



WHITEHORSE  
CITY COUNCIL

# Whitehorse City Council

## Complaint Handling Policy

### Responsible Department: Corporate Services

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## Complaint Handling Policy

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<b>Related documents</b>	<a href="#">Whitehorse City Council - Customer Service Charter</a> <a href="#">Whitehorse City Council - Code of Conduct</a> <a href="#">Whitehorse City Council - Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy</a> <a href="#">Whitehorse City Council - Community Local Law 2024</a> <a href="#">Whitehorse City Council - Privacy Policy</a> <a href="#">Whitehorse City Council - Public Interest Disclosure Procedure</a> <a href="#">How to Report a Child Safe Concern   Whitehorse City Council</a>

## Related Legislation

[Local Government Act 2020 - Victoria](#)

[Gender Equality Act 2020 - Victoria](#)

[Equal Opportunity Act 2010 - Victoria](#)

[Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 - Victoria](#)

[Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005](#)

[Child Safe Standards - Victoria](#)

[Child Safety Reportable Conduct Scheme - Victoria](#)

[Child Information Sharing Scheme - Victoria](#)

## Introduction

At Whitehorse City Council we value complaints and encourage people to contact us when they have a problem with our services, actions, decisions, and policies.

Council is committed to:

- enabling members of the public to make complaints about the Council.
- responding to complaints by taking action to resolve complaints as quickly as possible.
- learning from complaints to improve our services.

Council treats every complaint we receive on its individual merits, through clear and consistent processes.

Our complaints policy applies to all complaints from members of the public about Council staff, Council contractors and decisions made at Council meetings.

## Objectives

Our Complaints Policy aims to:

- Keep customers informed about what they can expect during the complaints handling process and how they can escalate their issue if they are not satisfied.
- Ensure our customers' right to comment is protected and promoted.
- Ensure that feedback is handled in a fair, unbiased, and consistent way.
- Provide opportunities to continually improving our customers' experience and satisfaction with our services.

## What is a 'complaint'?

A complaint is a written or oral expression to Council where a response is sought by a person of their dissatisfaction with:

- the quality of an action, decision or service provided by Council staff or a Council contractor.
- a delay by Council staff or a Council contractor in taking an action, making a decision, or delivering a service.
- a policy or decision made by the Council, Council staff or a Council contractor.

## What types of complaints are not handled under this Policy?

- Requests for maintenance to an asset for which Council has responsibility, or reports of a fault with, or damage to
- Claims for compensation.
- Complaints regarding allegations of corrupt conduct. Complaints about allegations of corrupt conduct will be managed in accordance with the procedures detailed in the Protected Disclosure Act 2012.
- Complaints about individual Councillors should be referred to the Mayor, and complaints about the Mayor should be referred to the Chief Executive Officer.
- Workplace grievances, lodged by Council staff, volunteers or contractors.
- Complaints, reports, or allegations concerning abuse, harm or neglect of a child or young person by a Whitehorse City Council employee, Administrator, Councillor, Contractor, or Volunteer.

## Complaints subject to statutory processes

Council reserves the right to exercise discretion to refuse to deal with complaints that are otherwise subject to statutory processes. Where a complaint does not fall within Councils responsibility, we will direct the customer to the appropriate authority or organisation for resolution. This includes decisions and processes related to:

- Building Act
- Planning and Environment Act
- Valuation of Land Act
- Country Fire Authority Act
- Freedom of Information Act
- Public Interest Disclosures Act
- Health Records Act
- Privacy and Data Protection Act
- Infringements issued by Whitehorse City Council
- Any other enabling legislation provides for an independent review or appeal.

## Definitions

<b>Complainant</b>	Person or entity affected by the action or inaction of Whitehorse City Council.
<b>Council Officer</b>	Any person employed by Whitehorse City Council.
<b>Contractor</b>	Third parties carrying out services on behalf of Whitehorse City Council.
<b>Volunteer</b>	Undertakes activity on behalf of Whitehorse City Council in an unpaid capacity.
<b>Council Operations</b>	Refers to all Whitehorse City Council services, activities, processes, policies, and buildings.
<b>Customer(s)</b>	Any party that interacts with Council.
<b>Customer Service Request (CSR)</b>	Refers to a request by a customer for a particular service provided by Whitehorse City Council.
<b>Public Interest Disclosure</b>	A specific class of Complaint (governed by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012) that requires a high level of confidentiality and protection of the Complainant

## How to make a complaint

Any member of the public can make a complaint. An interpreter service is provided for complainants from non-English speaking backgrounds and support is available to people with a disability.

You can make a complaint through any of the following established channels:

**In person****Whitehorse Civic Centre**

379-399 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading  
Monday to Friday: 9am – 5pm

**Box Hill Town Hall**

1022 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill  
Tuesday to Friday: 9am – 1pm

**Phone**

03 9262 6333  
Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS): 131 450

**By post:**

Locked Bag 2 Nunawading VIC 3131 Australia

**Hearing or speech  
impaired:**

National Relay Service (NRS) Tel: 1300 555 727

**Online:**

[Whitehorse City Council - Online Complaints Form](#)

**Email:**

[feedback@whitehorse.vic.gov.au](mailto:feedback@whitehorse.vic.gov.au)

**Authorised third party:**

You may authorise a third party to complain on your behalf.

**Accessibility**

Council is committed to ensuring our complaints process is accessible to everyone. Please advise us if you have specific communication needs or barriers, and we can assist you by:

- using an assistance service, such an interpreter or TTY (for free).
- talking with you if you have trouble reading or writing.
- communicating with another person acting on your behalf if you cannot make the complaint yourself.

## Complaint details

To assist Council in effectively resolving your complaint, we encourage you to provide specific details of the issue, which may include the following:

- your name and contact details.
- the action, decision, service, or policy you are complaining about.
- the reason(s) why you are dissatisfied.
- relevant dates, times, or reference numbers.
- the location of issue.
- any documents that support your complaint.
- the outcome you are seeking from making your complaint.

## Anonymous complaints

We accept anonymous complaints, and where possible, we will action anonymous complaints. If you file an anonymous complaint, we may not be able to provide updates on the outcome, however, we will ensure that all issues raised are addressed.

To ensure that we can properly address your concern, please provide as much detail as possible about the issue, including times, dates, and any involved parties.

## Complaints about child safety

Whitehorse City Council takes all allegations and concerns about potential child abuse seriously and has practices in place to investigate and escalate to authorities, if necessary. Complaints about suspected child abuse involving a council officer will be handled in line with Council's Child Safe Policy. In addition to reporting child safety concerns to the relevant authorities, please report concerns to Council by contacting Council's Child Safety Contact Officer.

Child safety complaints in relation to the disclosure of abuse or harm will be managed by the Whitehorse City Council Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy. The Child Focused Complaints Handling process provides additional guidance to facilitate the prompt, thorough and fair handling of child related complaints.

The Child Safety Reporting Procedure outlines reporting requirements for suspected or actual abuse. This procedure includes information on how to report child abuse and/or neglect concerns within the organisation, and to external authorities.

## Triage and initial assessment

- Early assessment of a complaint helps Councils prioritise and allocate resources fairly. It is also the most efficient way of producing a prompt and proportionate response for every complaint.
- A triage process looks at what the complaint is about, and determines how, who and when to respond. It considers the seriousness and urgency of the issues and the risks. Factors to consider when triaging complaints include:



- What is the complaint about? Some complaints can be dealt with quickly, whereas others may need expert consideration.
- Is there any urgency, such as an immediate risk to the safety or wellbeing of a person, or security of property?
- How serious or complex are the issues?
- Does the complainant have communication needs or personal circumstances that require careful management?
- Are there statutory processes that must be followed? e.g. complaints about infringements through the review processes under the Infringements Act 2006 (Vic).
- Should the complaint be handled by an independent person? It may be more appropriate for an independent officer to deal with it to manage any perceived bias.
- Does the complaint indicate a systemic failing which might affect the broader community?
- What are the prospects of meaningfully investigating or resolving the complaint? The issues may be too old, the person complaining may not be directly affected, or they may want a resolution that Council

## How do we handle complaints?

Council applies a tiered approach to managing complaints. Where possible, we will attempt to resolve your complaint at the time you first contact us. If that is not possible, we will escalate your complaint to the relevant tier.

Frontline Resolution		
We will	Responsibility	Time frame
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a Customer Service Reference Number (CSR)</li> <li>• Make sure we understand the issue and your desired outcome</li> <li>• Provide a response and/or resolution timeframe</li> <li>• Communicate the outcome to you</li> </ul>	All staff	<p>Immediately if we can, or an acknowledgement within two business days, and resolution within five business days.</p> <p>If we need more time to investigate, we will keep you informed with the reasons why.</p>



Internal Review		
We will	Responsibility	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a Customer Service Reference Number (CSR)</li> <li>• Make sure we understand the issue and your desired outcome</li> <li>• Provide a response and/or resolution timeframe</li> <li>• Communicate complaints process</li> <li>• Provide internal review options.</li> </ul>	Customer Advocate Team	<p>An acknowledgement within two business days, and a resolution within 28 business days.</p> <p>If we need more time, we will keep you informed with the reasons why.</p>



External Review		
We will	Responsibility	Contact
We will provide details for the Victorian Ombudsman and/or other external agencies if you are dissatisfied with how we managed a complaint.	Victorian Ombudsman	<p>Website:  <a href="https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/complaints/make-complaint/">https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/complaints/make-complaint/</a></p> <p>Phone:            1800 806 314            (9am-5pm Monday - Friday)</p>

## Roles and responsibilities of Council staff

Role	Responsibility
All staff will:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarise themselves with this policy and the Council's complaint process.</li> <li>• Assist members of the public to make a complaint.</li> <li>• Receive and assess complaints and where possible resolve the complaint at the point of contact, within the scope of their role.</li> <li>• Where required, seek the assistance of their supervisor, to enable the complaint to be resolved at this point of contact.</li> <li>• Lodge complaints in Council's customer service request management system or forward the complaint to the Customer Advocate Team.</li> <li>• Record related correspondence in the related system.</li> <li>• Manage complaints that are escalated and or referred for internal review in line with the complaints policy and related procedures.</li> <li>• Promote positive behaviors and practices relating to enabling, responding to, and learning from complaints.</li> <li>• Support service improvements that arise from complaints.</li> </ul>
Customer Advocate Team will:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and report on all complaints.</li> <li>• Categorise complaints based on urgency, complexity, and subject matter, ensuring they are directed to the correct team or department.</li> <li>• Work toward resolving the issue in a fair, timely, and satisfactory manner while keeping all parties informed.</li> <li>• Handle complaints in line with complaints policy and related procedures.</li> <li>• Where required, seek assistance from relevant senior officers to enable the complaint to be resolved.</li> <li>• Assess the resolution provided by officers to ensure it addresses the complaint.</li> <li>• When required, advise customer of avenues for external review.</li> <li>• Identify recurring issues and patterns in complaints to recommend improvements to policies, procedures, and services.</li> <li>• Collaborate with other departments to implement preventive measures and resolve systemic problems</li> <li>• Provide ongoing training for staff in the complaints department to ensure they are well-equipped to handle a variety of situations and maintain professionalism in all interactions</li> <li>• Ensure that the complaints process complies with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements.</li> </ul>

## Contractors on behalf of Council

Council retains a level of responsibility for services carried out by contractors on its behalf. This policy applies to all contractors carrying out services or works on Council's behalf to the extent provided under their contractual obligations with Council. In the event where complaint is made in relation to services or works carried out by a contractor:

- Contract managers are responsible for ensuring that contractors are compliant and aware of the policy
- All complaints against contractors will be investigated and assigned to the appropriate department and/or case manager
- The case manager examining the complaint will liaise with both the customer and the contractor

## How to request an external review

There are external bodies that can deal with different types of complaints about us. You can request an external review from the following organisations.

Complaint	Organisation to contact for external review
Actions or decisions of a Council, Council staff and contractors.  This includes failure to consider human rights or failure to act compatibly with a human right under the <i>Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006</i> (Vic)	Victorian Ombudsman <a href="http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au">www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au</a>
Breaches of the Local Government Act	Local Government Inspectorate <a href="http://www.lgi.vic.gov.au">www.lgi.vic.gov.au</a>
Breach of privacy.  Complaint about a freedom of information application	Office of the Victorian Information Commission <a href="http://www.ovic.vic.gov.au">www.ovic.vic.gov.au</a>
Corruption or public interest disclosure ('whistleblower') complaints	Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission <a href="http://www.ibac.vic.gov.au">www.ibac.vic.gov.au</a>
Discrimination	Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission <a href="http://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au">www.humanrights.vic.gov.au</a>

## Learning from complaints

Complaints provide us with valuable feedback about how we are performing. We record and regularly analyse our complaint data to identify trends and potential issues that require further attention.

We will use this information to come up with solutions about how we can improve our services. We are open and transparent about the complaints we have received, and what we have done to resolve them.

## Privacy and confidentiality

Council values your privacy when collecting information to respond to a complaint. This Complaints Policy is subject to our Privacy Policy which outlines how we manage personal information.

We will keep your personal information secure. We will use your information to respond to your complaint and may also analyse the information you have provided for the purpose of improving services that relate to your complaint. Where we publish complaint data, personal information will be removed.