



Newcastle City Council
Policy

Customer Complaints Handling Policy

October 2016

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List superseded policy/ies	This policy supersedes the Complaints Handling Policy - ECM 4140215
Relevant strategic direction	Open and Collaborative Leadership
Relevant legislation/codes	Local Government Act 1993 Government Information Public Access Act 2009
Related policies/documents	Code of Conduct Internal Reporting Policy - Public Interest Disclosures Customer Service Policy (2010) Managing Unreasonable The person making the Customer Complaint Conduct Policy (2010) Effective Customer Complaints Handling Policy User Guide – NSW Ombudsman (2004) Managing Unreasonable The person making the Customer Complaint Conduct Practice Manual – NSW Ombudsman (2009) Practice Note No.9 – Complaints Management in Councils – Division of Local Government (July 2009)
Related forms	Complaints Form available on Council's website

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Part A Preliminary

1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Council handles Customer Complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively by:
- 1.1.1 responding in a timely, consistent and cost-effective way to issues raised by people making a Customer Complaint;
 - 1.1.2 boosting public confidence and perception of the quality of the services provided by Council; and
 - 1.1.3 providing information that can be used by the organisation to deliver quality improvements in services, staff and Customer Complaint handling.

2 Principles

- 2.1 Council commits itself to the following principles in managing Customer Complaints:
- Accountability and transparency - the policy provides a framework for transparency and a system of accountability.
 - Providing a timely resolution of Customer dissatisfaction about Council services.
 - Ensuring Customer Complaint data assists Council to identify problems and improve procedures, where applicable, to prevent similar dissatisfaction and Customer Complaints in the future.
 - Ensuring all Customer Complaints are dealt with in a timely, systematic and consistent manner, transparent to both the person making the Customer Complaint and Council Officers.
 - Ensuring Council Officers are provided with adequate and on-going training, supervision and guidance in the handling of Customer Complaints. Encouraging feedback as a means to resolving problems and improving services to the community.
 - Acknowledging the need to appropriately use Council resources in the handling of Customer Complaints.
 - Ensuring all Customer Complaints are acknowledged in a timely fashion.

3 Definitions

- 3.1 **Customer Complaint** means a formal expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the Council, our services, staff or the handling of a complaint made by a member of the public (other than those detailed at 4.1 below) where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or required.

For the purposes of this policy a Customer Complaint is not a routine service request or any other matter where Council has had no prior opportunity to provide a satisfactory service. A Customer Complaint is defined by the desire of the customer to formally express dissatisfaction with services, actions or inactions that don't meet the customer's expectations.

4 Scope

- 4.1 This Policy does not cover complaints that are:
- 4.1.1 Staff grievances;
 - 4.1.2 Public Interest Disclosures made by Council staff;
 - 4.1.3 Complaints against Councillors;

- 4.1.4 Code of Conduct complaints against staff;
- 4.1.5 Routine service requests (e.g. requests for service such as a once off missed bin or first request for repair of a pothole); and
- 4.1.6 Requests for information (GIPA requests).

Where a complaint, falling into one of the categories listed in clauses 4.1.1 - 4.1.6 above, is received by Council, it will be dealt with in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct, grievance procedure, Public Interest Disclosure Policy or in accordance with relevant legislation or other relevant Council policy.

Part B Council's commitment to Customer Complaints Handling

5 Making a Customer Complaint

Lodging a Customer Complaint

5.1 Customer Complaints can be made as follows:

- Email details of Customer Complaint to mail@ncc.nsw.gov.au or
- Online at [ncc.nsw.gov.au/complaints form](http://ncc.nsw.gov.au/complaints_form)
- Post: PO Box 489 NEWCASTLE NSW 2300
- Telephone
- In person

5.2 Council encourages the person making the Customer Complaint to do so in writing to ensure Council has all the relevant information and facts. If a person has difficulty making a Customer Complaint in writing, they should speak to Council's Customer Service Team on 4974 2000.

5.3 If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/ or resolution of their Customer Complaint, Council will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a Customer Complaint with their consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

Anonymous complaints

5.4 Council accepts anonymous Customer Complaints and will carry out an investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided.

Early resolution

5.5 Where possible, Customer Complaints will be resolved by Council's Customer Service Business Unit at first contact with Council.

Acknowledgment

5.6 Where a Customer Complaint cannot be resolved at first contact, Council will assess and prioritise Customer Complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

5.7 Council is committed to providing high levels of customer service and will acknowledge a Customer Complaint within two business days of receipt of the Customer Complaint.

Initial assessment

- 5.8 When determining how a Customer Complaint will be addressed, Council will make an assessment as to the seriousness, complexity and urgency of the complaint.

Finalisation of the Customer Complaint

- 5.9 Following consideration of the Customer Complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, Council will contact the person making the Customer Complaint within 21 calendar days and advise them of:
- 5.9.1 the outcome of the Customer Complaint and any action taken;
 - 5.9.2 the reason/s for the decision;
 - 5.9.3 the remedy or resolution/s that Council proposes to put in place, where relevant; and
 - 5.9.4 the options for review.
- 5.10 If there are any delays in responding to a Customer Complaint, Council will keep the person making the Customer Complaint informed.

6 Objectivity and fairness

- 6.1 Council will address each Customer Complaint in a fair and unbiased manner.
- 6.2 Council will ensure that the staff member handling a Customer Complaint is different from any staff member whose conduct or service is the subject of the Customer Complaint.
- 6.3 Conflicts of interests, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly.

7 Privacy

- 7.1 Personal information that identifies the person making the Customer Complaint will only be disclosed to a third party as permitted under the relevant privacy laws and other relevant legislation.

8 Review options

- 8.1 Where the person making a Customer Complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of Council's decision about their Customer Complaint; they may seek;
- 8.1.1 An internal review - this will be conducted by a more senior staff member or the Public Officer independent of the original decision; or
 - 8.1.2 Council will advise the person making the Customer Complaint of appropriate options for an external review of Council's response directly with the agencies listed at **Annexure A**.

9 Continuous improvement

- 9.1 Council is committed to improving the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of its service delivery by:
- 9.1.1 supporting the making, and appropriate resolution, of Customer Complaints;
 - 9.1.2 implementing best practices in Customer Complaint handling;
 - 9.1.3 regularly reviewing this Policy and Customer Complaint data;
 - 9.1.4 implementing appropriate service changes arising out of its analysis of Customer Complaints data; and
 - 9.1.5 continually monitoring its systems and processes and amending and updating them as required.

Annexure A - External agency contact details

Customers are welcome to seek advice or lodge complaints with external agencies. Find below some relevant contact details:

Office of Local Government

5 O'Keefe Avenue
NOWRA NSW 2541
P 02 4428 4100
F 02 4428 4199
TTY 02 4428 4209
E dlg@dlg.nsw.gov.au
W www.dlg.nsw.gov.au

NSW Ombudsman

Level 24, 580 George Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000
P 02 9286 1000
F 02 9283 2911
E nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au
W www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

Independent Commission Against Corruption

Level 21, 133 Castlereagh Street
SYDNEY, NSW, 2000
P 02 8281 5999
F 02 9264 5364
TTY 02 8281 5773
E icac@icac.nsw.gov.au
W www.icac.nsw.gov.au