



Whitehorse Complaints and Feedback Policy

1. PURPOSE

Whitehorse City Council's **Complaints and Feedback Policy** provides a framework for how we manage all forms of customer feedback, including customer compliments and complaints.

2. OBJECTIVES

To support Council's aim of providing excellent customer experiences and service delivery, Council is committed to:

- Enabling customers to provide feedback and complaints to Council with ease
- Ensuring we respond and take action to resolve complaints
- Providing a process of review if customers are unsatisfied with the outcomes of their complaint
- Identifying opportunities to learn from feedback and improve our services.

3. SCOPE

The policy applies to customer feedback, compliments and complaints received verbally or in writing via communication channels including phone, in person, via mail or online. It also includes feedback and complaints submitted on a customer's behalf with the assistance of a frontline staff member or other specialised translation/ advocacy service.

The policy covers feedback and complaints regarding Council's services, actions and decisions, including decisions made at Council meetings. It covers complaints about Council staff, including the CEO, Council volunteers and Council's contractors. It does not cover complaints against individual Councillors.

Whilst feedback can relate to all Council interactions, requests for service are not considered as complaints or feedback in the first instance. Requests for service or enquires not regarded as complaints or feedback under this policy include:

- A request for works or services to be provided
- A request for information or explanations about policy or procedure
- Reports of damaged or faulty infrastructure (e.g. a road pothole)
- Reports of hazards (e.g. a fallen tree branch)
- Reports about neighbours or neighbouring property (e.g. noise or unauthorised building works)
- The lodgement of an appeal or objection in accordance with a standard procedure or policy

4. HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

Any member of the public may make a complaint or provide feedback. Complaints or feedback can be made by:

Phone: 03 9262 6333
Email: customer.service@whitehorse.vic.gov.au
Website: www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au/contactus
Webchat: www.whitehorse.vic.gov.au

In Person: Whitehorse Civic Centre
379-399 Whitehorse Road
Nunawading VIC 3131

Box Hill Customer Service Centre
Box Hill Town Hall
1022 Whitehorse Road
Box Hill VIC 3128

Forest Hill Customer Service Centre
Shop 275, Forest Hill Chase Shopping Centre
270 Canterbury Road
Forest Hill VIC 3131

Mail: Whitehorse City Council
Locked Bag 2
Nunawading Delivery Centre VIC 3131

Complaints, compliments and feedback will be accepted by direct messages via Council-owned social media channels.

Comments on Council's social media pages will not be treated as feedback or complaints under this policy. Comments will not necessarily receive a personal reply.

Council monitors comments on its social media pages. If themes emerge or specific suggestions are made, these are passed on to the relevant departments.

5. DISCRETION NOT TO CONSIDER A COMPLAINT

Council has a discretion not to consider certain matters under this policy. If a matter is more appropriately considered under a different process, policy or by another agency or jurisdiction, Council will advise the customer it is not considering the matter under this policy. Council will provide suggestions as to the alternate appropriate process and how to access it, where relevant.

Examples of such matters include:

- Complaints relating to a planning application or decision
- Complaints relating to infringements
- Complaints relating to building, health and food services
- Complaints alleging fraud, corruption or other criminal behaviour
- Freedom of information request
- Work related grievances from our staff (i.e. complaints relating to their employment).
- Complaints already reviewed by an external agency
- Complaints about services provided by another agency, government department or 3rd party, independent of Council (eg, Parks Victoria, water or utilities providers, transport agencies)
- A matter more appropriately addressed under Council's Child Safe policy or the Child Safe Standards.

6. DEFINITIONS

CEO - is the Chief Executive Officer of Whitehorse City Council

Complainant – a person or organisation that makes a complaint.

Complaint – an expression of dissatisfaction with

- the quality of an action taken, decision made, or service provided by a member of Council staff, a Council volunteer or a contractor engaged by the Council; or
- 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; or
- a policy or decision made by a member of Council's staff, or a contractor engaged by Council, including decisions made at Council meetings

Compliment – unsolicited praise or appreciation for a Council service, action or facility; but does not include routine thanks or expression of appreciation in the course of a transaction.

Contractor - is any third-party engaged by the Council to carry out functions on the Council's behalf.

Council staff, Council employee - is any person employed by the Council to carry out the functions of the Council including the Council's CEO

Customer – any party that uses or is affected by Council services, facilities, programs or regulatory functions, including making enquiries about those functions.

The Council - means the body of elected Councillors

Frontline Staff – all Council 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

Reviewer – a manager or senior officer of Council who will investigate and respond to a matter when a customer is not satisfied with the resolution of their complaint at first instance and seeks an internal review. The Reviewer will be independent of the initial decision or action and will not be the same person who handled the original complaint.

7. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Council encourages customers to make complaints, provide feedback, offer suggestions and express their opinion or concerns about the services it provides. Council is committed to resolving the complaints it receives and considers effective complaint handling to be a part of its core business. Council will listen to and value feedback as opportunities to find service improvements.

The **Complaints and Feedback Policy** is underpinned by the following principles:

Commitment

Council values customer feedback and is committed to resolving service failures, listening to suggestions and considering opportunities for service improvements.

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 can 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. This Policy will also be readily accessible and available to all staff electronically or in hard copy format.

Transparency

Council's Policy 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 are 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 requires the respect, cooperation and assistance of complainants in providing further information to Council staff if requested, to ensure expediency in resolving an issue.

Privacy

All information provided by a customer 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 it may be difficult to resolve an issue if a customer does not provide their contact information.

Accountability

Council is accountable, both internally and externally for its decision-making and complaint handling performance. All complaints and feedback will be acknowledged (unless the customer says they do not wish or need to be contacted on the matter), allocated a reference number and responded to promptly within Council's established service standards. In responding to a complainant, Council will provide a clear 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. Suggestions will be routinely passed on to the relevant areas of Council for consideration.

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

8.1 All Employees

All employees are required to familiarise themselves with this policy, their responsibilities under the policy and to participate in relevant training. They are to recognize and facilitate feedback when a customer wishes to provide it.

8.2 Managers and Coordinators

All Managers and Coordinators are responsible for supporting employees and ensuring employees are aware of and comply with the policy. Managers are responsible for ensuring complaints are managed in accordance with the policy.

8.3 Directors

Directors may be required to act as a reviewer when a customer is not satisfied with the resolution of their initial complaint.

8.4 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.

9. PROCESSES FOR RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK

9.1 Suggestions and General Feedback

Suggestions and general feedback other than complaints will be acknowledged and passed to the relevant department for consideration.

9.2 Compliments

Compliments will be acknowledged and passed to the relevant department for consideration. Compliments about individual officers will be communicated to the officer and their manager.

9.3 COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCESS

The Complaint Handling Framework is a 4-tier model which aligns with the Victorian Ombudsman’s **Councils and Complaints: A Good Practice Guide 2nd edition July 2021**.

Tier 1 – First contact complaint resolution, where possible

<p>Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listen and clarify the complaint at hand ▪ Identify the desired outcome ▪ Attempt to resolve the issue immediately ▪ Outline the complaint process ▪ Provide a reference number ▪ Communicate who will respond to them ▪ Advise response and/or resolution timeframe 	<p>Responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frontline staff and officers who directly can receive feedback 	<p>Time Frame:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Immediately if possible, and within the scope of authority ▪ Acknowledgement within 2 business days ▪ Resolution within 7-10 business days
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Tier 2 – Investigation, if required (as alternate to Tier 1)

<p>Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allocate the matter for further investigation to the relevant department ▪ Advise complainant of process ▪ All relevant notes concerning the matter will be investigated, analysis will be undertaken and the applicable standards / procedures / policies identified and if they have been adhered to ▪ Provide progress updates for more complex issues ▪ Communicate the estimated time required for resolving the matter ▪ Communicate outcome 	<p>Responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relevant Departmental Manager and/or Coordinator 	<p>Time Frame:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acknowledgement within 2 business days ▪ Resolution within 7 to 30 business days ▪ If we need more time to investigate we will keep complainants informed
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Tier 3 – Internal Review (following a Tier 1 or Tier 2 resolution)

<p>Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review will be conducted including details of all investigations undertaken ▪ Provide progress updates ▪ Advise the complainant in writing of their findings ▪ If the Complainant is not satisfied with the resolution or outcome of an internal review, advice will be then made to seek alternate avenues 	<p>Responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relevant Departmental Manager, Director or CEO (where not involved in the original complaint) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acknowledgement within 2 business days ▪ Resolution within 7 to 30 business days ▪ If we need more time to investigate we will keep complainants informed
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Tier 4 – External Review

	<p>Responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Victorian Ombudsman or other relevant review body. 	
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9.3.1 External Review

If complainants remain dissatisfied an internal review, they can refer their complaint to an external organisation. The following organisations deal with different types of complaints.

Ombudsman Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides an impartial service for anyone who believes they have been treated unfairly
Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner ('OVIC'):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for regulating Victorian Government agencies and local councils in regards to information access, information privacy, and data protection
Dispute Settlement Centre (Victorian Department of Justice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides an informal, low cost and impartial service that can be used for private disputes between neighbours
Health Complaints Commissioner (HCC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An independent statutory body that resolves complaints about healthcare and the handling of health information in Victoria. They can also investigate health service providers who may pose a serious danger to the public.
Independent Broad-Based Anti-corruption (IBAC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigates complaints regarding the improper conduct of public officers and public bodies
Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for eliminating discrimination in Victoria. Offers information, education and consultancy services, conducts research and provides legal and policy advice
Local Government Inspectorate Investigates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints concerning breaches of the Local Government Act by Victorian councils
Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tribunal that hears and decides civil and administrative legal cases in Victoria
Victorian Electoral Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council elections

10. HOW WE LEARN FROM COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

Complaints, suggestions and other feedback from people who use or who are affected by our services provide us with valuable feedback about how we are performing and how we might improve our services.

We regularly analyse our complaint data to identify trends and potential issues that deserve further attention. We use this information to improve our services.

11. YOUR PRIVACY

We keep your personal information secure. We 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 is removed.

12. REPORTING FRAMEWORK

All customer complaints will be formally recorded by Council.

Complaints and other feedback will be reported on annually, particularly to ensure we are complying with the service standards set out in the Complaints Handling Process above.

13. RELATED POLICIES & LEGISLATION

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- 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 Protected Disclosure Procedure
- Whitehorse City Council's Child Safe Policy (in draft at time of endorsement) and the Child Safe Standards

Internal Use Only

14. REVIEW

Responsible Manager: Director Corporate Services

Date Adopted: 13 December 2021

Date of Next Review: 3 years from date of adoption

This policy has been reviewed for Human Rights Charter compliance.

A Gender Impact Assessment has also been undertaken. The policy is not expected to impact people of different genders in different ways.