



QUEENSLAND
OMBUDSMAN

Web: www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au

Call: (07) 3005 7000

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727

Interpreter: 131 450

Local council rates and charges

Find out whether we can investigate your complaint about council rates and charges.

What we can do

We will consider complaints about rates and charges if:

- there is no alternative process for resolving the complaint under the Local Government Act or other legislation
- there is evidence that the council has not followed correct processes as set out in the Local Government Act and regulations or did not follow relevant council policy and procedures.

Generally, we will not consider your complaint until you try and resolve your complaint with council. Find out more about [complain to the organisation involved](#).

What we can't do

We rarely get involved with complaints about:

- local councils' overall rating strategies and policies
- particular rates that have been set
- rate increases established as part of an annual council budget.

This is because councils are democratically elected bodies which have broad powers under the *Local Government Act 2009* (Local Government Act) to set rates and charges for services.

Land valuation and fire levy

We do not deal with [complaints about the valuation of land](#) or the [fire services levy](#), because other avenues of appeal have been established by the state government.

Complaints we can investigate

Types of rates and charges

The Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs website provides information about the [types of rates and charges](#).

How are rates and charges determined?

Local councils in Queensland have broad powers under the Local Government Act 2009 to impose rates and charges. The [City of Brisbane Act 2010](#) sets out similar powers for Brisbane City Council.

Rates and charges provide revenue for works, services and facilities for the local community.

Decisions about rates and charges must be made in an open and accountable way through an annual budget meeting of council (usually held between 1 June and 31 July each year).

Local councils publish documents about their budgets, including a revenue policy and revenue statement.

These documents are important to help understand the council's approach to raising revenue. A copy of these documents is available by contacting your local council or visiting its website.

Why has council increased its rates and charges?

Generally, there is no limit on what a local council can charge for its rates.

Each local council sets its rates levy to achieve a certain level of income each year to cover the cost of providing services and infrastructure.

Sometimes, changes in land valuations can lead to variations in rates for individual and even categories of property owners. However, the Local Government Act does contain a number of 'tools' which councils can use to limit increases in rates. For example, a council can average valuations over two or three years. It is up to each council to decide when these tools are used.

Information about why council has increased its rates and charges is generally included with your rate notice or on its website.

What happens if I don't pay my rates?

If the full amount is not paid by the due date, local councils are entitled to apply penalty interest and take other action. For example, council can recover the outstanding amount through legal proceedings. If the rates remain unpaid on occupied land for more than three years, council can sell the land.

If you make a complaint about your rates or charges, it is important you keep paying until the outcome is determined. This will avoid penalty interest being imposed on the unpaid amount. It also avoids legal action, which may result in legal costs being applied to your account.

Trouble paying your rates?

Local councils can enter into payment arrangements with people having difficulty paying rates. It is important to contact council as soon as you know you will have difficulty paying your rates. Make it clear why you are unable to pay and discuss what arrangements are available.