Council as is data from annual household survey. Departments also analyse information specific to their service.'

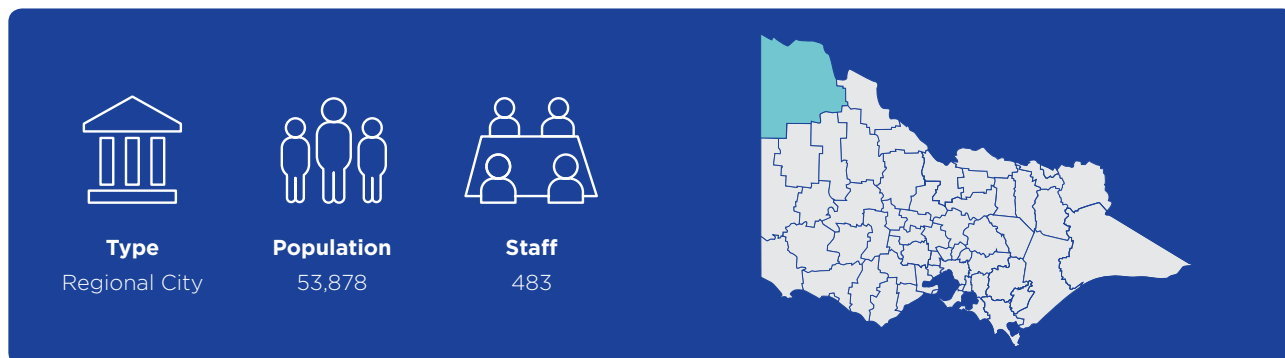
The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. Instead the complaint will be escalated within the council depending on the severity of the complaint.

Melton City Council says it does not make its complaint data public:

'Council does not make its complaints data public however we are aiming to make this information public for the 2019/20 Annual Report.'

Mildura Rural City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **94**
Number of requests for service: **23,923**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Mildura Rural City Council explained:

'[The number of requests for service] relates to the total number of CRMs recorded in 2018. A new Customer Complaints Policy and process was developed and adopted by Council in July 2018 and came into effect in August 2018. This changed the definition of a complaint and introduced a tiered approach to the way in which they were processed.'

'Whilst Council does distinguish between complaints and requests for service, 'Level 1' complaints are not recorded on the Complaints Register maintained by the Complaints Team. They are recorded in Council's Customer Relationship Management system. This method of recording makes it difficult to accurately report the total number of complaints received by Council.'

'Level 1 complaints are resolved by the receiving officer who is able to provide a 'frontline resolution' and this includes complaints involving missed bins etc.'



Policy

Mildura Rural City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Mildura Rural Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints with 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Mildura Rural City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Mildura Rural City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. This information is provided in complaint outcome letters. It is not on the council website:

'This information is not displayed on a Council webpage, however it is included in the fact sheet available "Complaint Resolution Process - Fact Sheet".'



Learning from complaints data

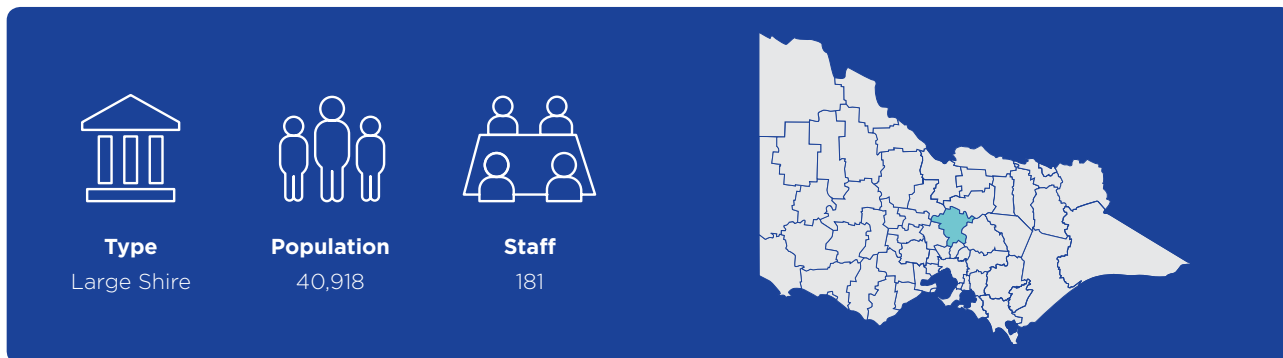
Mildura Rural City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says this takes place each quarter. The council says staff also report on the

outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council.

Mildura Rural City Council says it makes its complaints data public in published reports and in an annual report to council on statistics.

Mitchell Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **340**
Number of requests for service: **7,684**

Mitchell Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. Information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Mitchell Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Mitchell Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council, Councillors and the public.



Timeframes

Mitchell Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Mitchell Shire Council says it does not generally make its complaints data public. The council says its complaints data can be provided to relevant review bodies.

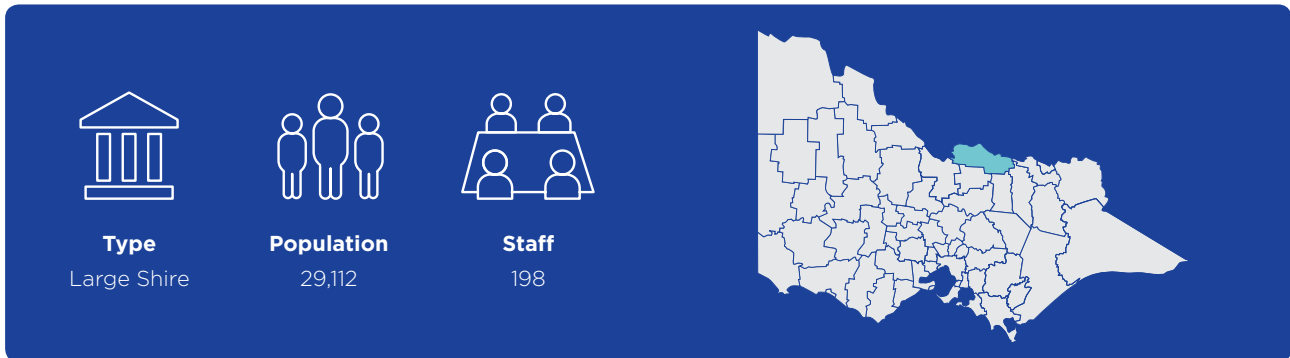


Independent review

Mitchell Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says complainants are informed about the option of internal review.

Moira Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Type
Large Shire

Population
29,112

Staff
198



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **4**
Number of requests for service: **50,000**

To provide context for the totals listed above Moira Shire Council explained:

'Our policy places great emphasis [on] informal complaints resolution which is empowering staff to resolve a concern on the spot and/or with reference to their supervisor. Once reasonable efforts and/or escalation are exhausted the complaint can be referred to a formal complaints handling process.'



Policy

Moira Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Moira Shire Council aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Moira Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it does not always inform its complainants about the option of internal review:

'... given we are a very small council we generally advise they progress straight to external review because often we don't have enough staff that are not connected to the issue to undertake a further review.'

Moira Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

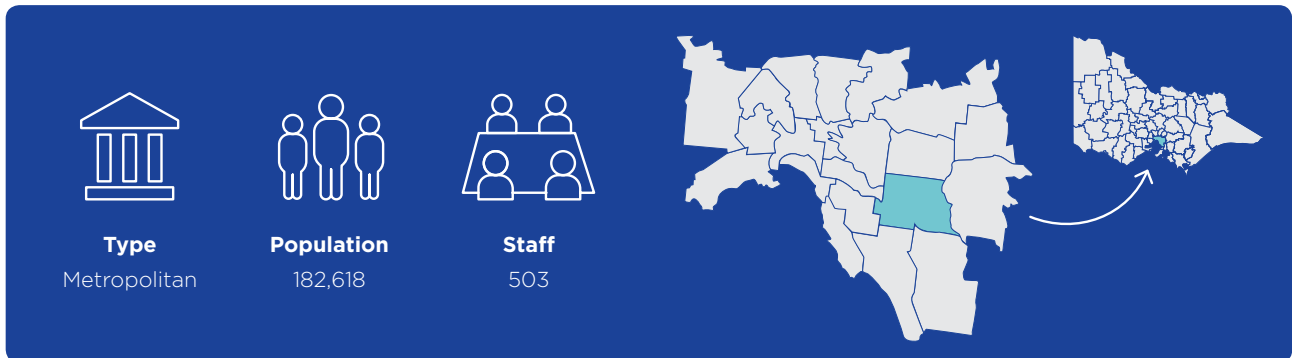
Moira Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Moira Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'We are continuing to develop our reporting capability and with relatively low number of formal complaints and small communities we need to be careful about inadvertently identifying complainants.'

Monash City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **285**
Number of requests for service: **122,396**

Monash City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. Information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Monash City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Monash City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director, or the CEO of the council.



Timeframes

Monash City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Monash City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says this is because its complaints data has not been de-identified.

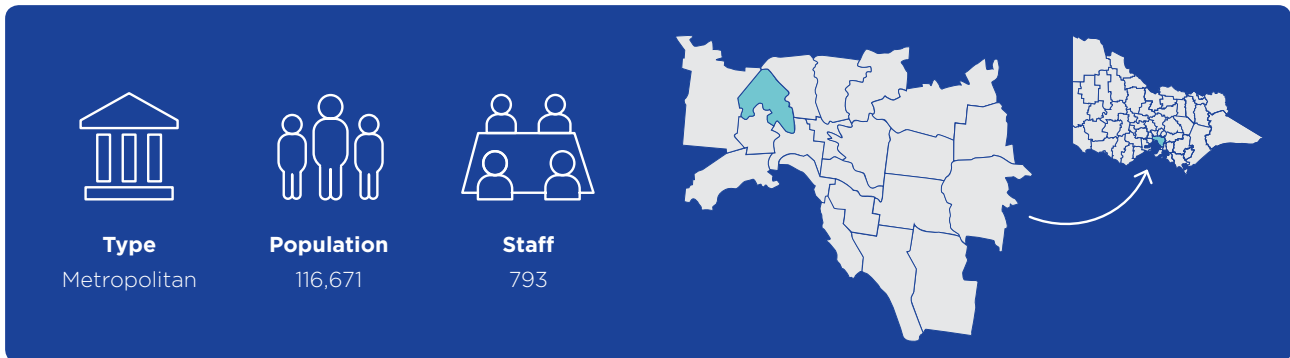


Independent review

Monash City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Moonee Valley City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **38,308**

To provide context to the totals provided above, Moonee Valley City Council says the total number of 'requests for service' was taken from its CRM system. The council says it is unsure how many complaints it received in 2018:

'Council's previous Complaints Handling Policy has not distinguished between complaints and requests for service, so we were unable to capture this information. This will be resolved with the new Complaint Handling Policy which will distinguish between the two.'



Policy

Moonee Valley City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is currently under review. The council says parts of the policy ('complaint resolution' and 'service standards') are on the council website.



Timeframes

Moonee Valley City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 5 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt:

'The customer is informed of the processes and a timeframe required to respond to their complaint. If a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved within 5 working days the customer is advised in writing that the matter is still under investigation and depending on the complexity of the issue, will be resolved within 14 to 28 days.'



Independent review

Moonee Valley City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review and that both of these steps are part of its new complaint handling policy.

Moonee Valley City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. It says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Moonee Valley City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says: 'this process is up to each business unit to analyse and improve as needed.'

The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council, the Councillors and the public:

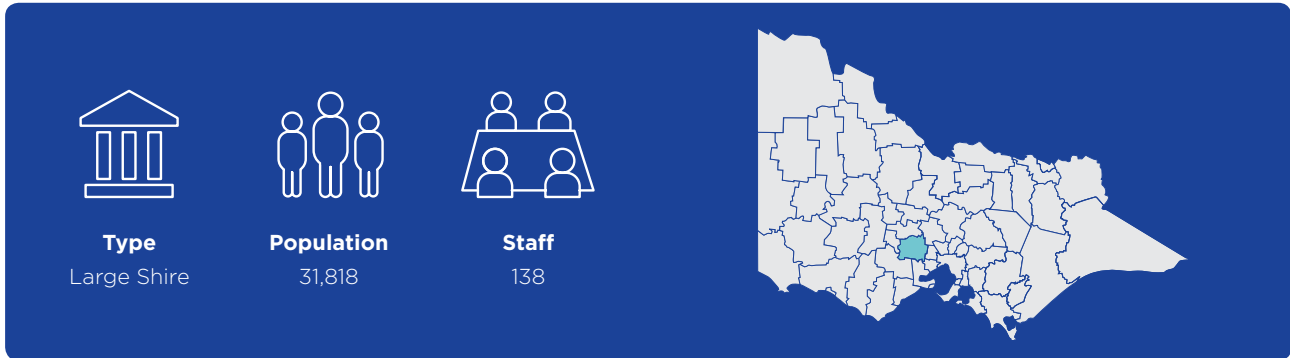
'The current process varies however, in the future, the responses will be stored in the new Customer Relationship Management system'.

Moonee Valley City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'We do provide what we can but are unable to report accurately on this. We are aiming for better recording and reporting with our new system.'

Moorabool Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Type
Large Shire

Population
31,818

Staff
138



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **18**
Number of requests for service: **68,300**

To provide context for the totals listed above Moorabool Shire Council explained:

'Council does not have a Complaints Register, however, following an internal Audit that is currently being conducted, this will be rectified and provided for in Council's draft Complaints Policy and Procedure which is currently being reviewed.'



Policy

Moorabool Shire Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy.



Timeframes

Moorabool Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Moorabool Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the internal review is not always conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter:

'The matter is escalated through line management through to the CEO pending the level of the officer handling the complaint in the first instance.'

The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Moorabool Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters or verbally. It is not on the council website.

'This option is taken either verbally or in writing.'



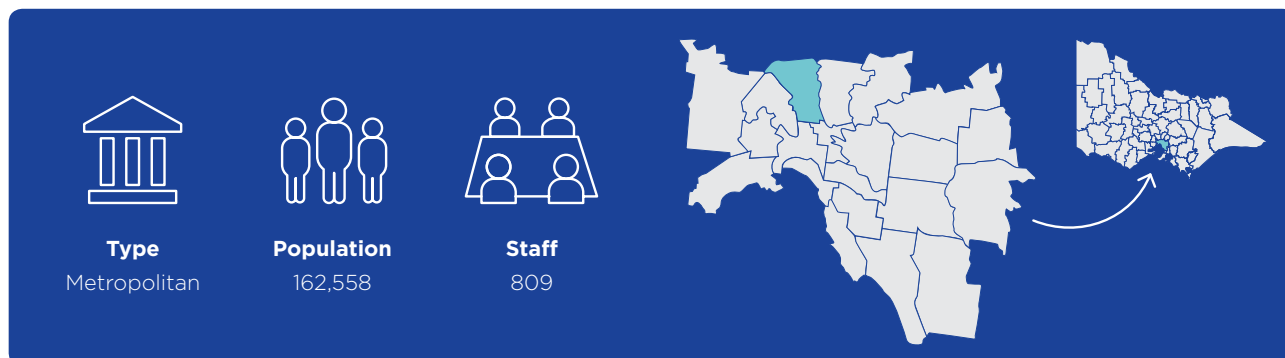
Learning from complaints data

Moorabool Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Moorabool Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says this is not considered due to privacy concerns.

Moreland City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **1,160**
Number of requests for service: **85,068**

To provide context to the totals provided above, Moreland City Council explained:

'Data provided is currently classified into three groups:

- *Complaints*
- *Call backs*
- *Service Requests.*

Council is currently in the process of reclassifying requests within our systems database in alignment with our new Complaints Resolution Procedure. Under this new policy, Council takes a four-tiered approach to complaint handling, including:

- *Frontline resolution*
- *Investigation*
- *Access to internal review*
- *Access to external review.*

Following implementation, 'requests for service' and 'call backs' will be reclassified, providing the organisation with a clear position as to its Complaints data.'



Policy

Moreland City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website. The council notes that the policy on the website is under review:

'... The revised complaints resolution Policy and Procedure, currently under consultation, is aligned with our 'Future Ready Moreland' implementation plan and the 'Customer Service Strategy'. Moreland City Council is committed to providing a consistent and transparent process for customers making a complaint. The Complaints Resolution Policy will be publicly available making the process accessible to all members of the public.'



Timeframes

Moreland City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Moreland City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Moreland City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Moreland City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'[This is] part of our complaints resolution Policy and Procedures.'

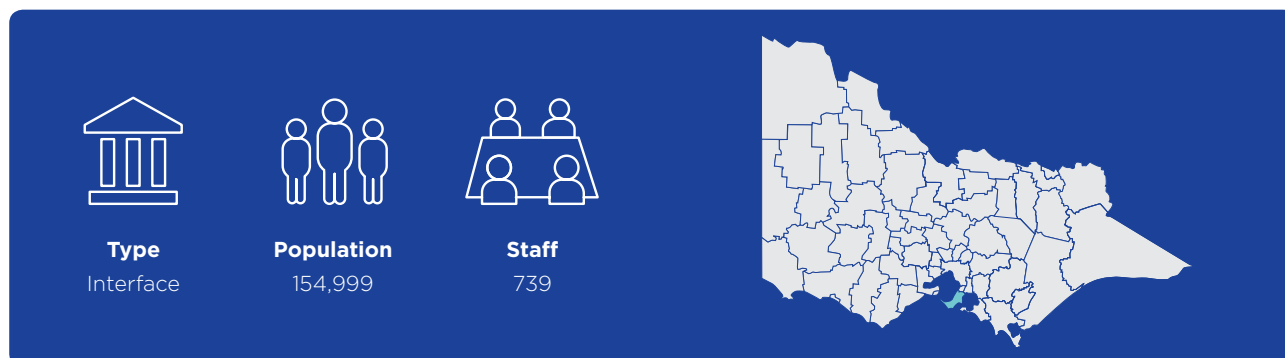
The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council.

Moreland City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Council is in the process of implementing the Complaints and Resolution Policy and Procedural Guidelines. A project to independently evaluate customer service performance has progressed and this includes reporting of complaint data and outcomes for key service areas.'

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **83,856**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council explained:

'The Shire intends to implement consistent recording of complaints data with the adoption of its revised Complaints Handling Policy.'



Policy

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 12 business days:

'... the Shire's revised Complaints Handling Policy once adopted will reduce the timeframe to 10 working days.'

The council says it aims to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

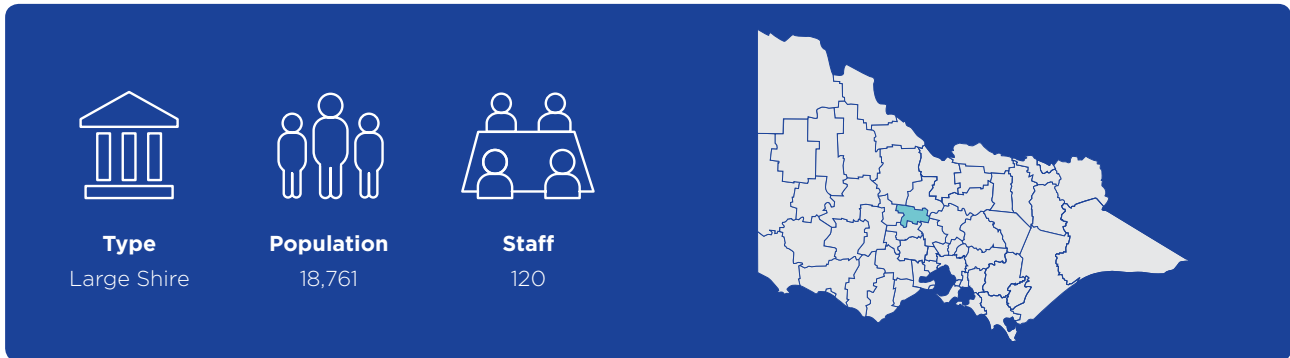
Mornington Peninsula Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Currently the Shire does not have consistent recording of complaints data. The Shire intends to implement consistent recording of complaints data with the adoption of its revised Complaints Handling Policy.'

Mount Alexander Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **132**
Number of requests for service: **9,736**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Mount Alexander Shire Council explained:

'Requests for service are clearly understood and recorded.'



Policy

Mount Alexander Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Mount Alexander Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Mount Alexander Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Mount Alexander Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters. The council says this is on the council website.



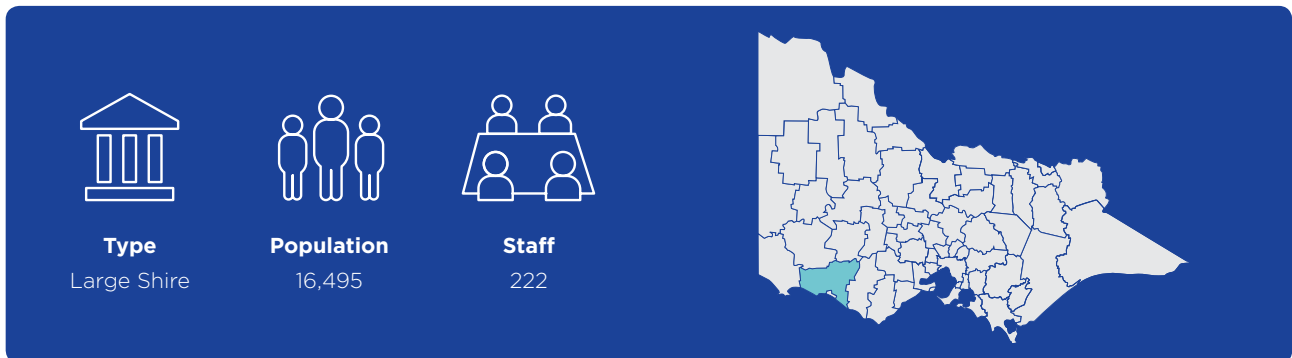
Learning from complaints data

Mount Alexander Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council and the Governance Unit.

Mount Alexander Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Moyne Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **39**
Number of requests for service: **4,685**

To provide context for the totals listed above Moyne Shire Council explained:

'The recorded complaints are from our central [Electronic Document and Records Management System.] It does not include complaints received from various other services we provide e.g. waste collection, Early Years, Aged Care, Food & Health. These are recorded in other systems and are provided to various State departments some as a requirement of Local Government Performance Reporting Framework.'



Policy

Moyne Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Moyne Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Moyne Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Moyne Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Moyne Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council. The council says a briefing may be made to Councillors depending on the nature of the complaint.

Moyne Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Being a rural community the complaint if made public would easily identify where it came from and from whom.'

Murrindindi Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints

Type
Small Shire

Population
13,732

Staff
145

A map of Victoria with Murrindindi Shire highlighted in light blue.



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **Not provided**

To provide context for the information above, Murrindindi Shire Council explained:

'... Council is midway through a Customer First project which is completely redesigning the way we undertake customer service and how we record and track requests. We will have the available data in the future however it was not accurately available in 2018.'



Policy

Murrindindi Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Murrindindi Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Murrindindi Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Murrindindi Shire Council says it does not always inform its complainants about the option of internal review:

'Sometimes we do offer internal review or a contact internally to speak to and sometimes its external bodies.'

Murrindindi Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is generally provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

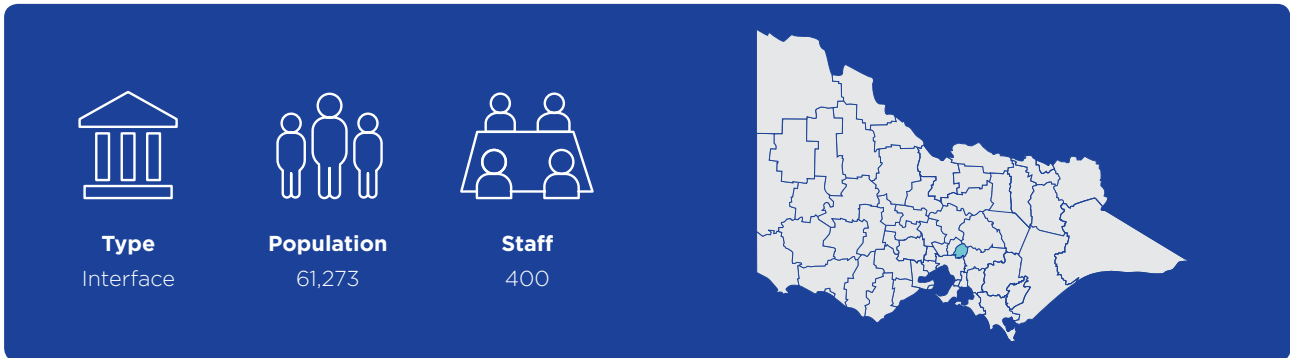
Murrindindi Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Murrindindi Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'We have not been in a position where we have accurate data. We are transitioning to a new system now that could facilitate this.'

Nillumbik Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **19,958**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Nillumbik Shire Council explained:

'We cannot answer [the above] as we have no defined policy or procedure. We are currently in draft phase in documenting and defining both policy and process/procedure for complaints. We intend to have this complete and implemented with training in pilot groups in Q4 of FY18/19.'



Policy

Nillumbik Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website:

'It is on [the website] but it needs a significant upgrade, hence the work being done on policy and procedure currently.'



Timeframes

Nillumbik Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Nillumbik Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Nillumbik Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

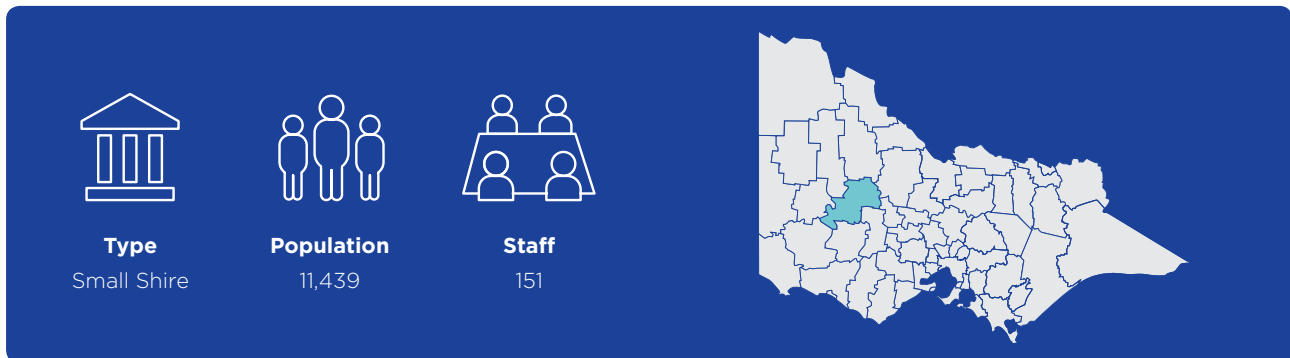
At the time of answering this survey, Nillumbik Shire Council said it did not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. However, the council said that in July 2019 it would be starting a pilot program which would include regular analysis of complaints. As part of this program, council staff would also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Nillumbik Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Because to this point, we have not had the systems, processes and training to capture them. That will soon change with the work we are doing.'

Northern Grampians Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **260**
Number of requests for service: **9,000**

'Requests for service and complaints are received by mail, over the counter or telephone and are entered into either the EDRMS or CRM. Requests through the CRM can be entered as complaints v requests. cannot run reports of request types from EDRMS system - inwards correspondence approx 7000 for 2018 but cannot tell how many of them would be termed a complaint.'



Independent review

Northern Grampians Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Northern Grampians Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is also on the council website.



Policy

Northern Grampians Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Northern Grampians Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Northern Grampians Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Data is not accurate enough for reporting purposes.'

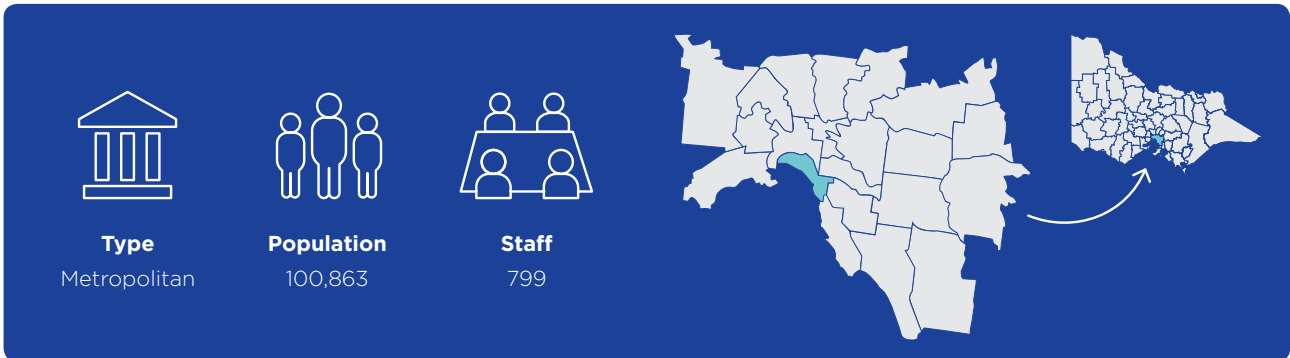


Timeframes

Northern Grampians Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Port Phillip City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **472**

Number of requests for service: **59,384**

To provide context to the totals provided above, Port Phillip City Council explained:

'Missed bin requests have not been included in the number of complaints received. The total of missed bin requests for 2018 was 892.'



Policy

Port Phillip City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Port Phillip City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Port Phillip City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by

a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Port Phillip City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Port Phillip City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'Yes, we regularly analyse complaints in terms of meeting targeted response times.'

The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council, and the Executive Leadership Team.

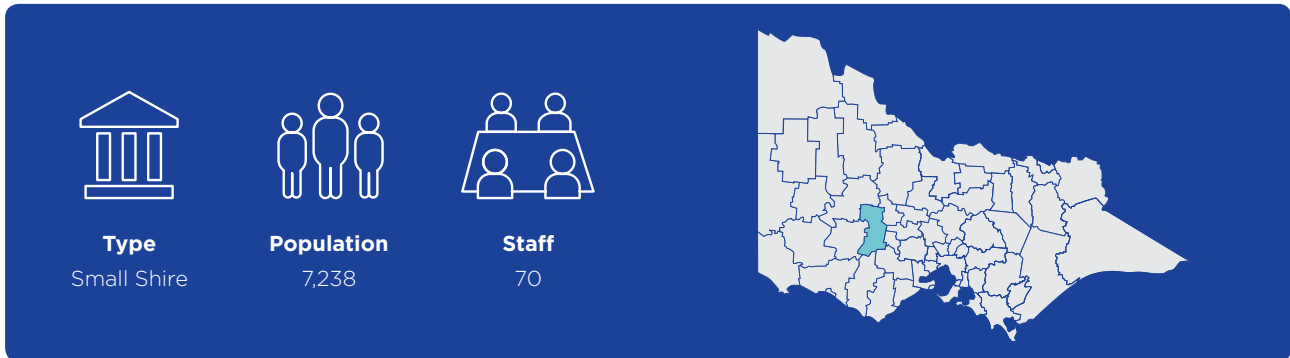
Port Phillip City Council says it makes some of its complaints data public:

'In our annual report we provide the following data:

- *Parking complaints (Officer) - volume*
- *Graffiti complaints - a percentage*
- *Health food complaints - time taken to action*
- *Food premises complaints - volume*
- *Breach of Domestic Animal Act - time taken to action*
- *Unightly property complaints - volume.'*

Pyrenees Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Type
Small Shire

Population
7,238

Staff
70



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **17**

Number of requests for service: **1,024**

Pyrenees Shire Council says it informs complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Pyrenees Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Pyrenees Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.



Timeframes

Pyrenees Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Pyrenees Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Not currently part of suite of information provided to the public, either by annual report or local government performance reporting. Significant complaints may be reported to Council and/or Audit Committee but informally.'

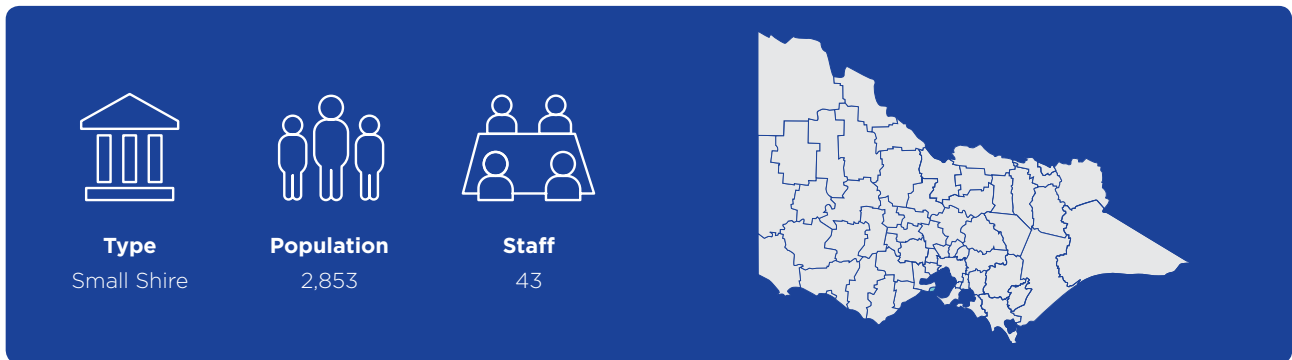


Independent review

Pyrenees Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Borough of Queenscliffe

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Type
Small Shire

Population
2,853

Staff
43



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **29**

Number of requests for service: **1,692**

The Borough of Queenscliffe says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The Borough says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Policy

The Borough of Queenscliffe says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

The Borough of Queenscliffe says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The Borough says this takes the form of quarterly reports to the Executive Management Team. The Borough says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council and Councillors.

The Borough of Queenscliffe says it makes its complaints data public in published reports.



Timeframes

The Borough of Queenscliffe says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

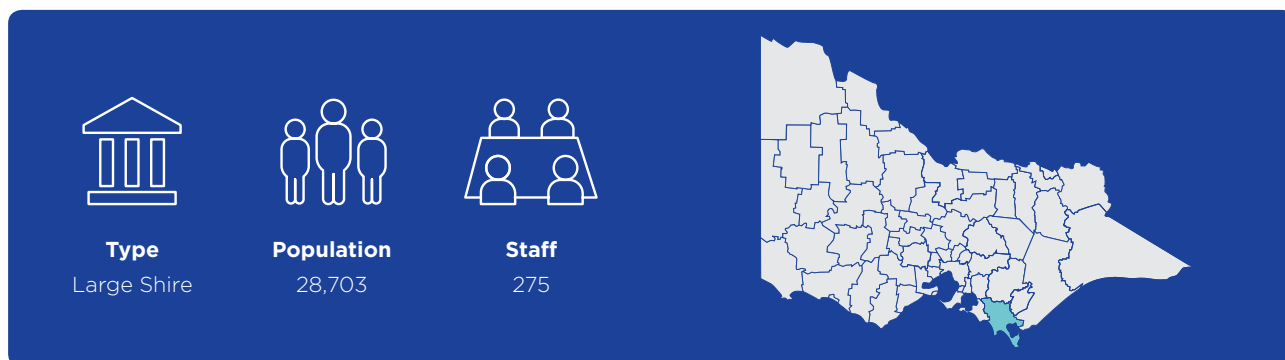


Independent review

The Borough of Queenscliffe says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The Borough says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

South Gippsland Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **148**

Number of requests for service: **17,513**

South Gippsland Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

South Gippsland Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

South Gippsland Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.



Timeframes

South Gippsland Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

South Gippsland Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'We make request numbers public, but not complaints. Have never had a request or requirement to make complaints data public.'

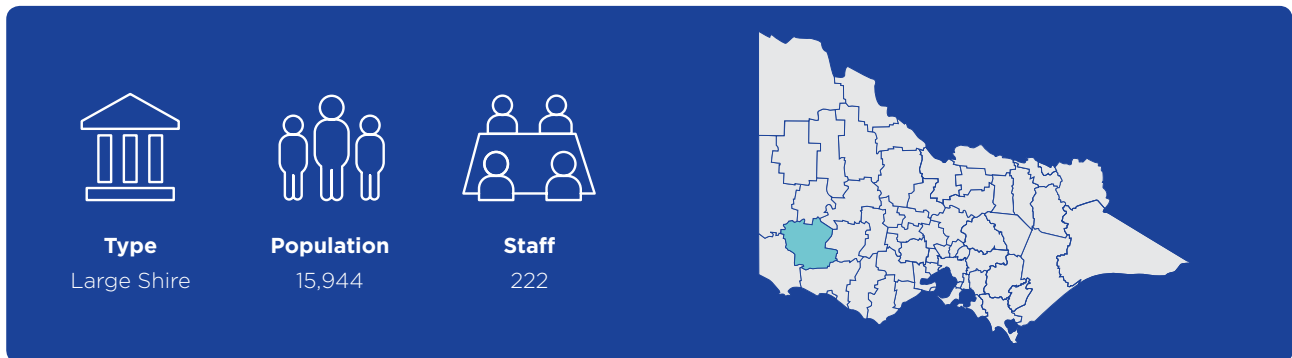


Independent review

South Gippsland Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Southern Grampians Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **7,301**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Southern Grampians Shire Council explained:

'...the reporting system is being updated to differentiate between complaint and request for service. The differentiation will be outlined in Council's policy, guided by the Ombudsman's 'Councils and complaints - A good practice guide' and is currently in the process of being developed.'



Policy

Southern Grampians Shire Council says it does not currently have a complaint handling policy:

'The policy is currently being developed, guided by the Ombudsman's 'Councils and complaints - A good practice guide.'



Timeframes

Southern Grampians Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days

and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt. The council notes that this would depend on the nature of the complaint.



Independent review

Southern Grampians Shire Council says it lacks a relevant policy for the internal review process. The council says the relevant policy is being developed and will include the option of internal review.

Southern Grampians Shire Council says it also lacks a policy to ensure complainants are informed that they can contact the Victorian Ombudsman or other avenues of external review. The council says this will also be covered in the new policy.



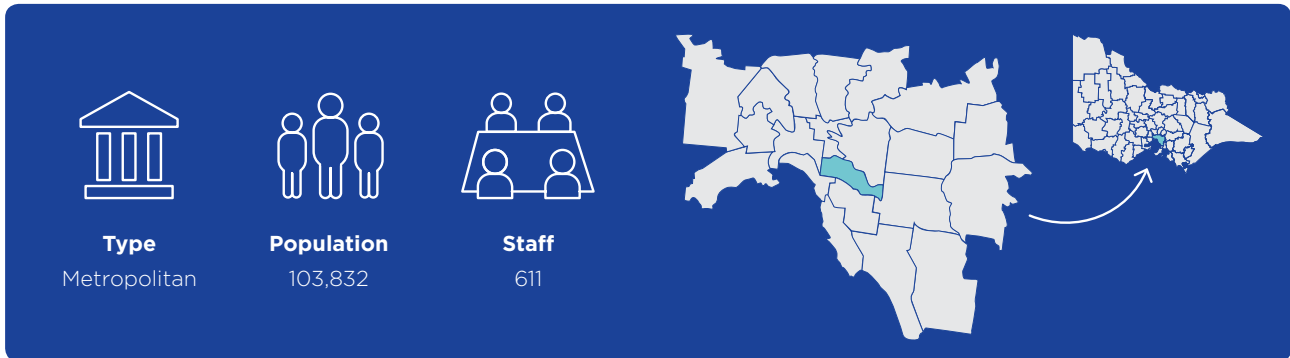
Learning from complaints data

Southern Grampians Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Southern Grampians Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Stonnington City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **199**

Number of requests for service: **112,819**

To provide context to the totals provided above, Stonnington City Council says it also received 84,143 requests for information.



Policy

Stonnington City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Stonnington City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Stonnington City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it currently does not always inform its complainants about the option of internal review:

'Council recently adopted its Complaints Handling Policy and is in the process of standardising outcome letter/email templates for consistency.'

Stonnington City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is on the council website. This information is currently not provided in complaint outcome letters. As above, the council says it is in the process of standardising outcome letters.



Learning from complaints data

Stonnington City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'[A] new data capture system and reporting functionality will be operational in August 2019.'

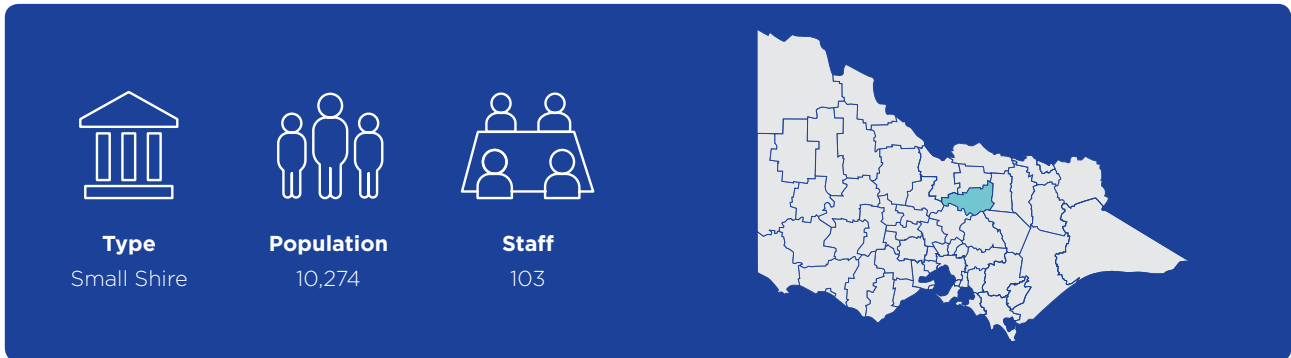
The council says staff report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council.

Stonnington City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'... Aspiration for 2019/20 financial year reporting period when centralised data capture system is fully operational.'

Strathbogie Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **5**
Number of requests for service: **4,236**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Strathbogie Shire Council explained:

'Complaints are not identified clearly enough in our systems to easily report on. A very manual process to pull them out for reporting is required. Five may not be a full representation of what was received.'



Policy

Strathbogie Shire Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy.



Timeframes

Strathbogie Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Strathbogie Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Strathbogie Shire Council says it informs complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about making a complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters. The council says this information is not directly available on the council website; however, it is contained within the council's Customer Service Charter which is on the council website.



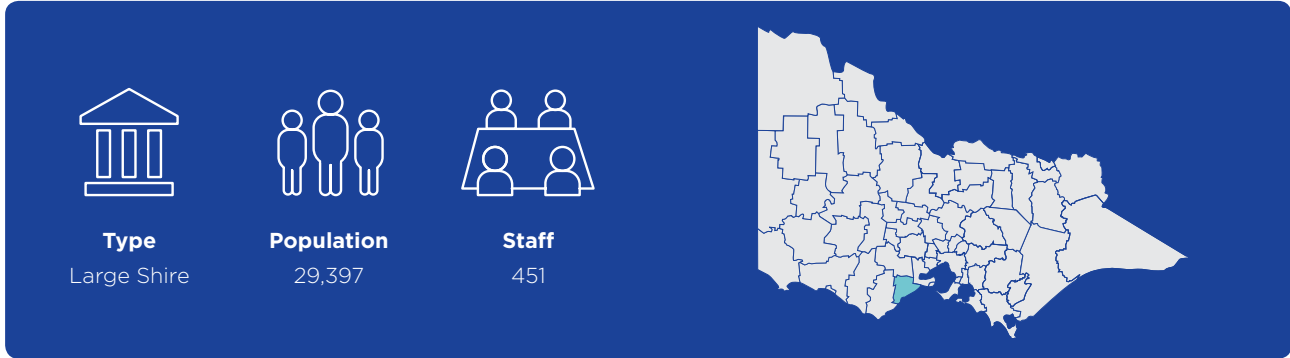
Learning from complaints data

Strathbogie Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints received by the council. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or CEO of the council and Councillors.

Strathbogie Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Surf Coast Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Type
Large Shire

Population
29,397

Staff
451

Map of Surf Coast Shire Council area.



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **74**

Number of requests for service: **13,739**

Surf Coast Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Surf Coast Shire Councils says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Surf Coast Shire Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'[W]e have a column in the complaints register asking the investigating manager to identify areas for improvement.'

Surf Coast Shire Council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council, Councillors and the public.



Timeframes

Surf Coast Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Surf Coast Shire Council says it makes its complaints data public in published reports.

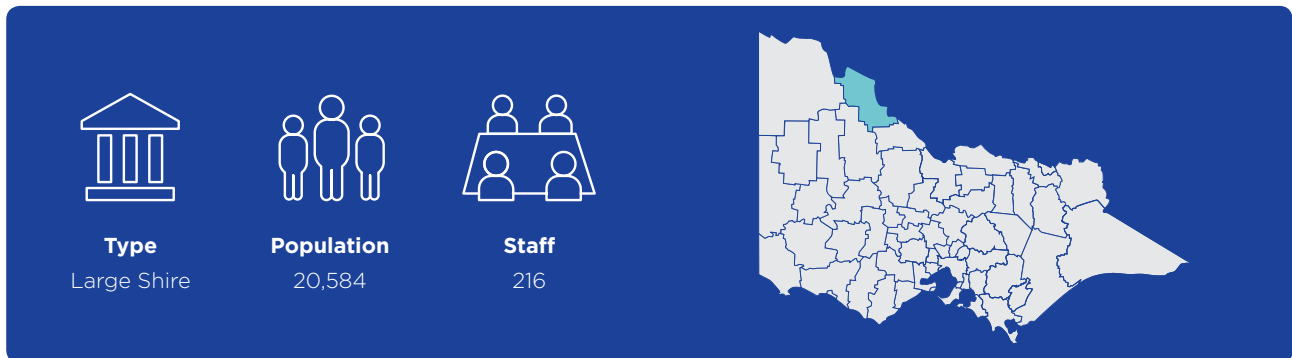


Independent review

Surf Coast Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Swan Hill Rural City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **34**
Number of requests for service: **708**

To provide context to the totals listed above, Swan Hill Rural City Council explained:

'We have implemented a complaints handling system called 'sysaid', not all departments have been on this system in 2018 so some complaints may have been processed outside the system. Also, the data on complaints that we have been able to capture until now have had many requests in the data. Now that our policy has been adopted with clearly definitions.'



Policy

Swan Hill Rural City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Swan Hill Rural City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Swan Hill Rural City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Swan Hill Rural City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. Information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

At the time of the survey, Swan Hill Rural City Council said it would soon be analysing complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'... they will in 2019, a report will go to the Executive committee and also the Councillors.'

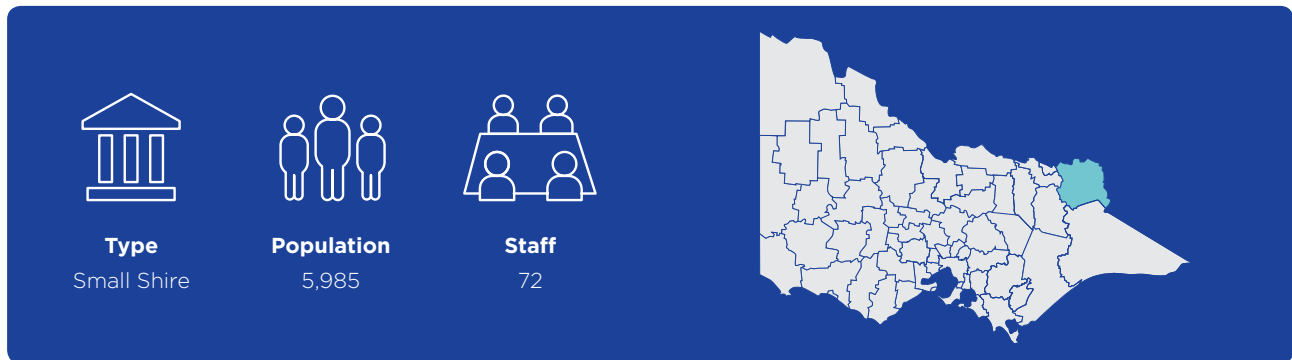
Swan Hill Rural City Council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council and Councillors.

Swan Hill Rural City Council says it is beginning to make its complaints data public:

'... until now we haven't, however our recently adopted policy will have a 6 monthly complaints report that will go to our council meeting which is open to the public.'

Towong Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **30**
Number of requests for service: **2,248**

Towong Shire Council says it does not generally differentiate between complaints and requests for service. To provide context for the totals listed above, Towong Shire Council explained:

'In terms of Council's handling of complaints, the figure of 30 provided is reflective of matters addressed by a Director or CEO. These are generally when the concern relates to the manner in which a service has been provided as opposed to a service request.'



Policy

Towong Shire Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy.



Timeframes

Towong Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Towong Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. Towong Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Towong Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. Information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Towong Shire Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'Reporting from the customer request system is analysed in an effort to reduce issues and improve workflow.'

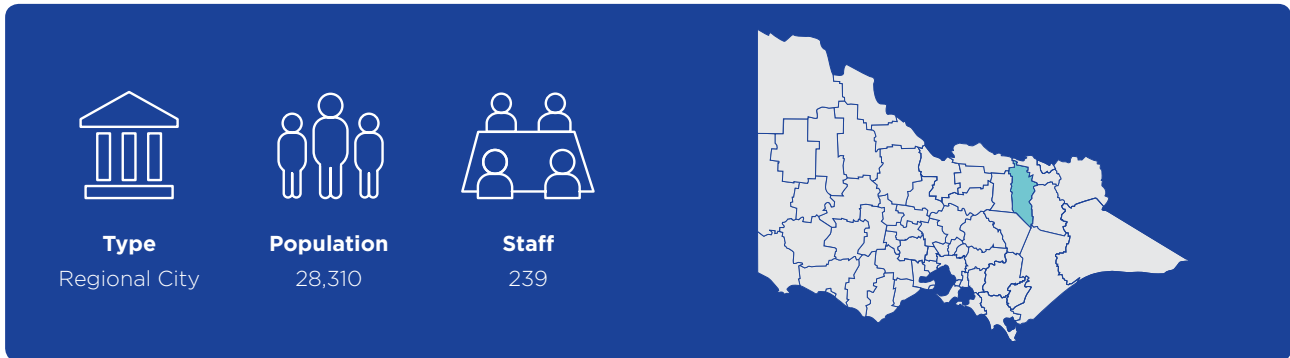
The council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints received by the council. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council and Councillors.

Towong Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'The majority of complaints are service requests and managed accordingly. Privacy considerations do not permit publication of complaints information.'

Wangaratta Rural City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Type
Regional City

Population
28,310

Staff
239



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **154**

Number of requests for service: **7,888**

Wangaratta Rural City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. This information is provided in complaint outcome letters; however, it is not on the council website:

'We ask that community members give us the opportunity to resolve their complaint in the first instance.'



Policy

Wangaratta Rural City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Wangaratta Rural City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'Quarterly reports are discussed with the Corporate Management Team and Council.'

The council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director, the CEO of the council, or the public.



Timeframes

Wangaratta Rural City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and to resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

Wangaratta Rural City Council says it makes its complaints data public in published reports and on request.

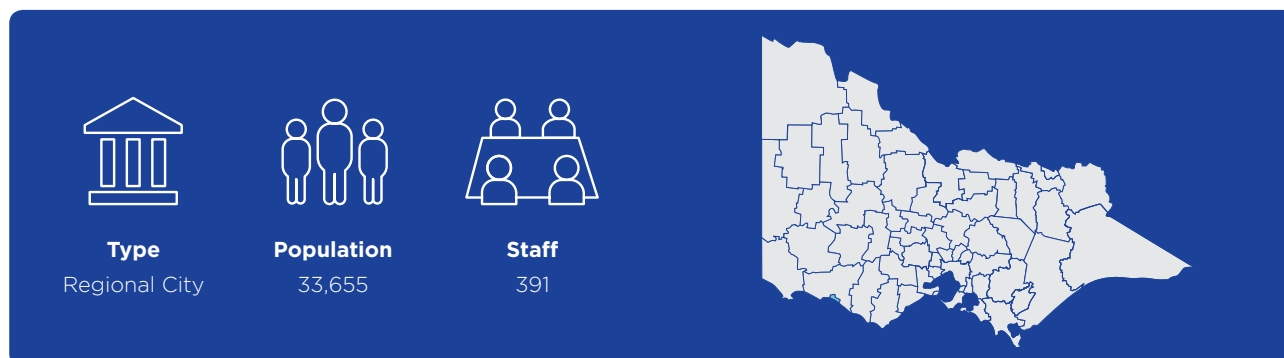


Independent review

Wangaratta Rural City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Warrnambool City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **18**

Number of requests for service: **28,638**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Warrnambool City Council explained:

'The above figures were extracted from our two main data bases ... Some service areas use specialist software for recording client histories e.g. Home and Community Care programs & Maternal and Child Health services. If a client complains directly to the service area the details of the matter would be recorded on the client record and [are] unlikely to be categorised as a complaint.

Also, complaints/reports received by Council regarding a child's health and wellbeing are reported through the Department of Health and Human Services portal and [are] not recorded in Council's systems.'



Policy

Warrnambool City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Warrnambool City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days. The council says there is currently no specified timeframe for resolving complaints.



Independent review

Warrnambool City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter only 'in some instances'. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Warrnambool City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. This information is on the website. The council says this information is not provided in complaint outcome letters in all cases.



Learning from complaints data

Warrnambool City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints that the council receives.

Warrnambool City Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Wellington Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints

Type
Large Shire

Population
42,983

Staff
400



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **20**
Number of requests for service: **6,418**



Independent review

Wellington Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs complainants about the option of internal review.

Wellington Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Wellington Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy; however, it is not on the council website:

'Currently being rolled out to staff. It will be on our website by end of 2019.'



Learning from complaints data

Wellington Shire Council says it does not currently analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'we will on approval and roll out of training.'

Wellington Shire Council staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council, Councillors and the public.

Wellington Shire Council says it does not make its complaint data public. The council says this is because it is 'not part of current complaints handling framework.'

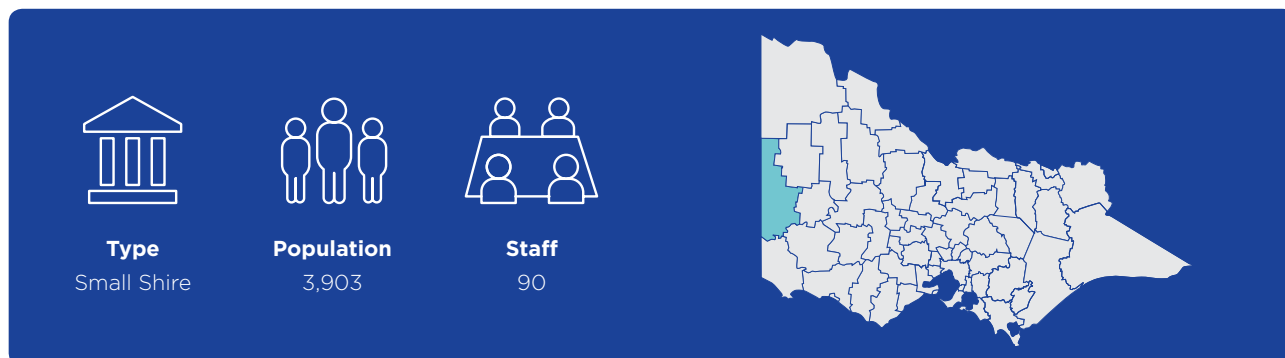


Timeframes

Wellington Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.

West Wimmera Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **589**

West Wimmera Shire Council does not generally differentiate between complaints and requests for service. The council said:

'The systems employed by Council do not at this stage differentiate between complaints and requests. The only number we record separately is complaints about waste collection services (including missed pick up and broken bins). There was a total of 589 customer requests received during 2018. This number includes complaints (including the 14 waste service complaints).'



Policy

West Wimmera Shire Council says it adopted a complaint handling policy in February 2019. The council says this policy is not yet on the council website.



Timeframes

West Wimmera Shire Council aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

West Wimmera Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. West Wimmera Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

West Wimmera Shire Council says it does not inform its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review.



Learning from complaints data

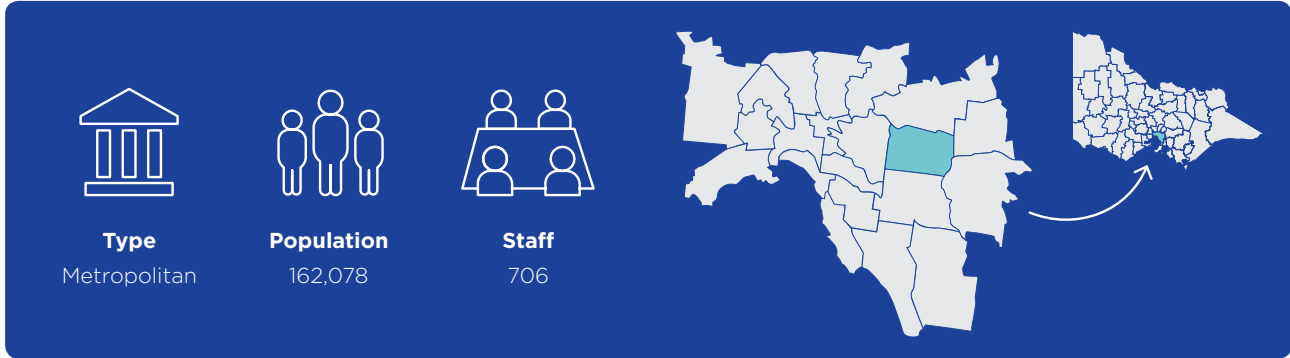
West Wimmera Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff also do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

West Wimmera Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Complaints concerning waste and animal control services are reported in aggregate through the LGPRF. Council has not had a policy around public reporting of complaints data, however has no problem in principle in sharing de-identified data.'

Whitehorse City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **134**
Number of requests for service: **79,956**

To provide context to the totals provided above, Whitehorse City Council explained:

'Council also receives approximately 30,000 calls per month. Some would link to the 79,956 Customer Service requests we raise, but some external sites (ie our recreation facilities) are not on our Customer Request system so other requests that could be considered as a 'request for service' may not be captured.'



Policy

Whitehorse City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Whitehorse City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days. The council says it aims to resolve complaints within 'seven to 30 working days from the day of receipt'.



Independent review

Whitehorse City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Whitehorse City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

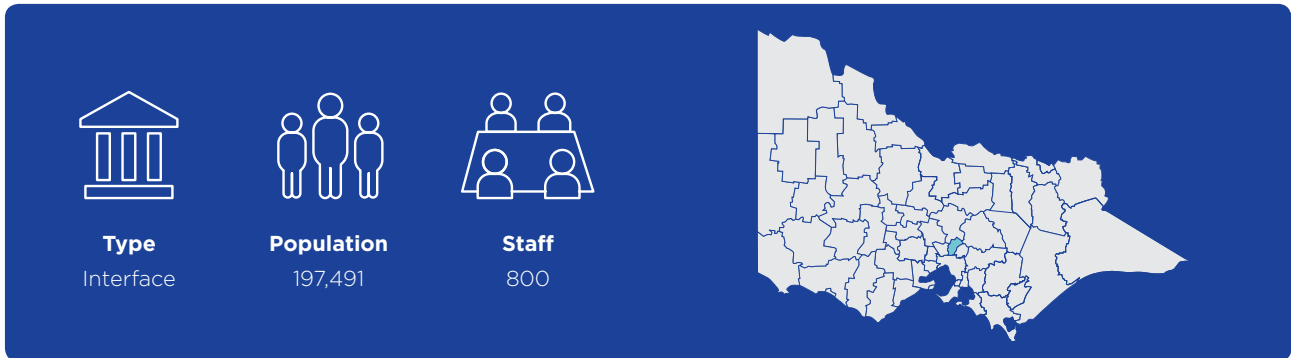
Whitehorse City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says this consists of a 'monthly review by senior team members to capture key areas/any trends'. The council says staff also report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of the council.

Whitehorse City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'Given the complexity and diversity of services Council offers this might be hard to do and many of the more complex complaints involve matters with privacy implications.'

Whittlesea City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **8,259**

Number of requests for service: **113,101**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Whittlesea City Council explained:

'Missed bins are counted as complaints (customer service enquiries for bins was transferred from the contractor to Council's customer service team on 30/04/18). From 30/04/18 to 31/12/18 there were 7,617 Missed Bins.'



Policy

Whittlesea City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Timeframes

Whittlesea City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Whittlesea City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and

request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Whittlesea City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says this information is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Whittlesea City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'Instructions on how to run a complaint report are shared with EAs and Managers so that reporting can be self-managed.'

Whittlesea City Council says this process also allows council staff to report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

'Complaints data forms part of the Business Plan reporting suite. The Executive Leadership Team is updated regularly on the number and nature of complaints.'

Whittlesea City Council says it does not make its complaints data public.

Wodonga City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints

Type
Regional City

Population
39,351

Staff
243



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **56**

Number of requests for service: **14,743**

is provided in complaint outcome letters. Information about the Victorian Ombudsman is on the council website:

'There is guidance material available on the website that informs complainants, if they are dissatisfied, they can request an external review, however this does not specifically list the Victorian Ombudsman as an external reviewer.'



Policy

Wodonga City Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Wodonga City Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says staff do report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives. These reports are made to the relevant manager, director or the CEO of council, Councillors and an audit committee.

Wodonga City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'No process currently in place, however there are plans to introduce the publishing of complaint data in a public report.'



Timeframes

Wodonga City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



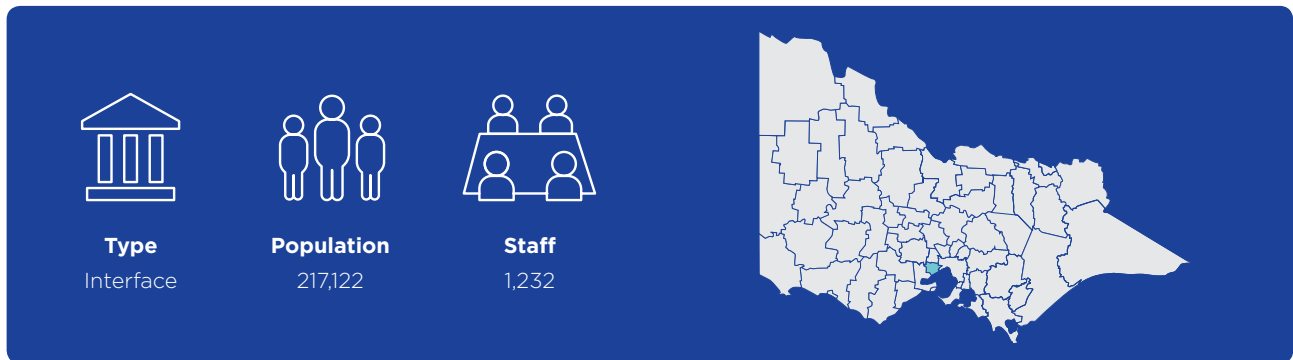
Independent review

Wodonga City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Wodonga City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says this information

Wyndham City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **Not provided**
Number of requests for service: **20,491**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Wyndham City Council explained:

'We cannot supply accurate data for complaints. Some channels are not captured in our database, however a new policy and system configuration will soon provide this.'



Policy

Wyndham City Council says it has a complaint handling policy. The council says the policy is not available on the council website; however, the council says the website has a page dedicated to complaint resolution.



Timeframes

Wyndham City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Wyndham City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Wyndham City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Wyndham City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'We look [at] trends by complaint type and category to see if there are any patterns.'

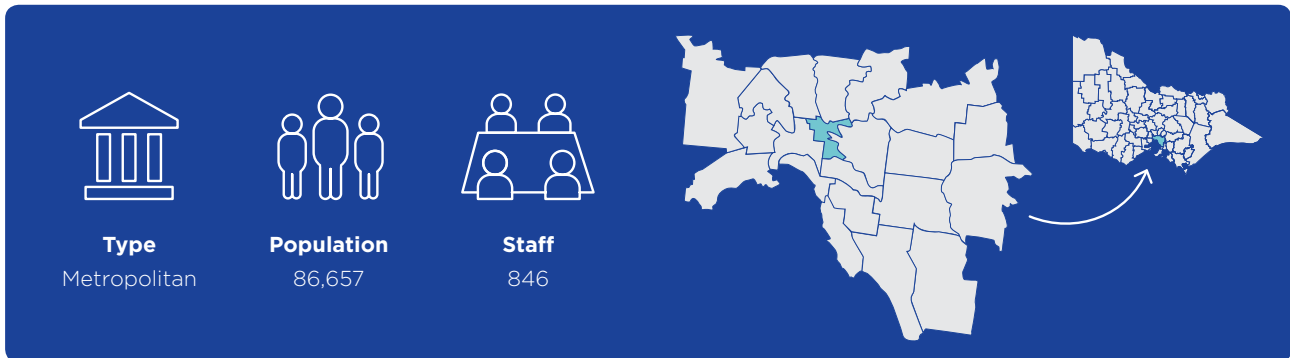
The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Wyndham City Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'We are not confident of current numbers being reported.'

Yarra City Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **1,341**
Number of requests for service: **159,155**

To provide context to the totals provided above, Yarra City Council explained:

'Council experienced a notable rise in complaints/requests following media publicity on a formal Council determination on the subject of 26 January and Australia Day.'



Policy

Yarra City Council says it has a complaint handling policy; however, the policy is not currently on the council website:

'[The policy is] currently being reviewed to use more "customer friendly - less bureaucratic" language. However, the on-line complaints/requests system guides the user in lodging their request/complaint.'



Timeframes

Yarra City Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints upon submission of the request, or within 24 hours. The council also says it aims to resolve complaints within 10 days:

'We aim for 10 days; however, it can depend on the nature/complexity of the complaint/request.'



Independent review

Yarra City Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Yarra City Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Yarra City Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

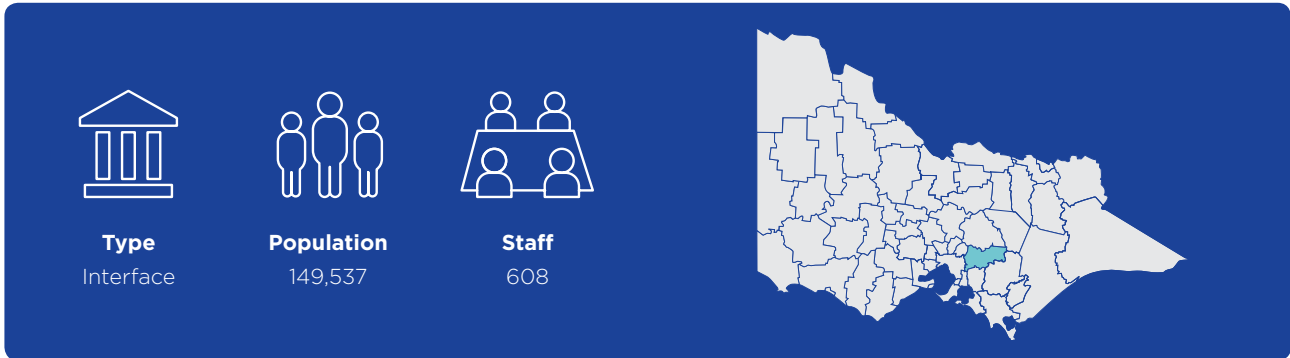
'Both by staff and also the outcomes of independently conducted Community Satisfaction Surveys.'

The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Yarra City Council says it does not make its complaints data public. The council says this is being reviewed.

Yarra Ranges Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **2,431**
Number of requests for service: **45,600**

To provide context for the totals listed above, Yarra Ranges Shire Council explained:

'[I]n late 2016 [Yarra Ranges Shire Council] implemented a centralised complaints team. This resulted in all teams sending matters of complaint to the Customer Liaison Team for documentation, monitoring and ensuring responses were sent. Lodging of complaints has been encouraged to ensure all formal expressions of dissatisfaction are recorded, monitored and responded to.'

'We have no way currently to know exactly how many 'requests for service' there have been through our multitude of corporate systems, however our main corporate system 'Pathway' has recorded approximately 45,600 requests for service for 2018.'



Timeframes

Yarra Ranges Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Yarra Ranges Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says it informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Yarra Ranges Shire Council says it informs its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options for external review. The council says information about the Victorian Ombudsman is provided in complaint outcome letters and is on the council website.



Policy

Yarra Ranges Shire Council says it has a complaint handling policy which is on the council website.



Learning from complaints data

Yarra Ranges Shire Council says it regularly analyses complaints to identify trends and areas for improvement:

'[Yarra Ranges Shire Council] has a team dedicated to recording, monitoring and closing complaints and sharing post complaint analysis with Leadership.'

The council says staff do not otherwise report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Yarra Ranges Shire Council says it makes its complaints data public in published reports.

Yarriambiack Shire Council

What they told us... dealing with complaints



Type

Small Shire



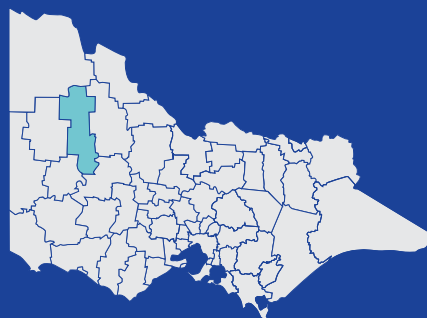
Population

6,674



Staff

104



Number of contacts in 2018

Number of complaints: **60**

Number of requests for service: **Not provided**

Yarriambiack Shire Council says it does not generally differentiate between complaints and requests for service. To provide context to the number of complaints listed above, Yarriambiack Shire Council explained:

'... hard to give an accurate figure when we don't have a consistent system in place... we are hoping to change this with a new system and education of all staff.'



Policy

Yarriambiack Shire Council says it does not have a complaint handling policy.



Timeframes

Yarriambiack Shire Council says it aims to acknowledge all complaints within 10 business days and resolve complaints within 28 days from the day of receipt.



Independent review

Yarriambiack Shire Council says if complainants are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint and

request an internal review, the review is conducted by a senior officer who was not previously involved in the matter. The council says in this case, the complaint is usually followed up by a general manager or the CEO of the council. Yarriambiack Shire Council says it sometimes informs its complainants about the option of internal review.

Yarriambiack Shire Council says it does not currently inform its complainants about the Victorian Ombudsman and other options of external review.

The council says this information will be on the council website and provided in complaint outcome letters when the council's new complaint policy and relevant procedures are implemented.



Learning from complaints data

Yarriambiack Shire Council says it does not regularly analyse complaints data to identify trends and areas for improvement. The council says this will change under the complaint handling system. The council says staff do not report on the outcomes of complaints the council receives.

Yarriambiack Shire Council says it does not make its complaints data public:

'... we don't have a reliable or an effective system in place to capture all data yet. This is a major focus for the next 12 months, with a whole new IT system.'

Appendix D:

Number of reported complaints
and requests for service received

Number of reported complaints and requests for service received in 2018

Metropolitan councils		
Council	Complaints	Requests for service
Banyule City Council	Not provided	76,722
Bayside City Council	571	68,871
Boroondara City Council	5,764	192,225
Brimbank City Council	224	57,365
Darebin City Council*	950	100,000
Frankston City Council*	102	13,626
Glen Eira City Council*	532	177,591
Greater Dandenong City Council	Not provided	41,697
Hobsons Bay City Council*	36	41,853
Kingston City Council*	150	56,000
Knox City Council*	1,217	153,562
Manningham City Council*	140	29,606
Maribyrnong City Council	532	43,603
Maroondah City Council*	965	70,000
Melbourne City Council	88	295,204
Monash City Council	285	122,396
Moonee Valley City Council	Not provided	38,308
Moreland City Council	1,160	85,068
Port Phillip City Council*	472	59,384
Stonnington City Council	199	112,819
Whitehorse City Council*	134	79,956
Yarra City Council	1,341	159,155

*Council advises that data may not be accurate or reliable.

Interface councils		
Council	Complaints	Requests for service
Cardinia Shire Council	32	41,000
Casey City Council*	92	230,000
Hume City Council	782	246,076
Melton City Council	Not provided	Not provided
Mornington Peninsula Shire	Not provided	83,856
Nillumbik Shire Council	Not provided	19,958
Whittlesea City Council	8,259	113,101
Wyndham City Council	Not provided	20,491
Yarra Ranges Council*	2,431	45,600
Regional city councils		
Council	Complaints	Requests for service
Ballarat City Council	606	20,741
Greater Bendigo City Council*	485	40,858
Greater Geelong City Council*	705	101,472
Greater Shepparton City Council*	212	15,426
Horsham Rural City Council	12	6,429
Latrobe City Council*	162	Not provided
Mildura Rural City Council*	94	23,923
Wangaratta Rural City Council	154	7,888
Warrnambool City Council*	18	28,638
Wodonga City Council	56	14,743

*Council advises that data may not be accurate or reliable.

Large shire councils		
Council	Complaints	Requests for service
Bass Coast Shire Council*	9	16,664
Baw Baw Shire Council*	96	25,024
Campaspe Shire Council	735	29,731
Colac Otway Shire Council*	11	15,000
Corangamite Shire Council	35	21,001
East Gippsland Shire Council*	188	320,393
Glenelg Shire Council*	10	150
Golden Plains Shire Council*	5	1,600
Macedon Ranges Shire Council	142	22,165
Mitchell Shire Council	340	7,684
Moira Shire Council*	4	50,000
Moorabool Shire Council*	18	68,300
Mount Alexander Shire Council	132	9,736
Moyne Shire Council*	39	4,685
South Gippsland Shire Council	148	17,513
Southern Grampians Shire Council	Not provided	7,301
Surf Coast Shire Council	74	13,739
Swan Hill Rural City Council*	34	708
Wellington Shire Council	20	6,418

*Council advises that data may not be accurate or reliable.

Small shire councils		
Council	Complaints	Requests for service
Alpine Shire Council	Not provided	Not provided
Ararat Rural City Council	1,180	9,946
Benalla Rural City Council*	11	2,152
Borough of Queenscliffe	29	1,692
Buloke Shire Council	Not provided	1,740
Central Goldfields Shire Council	Not provided	799
Gannawarra Shire Council	2	1,025
Hepburn Shire Council	44	9,600
Hindmarsh Shire Council*	30	400
Indigo Shire Council	256	8,365
Loddon Shire Council	65	10,419
Mansfield Shire Council	113	1,538
Murrindindi Shire Council	Not provided	Not provided
Northern Grampians Shire Council*	260	9,000
Pyrenees Shire Council	17	1,024
Strathbogie Shire Council*	5	4,236
Towong Shire Council*	30	2,248
West Wimmera Shire Council*	Not provided	589
Yarriambiack Shire Council*	60	Not provided

*Council advises that data may not be accurate or reliable.

Victorian Ombudsman's Parliamentary Reports tabled since April 2014

2019

OPCAT in Victoria: A thematic investigation of practices related to solitary confinement of children and young people
September 2019

Investigation into Wellington Shire Council's handling of Ninety Mile Beach subdivisions
August 2019

Investigation into State Trustees
June 2019

Investigation of a complaint about Ambulance Victoria
May 2019

Fines Victoria complaints
April 2019

VicRoads complaints
February 2019

2018

Investigation into the imprisonment of a woman found unfit to stand trial
October 2018

Investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers at Goulburn Murray Water
October 2018

Investigation of three protected disclosure complaints regarding Bendigo South East College
September 2018

Investigation of allegations referred by Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee, arising from its inquiry into youth justice centres in Victoria
September 2018

Complaints to the Ombudsman: resolving them early
July 2018

Ombudsman's recommendations – second report

July 2018

Investigation into child sex offender Robert Whitehead's involvement with Puffing Billy and other railway bodies

June 2018

Investigation into the administration of the Fairness Fund for taxi and hire car licence holders

June 2018

Investigation into Maribyrnong City Council's internal review practices for disability parking infringements

April 2018

Investigation into Wodonga City Council's overcharging of a waste management levy

April 2018

Investigation of a matter referred from the Legislative Council on 25 November 2015

March 2018

2017

Investigation into the financial support provided to kinship carers

December 2017

Implementing OPCAT in Victoria: report and inspection of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre

November 2017

Investigation into the management of maintenance claims against public housing tenants

October 2017

Investigation into the management and protection of disability group home residents by the Department of Health and Human Services and Autism Plus

September 2017

Enquiry into the provision of alcohol and drug rehabilitation services following contact with the criminal justice system

September 2017

Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions

August 2017

Report into allegations of conflict of interest of an officer at the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board

June 2017

Apologies

April 2017

Investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers at the Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Resort Management Board

March 2017

Report on youth justice facilities at the Grevillea unit of Barwon Prison, Malmsbury and Parkville

February 2017

Investigation into the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages' handling of a complaint

January 2017

2016

Investigation into the transparency of local government decision making

December 2016

Ombudsman enquiries: Resolving complaints informally

October 2016

Investigation into the management of complex workers compensation claims and WorkSafe oversight

September 2016

Report on recommendations

June 2016

Investigation into Casey City Council's Special Charge Scheme for Market Lane

June 2016

Investigation into the misuse of council resources

June 2016

Investigation into public transport fare evasion enforcement

May 2016

2015

Reporting and investigation of allegations of abuse in the disability sector: Phase 2 – incident reporting

December 2015

Investigation of a protected disclosure complaint regarding allegations of improper conduct by councillors associated with political donations

November 2015

Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria

September 2015

Conflict of interest by an Executive Officer in the Department of Education and Training

September 2015

Reporting and investigation of allegations of abuse in the disability sector: Phase 1 – the effectiveness of statutory oversight

June 2015

Investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers of VicRoads

June 2015

Investigation into Department of Health oversight of Mentone Gardens, a Supported Residential Service

April 2015

Councils and complaints – A report on current practice and issues

February 2015

Investigation into an incident of alleged excessive force used by authorised officers

February 2015

2014

Investigation following concerns raised by Community Visitors about a mental health facility

October 2014

Investigation into allegations of improper conduct in the Office of Living Victoria

August 2014

Victorian Ombudsman
Level 2, 570 Bourke Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Phone 03 9613 6222
Email ombudvic@ombudsman.vic.gov.au
www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au