

Complaint handling process

1. Purpose

To establish a systematic approach for handling complaints.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to complaints received by Council from residents and ratepayers.

3. Definitions and Abbreviations

complaint

- a programmed service that has not been provided to the predetermined standard (timeline, quality and quantity); or
- a requested service that should have been provided but has not been provided to the predetermined standard (timeline, quality and quantity); or
- conduct unbecoming of an officer of Council; or
- an issue raised by a community member or community group which the CEO considers would be best managed by following this procedure.

service request

- a request for the provision of a service that is not provided on a programmed basis; or
- a request for the provision of a programmed service in excess of the predetermined standard (timeline, quality and quantity).

CEO Chief Executive Officer

4. Consultation

Nil

5. Process

5.1. Receipt of Complaint

Complaints may be lodged through a number of channels and at any level. It is more efficient to first lodge the complaint with the officer nearest to the source of the problem. The officer receiving the complaint will then escalate the matter to the appropriate level.

5.1.1. Verbal complaints

Verbal complaints include both face to face discussions at customer service counters and complaints received over the telephone.

The officer receiving the complaint will:

- Introduce themselves, determine the details of the complaint and record the complaint in the customer request system (including necessary information).
- Confirm the details received with the person making the complaint.
- Explain to the complainant the courses of action available.
- Commit to positive action immediately and seek to resolve the complaint if possible.
- Determine whether the person making the complaint is satisfied with the proposed course of action and, if not, suggest an alternative course of action.
- Follow up and monitor the outcome to confirm that the person is satisfied and has received appropriate feedback.

Should the nature or severity of a verbal complaint appear major, the officer should request that the complaint be put in writing to reduce the possibility of the complaint being misunderstood.

5.1.2. Written complaints

Written complaints are registered by Central Records and delegated to the relevant manager or director.

The officer receiving the complaint will:

- Acknowledge the complaint in writing within two working days of receipt by Council.
 - o Where written complaints are resolved quickly, a letter of reply will replace the letter of acknowledgment.
 - o Where written complaints raise issues which require follow up work or investigation by the officer, the letter of acknowledgment shall also give a tentative response date and outline the process for resolving the complaint.
- Record the complaint in the customer request system.

Follow up and monitor the outcome to confirm that the person is satisfied and has received appropriate feedback.

In the reply letter, the officer will:

- Outline the complaint received.
- Explain the courses of action available.
- Commit to positive action immediately.
- Ask the complainant to contact the officer if they are not satisfied with the proposed course of action.

5.2. Responsibility for Responding to Complaint

5.2.1. Contracted services

In-house and external contract complaints will be delegated to the contract manager to resolve with the contractor. It is the responsibility of the contract manager to receive and handle service complaints.

5.2.2. Non-contracted services

These complaints will be assigned to the relevant manager for investigation and resolution. Where satisfactory resolutions are not obtained by complainants, the matter may be referred to the relevant director to resolve.

5.3. Types of Complaints

5.3.1. Complaints Regarding Statutory Matters

Where Council activities are governed by State or Federal legislation, Council is unable to alter its decision making processes and is guided by the requirements of the legislation.

Council has adopted local laws that operate in conjunction with State legislation. When Council officers commence proceedings, including legal action and issuing infringement notices, and a member of the community wishes to have the decision reviewed, a request for review must be received in writing. Such matters will be handled by the responsible officer as a service request.

5.3.2. Risk Management Issues

If a complainant informs Council that a claim may be lodged for personal injury or property damage, Council's Risk Management Officer shall be advised of the complaint and the responsible officer will liaise with the Risk Management Officer in handling the complaint.

5.3.3. Complaints about Council Officers

Complaints regarding officer behaviour shall be handled sensitively and confidentially. All complaints regarding the professional behaviour of officers must be made in writing and include the detail necessary to allow investigation of the complaint.

These complaints will be handled through the complaints handling process with the relevant manager initially investigating and resolving the complaint. The director will become involved if the complaint cannot be resolved.

All aspects of the complaint, discussions and resolution shall be accurately recorded and may form the basis for disciplinary action. Staff will be given the opportunity to nominate their own independent agent should they consider the complaint warrants such participation.

Where a complaint is about discrimination, the Organisational Development Manager shall manage the investigation and act as an independent / impartial agent.

5.3.4. Strategy Related Issues raised by Community Groups

Strategy related issues raised by community groups shall be referred to the relevant Director in the first instance. Where the concerns are complex the Director shall refer the issue to the CEO. The CEO will consider the matter and determine whether the issue will be handled through this procedure.

5.4. Escalation of Complaints to Mediation

Where a dispute remains unresolved, a senior member of staff shall be nominated to mediate. This officer will investigate the unresolved complaint with a view to resolving the matter. If mediation is required, the director of the area in which the complaint has originated will invite a director from another area to act as mediator.

5.5. Mediation

The mediation process will not be used to review formal Council decisions but rather to check that complaints have been handled correctly and that the decision made reflects Council policies.

The mediator will -

- Act independently.
- Consult with the director to confirm that the complaint has been acknowledged within two working days of receipt and the complainant has been advised of the complaint handling process.
- Ask the responsible manager to provide all information associated with the complaint and to provide any additional background.
- Review all the material then talk to the complainant and the officers involved.
- Forward a written recommendation to the director and / or the CEO.
- Advise the complainant in writing of the decision.
- Place copies of all notes, correspondence and other relevant material on a central file.

If the complaint has not been resolved by the director or the mediation process, the complainant can seek to discuss matters with the CEO.

5.6. Right of Appeal

If a member of the community is dissatisfied with the decision of Council's senior officers, they are able to involve the State Ombudsman's Office.

5.7. Reporting

A report will be made annually to the Full Management Team detailing the number of complaints, the service the complaint related to and the level at which the complaint was resolved.