



Complaint Management Policy

1. PURPOSE

Council's Complaint Management Policy has been developed to assist Council employees in managing and processing customer complaints in a consistent and transparent manner.

2. OBJECTIVES

This policy aims to ensure all staff will be able to handle customer complaints fairly and objectively through a standardised process which establishes timeframes and clear procedures by which all complaints received will be registered, investigated and responded to. The intent of this policy is to provide understanding and guidance on the roles and responsibilities that Council staff have in processing a complaint in accordance with the steps set out in Council's *Complaint Resolution Process*. It also provides provisions by which complainants can request a further review of a matter or refer their complaint to an independent body should they be dissatisfied with a complaint outcome.

3. SCOPE

The policy applies to all Council employees including Councillors, volunteers and agency staff in managing complainants in a respectful manner. It encompasses all written complaints received via all communication mediums including fax, mail and email correspondence, Council's Customer Request cards and Council's website feedback form. It also includes complaints received and processed with the assistance of a frontline staff member or other specialised translation/ advocacy services that have been communicated via face to face or telephone contact with Council. It does not include:

- Requests for service
- Complaints about matters for which there is a process of review or appeal or objection prescribed by legislation
- Complaints about a Councillor or the Mayor
- Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Complaints against staff alleging serious misconduct
- Complaints about alleged privacy breaches
- Allegations of fraud or corrupt conduct

*Further details on where to direct complaints on these above matters are outlined in Council's *Recording Customer Feedback Guidelines*.

4. DEFINITIONS

Complaint – an expression of dissatisfaction that is related to services provided by Council – be it quality, policy or procedure. It does not cover decisions made by Council at formal Council meetings.

Complainant – a person or organisation that makes a complaint.

Unreasonable Complainant – a person or organisation who makes a complaint to Council and whose conduct would be deemed unreasonable.

Unreasonable Complainant Conduct – conduct by a current or former complainant that would be considered by its frequency and/ or nature as causing substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for Council, that impacts on employees, other service users and/or the complainant themselves.

Frontline Staff – all staff members whose primary role is to have regular interactions with customers and who are often the initial point of contact of Council for customers.

5. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Council recognises that community members have the right to ask questions, seek information on or express their opinion and concerns about the services it provides. Council therefore is committed to resolving the complaints it receives and considers effective complaint handling to be a part of its core business.

The Complaint Management Policy and associated Recording Customer Feedback Guidelines are underpinned by the following principles that include:

Commitment

Council is committed to resolving the complaints it receives. Council recognises that customers have the right to complain and encourages customers to provide feedback about the services we provide to the community.

Accessibility

Customers are encouraged and enabled to provide feedback about our services through a wide range of mediums. Should a customer require additional assistance in recording the details of their complaint, our frontline customer service staff are able to assist in documenting the details of their concern or providing access to the relevant translation/advocacy or other services to ensure a matter is captured and recorded accurately. Details of Council's Complaint Resolution Process will also be readily accessible and available to all staff both electronically or in hard copy format.

Transparency

Council's *Complaint Resolution Process* clearly sets out how to complain, where to complain and how a complaint will be handled. The processes taken in investigating and responding to a complaint is also clearly documented to ensure a consistent approach is taken towards managing complaints across the organisation.

Objectivity and Fairness

All complainants will be treated with respect and courtesy, with Council aiming to provide a complete, fair and just outcome on all matters in the first instance. Similarly, Council require the respect, cooperation and assistance of complainants in providing further information to Council staff if requested, to ensure expediency in resolving an issue.

Confidentiality

All information provided by a complainant will be handled sensitively to ensure confidentiality and personal privacy are protected. Council staff will only consult on or be referred matters that are appropriate to their areas of expertise during the investigation process and in accordance with Council's Privacy Policy. Complaints referred anonymously will also be investigated, but as per Council's *Recording Customer Feedback Guidelines*, it may be difficult to resolve an issue if a customer chooses to withhold their contact information.

Accountability

Council is accountable, both internally and externally for its decision-making and complaint handling performance. All complaints therefore will be acknowledged, allocated a reference number and responded to promptly within Council's established timeframes. In responding to a complainant, Council will provide an explanation and reasons for any decisions reached and ensure its decisions are subject to appropriate review processes.

Continuous Improvement

Council regularly analyses complaint data to ensure that opportunities for service improvement are highlighted and implemented.

5.1 Complaints about Council Employee Conduct

Serious Misconduct

Complaints against Council employees alleging serious misconduct can be directed to Council's Protected Disclosures Coordinator and marked 'Strictly Confidential Protected Disclosure.' These will be dealt with in accordance with the *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* and Council's Protected Disclosure procedures.

General Conduct

Complaints against employees concerning general conduct and behavioural matters can be managed through Council's *Complaint Resolution Process* by the relevant Department Manager in accordance with Council's *Employee Conduct Policy*, *Dispute Resolution Policy* and in accordance with the principles of natural justice.

5.2 Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

Whilst Council is committed to being accessible and responsive to all complainants, it recognises customers exhibiting one or more traits of an unreasonable complainant can impact negatively on employee wellbeing and the fair and reasonable allocation of Council resources to resolving an issue. Complainants therefore who are abusive or displaying behaviour that is threatening, intimidating or extreme / inappropriate (as per Council's *Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy*) may have restrictions or limitations placed on their contact with Council, whilst their complaint is being investigated. Whilst this does not preclude a customer having a valid complaint or issue, appropriate and proportionate restrictions may be put in place that will likely impact on a complaints resolution timeframe and the manner in which the complainant can communicate with Council (i.e. an 'in writing only' communication restriction).

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 All Employees

All employees are required to familiarise themselves with this policy, Council's *Complaint Resolution Process* and *Recording Customer Feedback Guidelines*. Training is provided to all new Council staff as part of the CARES component of Council's Corporate Induction Program, Council's *Customer Service- It's Everyone's Business* training program and the *Recording Customer Feedback Summary Sheet*, a training tool available to all staff.

6.2 Corporate Information Staff

Corporate Information staff members are responsible for identifying correspondence to be classified as a complaint and allocating it through Council's corporate records management system (HPRM) to the appropriate department manager for investigation and response.

6.3 Customer Liaison Officer

The Customer Liaison Officer (CLO) is the internal key contact with regards to recording and monitoring complaints across the organisation. Complaints concerning matters across multiple business units may be referred to the CLO to coordinate a response. The CLO may also case manage a matter in particular instances where a customer has displayed trait of Unreasonable Complainant Conduct. The CLO will also assist the Team Leader Customer Service and Coordinator Corporate Information in compiling and providing regular data to the Executive Management Team (EMT) on complaint trends and identify opportunities for service improvements for departments.

6.4 Managers and Supervisors

All Managers and direct supervisors are responsible for supporting employees to apply the strategies in this policy, including ensuring compliance with the procedures identified for recording or assisting customer to record details of their complaint and ensuring new employees to the organisation are made aware of the Policy and other supporting documentation as previously outlined, during their induction.

Additionally, Department Managers allocated a complaint are responsible for ensuring the complainant is acknowledged, investigated and responded to within the appropriate timeframes and that relevant details are recorded in HPRM should a complainant request an internal review of a matter be conducted.

6.5 General Managers

General Managers should liaise regularly with Department Managers on complaints received and the opportunities for service improvements that may be available for departments to implement. They may also be requested to conduct a further investigation of a matter. The General Manager will then investigate and respond to the complainant within the appropriate timeframes, with relevant details recorded in HPRM.

6.6 Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The CEO is responsible for encouraging an environment where complaints are handled seriously and thoroughly and ensuring effective complaint management practices are being adhered to and opportunities for service improvements are identified. The CEO may also be requested to conduct a formal internal review of a matter by a complainant should the complainant not be satisfied with a General Managers review and further response on a matter. The CEO will then conduct a fresh investigation of the matter and advise the complainant of the outcome of the review undertaken and further independent review avenues available.

7. COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCESS

Council's Complaint Handling Process will generally follow the steps as outlined below:

7.1 Receipt of a Complaint

Frontline staff members or a Council officer receiving a complaint should take steps to resolving a complaint immediately, where possible, should a matter be within their area of expertise and/or training. Should a complaint require further escalation, the customer should be directed through Council's *Complaint Resolution Process* to make a formal complaint. The complaint will then be registered by Council's Corporate Information staff in HPRM and directed to the appropriate department Manager for investigation. A written acknowledgement and reference number will be provided to the complainant within seven working days. Where a frontline customer service staff member has assisted a customer in

capturing and documenting details of a complaint, a copy of the complaint details should be provided to the complainant.

7.2 Investigation

In instances where a complaint has been escalated and captured in Council's *Complaint Resolution Process*, the relevant department Manager will be allocated the matter for further investigation. Council aims to resolve complaints within seven to 30 working days (depending on the complexity of the concern.) If further investigations are required, this will be communicated to the complainant in writing and an estimation of the additional time required for resolving the matter will be provided. The Manager will also contact the Coordinator Corporate Information to request the required timeframe extension for the matter in HPRM. Standardised templates are also available in HPRM to assist Managers in acknowledging and responding to customer complaints.

When investigating a matter all relevant notes concerning how the matter has been investigated, what analysis has been done or what standards/procedures/policies and whether they have been adhered to will be documented in HPRM. This information is required to be captured should a complainant subsequently seek a review of their matter. Should the information captured be of a sensitive nature, the Coordinator Corporate Information will be able to assist in further restricting access to these records.

7.3 Internal Review

A complainant has the right to request that their complaint be reviewed or a formal internal review be conducted by the CEO, where they are able to outline that the resolution or outcome of their concern is unfair, unreasonable or does not conform to any Council policy that is relevant to the complaint. A complainant will be advised of their right to request a review at the time they are advised of the resolution or outcome of their complaint, as outlined in Council's *Complaint Resolution Process*.

In the first instance, a review will be conducted by the relevant area General Manager, who will review the details of all investigations undertaken and advise the complainant in writing of their findings on the matter.

Should the complainant still be dissatisfied and be able to outline that the further resolution or outcome on their concerns is unfair, unreasonable or not in accordance with relevant Council policy they may then request a formal internal review be conducted by the CEO.

Again, all information on reviews undertaken should be captured in HPRM, with relevant restrictions on access to these records put in place with the assistance of the Coordinator Corporate Information.

7.4 External Review

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the resolution or outcome of an internal review of their concerns, they will be advised of alternate avenues through which they may refer their complaint.

In the majority of cases, the complainant will be advised to refer their complaint to the Victorian Ombudsman for an independent review of their concerns to be undertaken. The Ombudsman is an independent body established to provide a fair hearing of grievances and review administrative action taken by government agencies, including local government.

Victorian Ombudsman

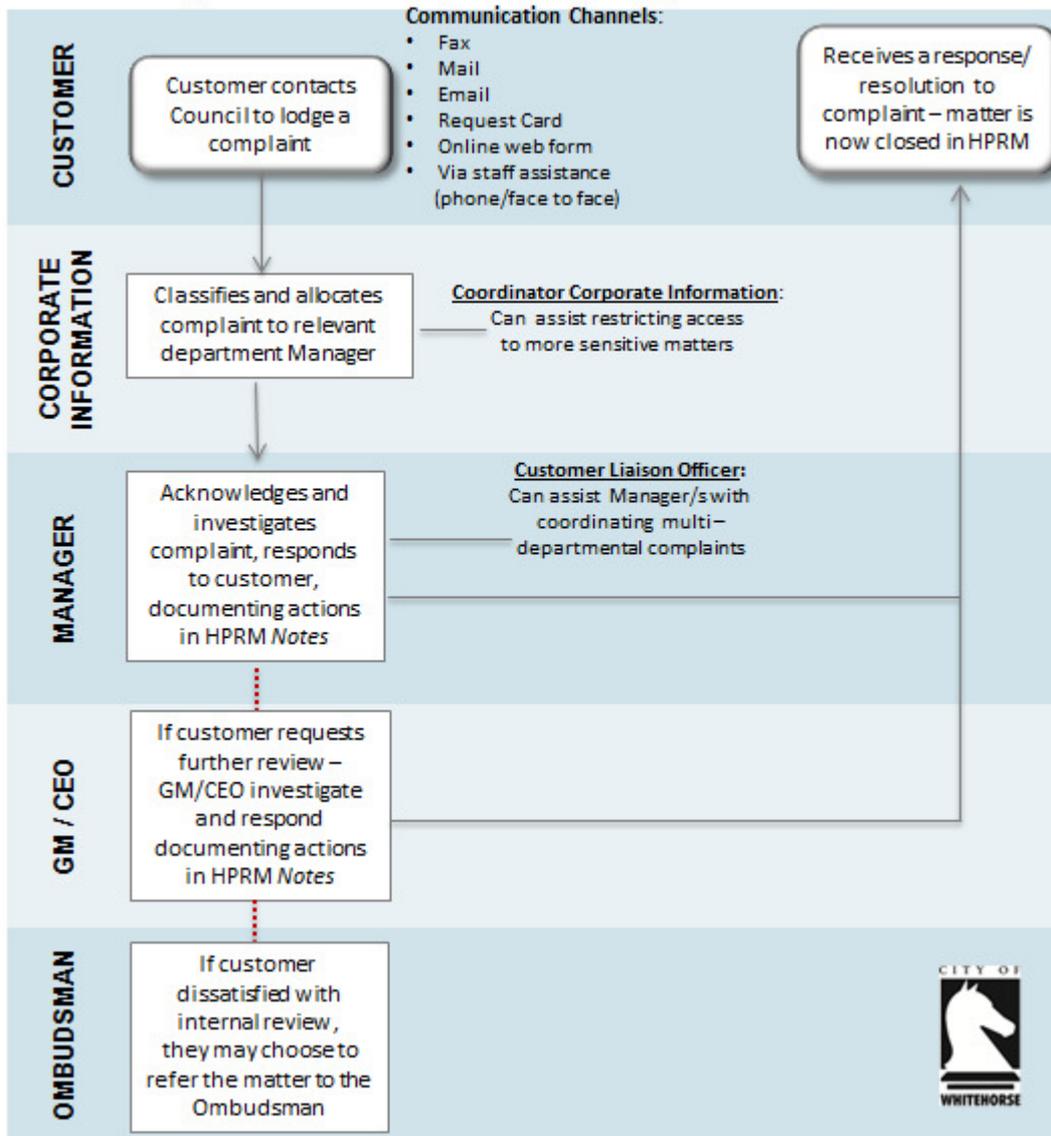
Level 2, 570 Bourke Street
Melbourne 3000

Phone: 9613 6222

Email: ombudvic@ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Website: www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Steps in the Complaint Management Process



8. REPORTING FRAMEWORK

All customer complaints will be captured formally by Council’s Corporate Information Department and recorded in HPRM and classified according to Council’s Complaint Classification Framework as outlined in the Council’s *Recording Customer Feedback Guidelines*.

Data will be captured and a report provided to EMT on a monthly basis by the Team Leader Customer Service. The report will include information on the number of complaints recorded during the month (by key department area) and the type of feedback (as outlined in the Complaint Classification Framework). This data will also be analysed and reported on to EMT as part of Council’s Corporate Performance Customer Service Quarterly Report and Annual Report to identify trends and continuous improvement/ service provision opportunities across the organisation.

9. RELATED POLICIES & LEGISLATION

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Whitehorse City Council Complaint Handling Guidelines
- Whitehorse City Council Complaint Resolution Process
- Whitehorse City Council Customer Complaint Aggression Procedure
- Whitehorse City Council Customer Service Charter
- Whitehorse City Council Dispute Resolution Policy
- Whitehorse City Council Employee Conduct Policy
- Whitehorse City Council Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Policy
- Whitehorse City Council Information Management Policy
- Whitehorse City Council Information Privacy Policy
- Whitehorse City Council Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy
- Whitehorse City Council Protected Disclosure Procedure