
PROCEDURE

Verbal complaint

An Employee receiving a verbal complaint must record the details on the Complaints Form, register as incoming correspondence and forward the matter to the CEO.

Written complaint

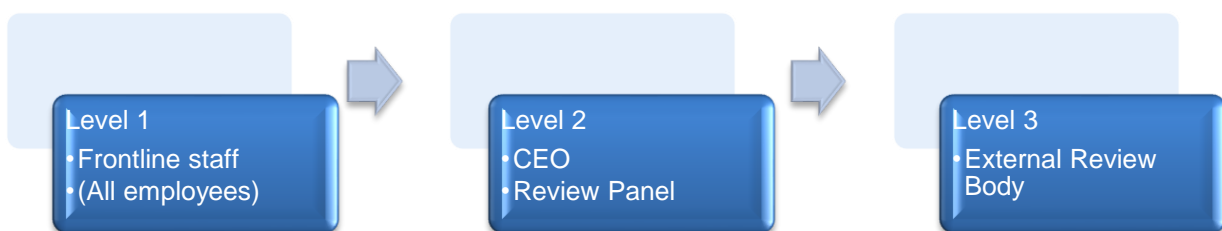
All complaints received in writing must be registered as incoming correspondence in Council's record management system, and forward the matter to the CEO.

Acknowledgement

- A complaint must be acknowledged within **five (5) business days**. This acknowledgement can be an important tool in managing the Complainant's expectations.
- The acknowledgement should outline the complaint process and provide contact details. It should also note how long it is likely to take to resolve the complaint and when the Complainant will next be contacted.
- Written acknowledgement can be beneficial but is not always necessary. If the complaint is made by telephone and cannot be resolved straight away, it could be more efficient to explain verbally how the complaint will be handled.

Employees guidelines – review of the complaint

Dealing with complaints is not somebody else's problem; it is every Employee's responsibility. If you receive a complaint you may not be the most appropriate person to resolve it, but the process does start with you recording it, even if you have no further involvement. The Employee first receiving the complaint is responsible for initiating the process.



Actions to be undertaken (Level 1):

- Be courteous - greet the person properly, advise them of your name and position, ask how you can assist them;
- Listen to what they have to say, give them time to tell their story;
- Use good listening skills, maintain eye contact, lean forward if sitting down, adopt an open body posture;
- Seek clarification of any points you are not clear on in a non-judgemental way;
- If known, provide any relevant information that will assist the Complainant to better understand the decision or action that they complained about;
- Make it clear you understand the complaint - summarise the main points and check that you have got them right;



- Ask, “If it is possible, what would you like us to do?”;
- Advise clearly what you can and cannot do;
- Provide the customer with a copy of the Council’s “Complaint Form”, if possible try to meet any reasonable requests that would resolve the matter if within delegated authority limits, or advise that the matter must be handled by the Chief Executive Officer or an independent external review body. If you have to refer the matter on, refer it to the appropriate person, don’t just “palm it off”;
- Show empathy - don’t dismiss the complaint out of hand;
- Treat the Complainant respectfully, pleasantly and professionally;
- Decide what is the appropriate course to take;
- Take this action and inform the Complainant;
- Record the complaint using Council’s standardised “Complaint Form” ensuring that it is signed, dated and the Complainant’s address is recorded;
- Provide a copy of the completed Complaint Form to the Complainant;
- Ensure that the complaint is registered through the internal complaints register including subsequent action taken or referral to next level, for later trend analysis; and
- Follow up in writing on action taken (i.e. if verbal apology given, confirm in writing).

When to refer a complaint on (Level 2):

- When the complaint is about your own conduct and you are not confident that you can deal with it fairly and objectively or when the Complainant requests it be dealt with by another officer - Refer to Chief Executive Officer;
- When the complaint is outside your authority or area of expertise - Refer to Chief Executive Officer; or
- When an Employee or Elected Member is alleged to have committed a criminal offence, acted corruptly or engaged in misconduct behaviour or other serious or controversial conduct or when significant disciplinary action is a possible outcome - Refer to the Chief Executive Officer.

External Review Body (Level 3)

Where the Complainant is still dissatisfied with the decision, the Complainant is to be advised of the alternative agencies and departments available for independent review of the complaint. These agencies include, but are not limited to:

- State Ombudsman;
- Corruption and Crime Commission;
- Department of Local Government;
- Equal Opportunity Commission;
- WA Police; and
- Commonwealth Ombudsman

Conciliation

If a review is not an option, then the next phase should be conciliation.



Complaints about personnel, especially rudeness or other improper conduct complaints, often are more conducive to semi-formal conciliations. The aim is to prevent the complaint from escalating into a larger and more time-consuming dispute.

Often, prompt attention to a complaint may be better received and may result in conciliation being achieved to the satisfaction of the parties in a short period of time.

If the matter is complicated and emotions play a substantial part, the elapsing of time can assist in allowing tempers to cool, advice be obtained and alternatives to be investigated and considered.

Conciliation should not be undertaken in the following cases:

- a) The complaint is complex;
- b) The facts are likely to be in dispute and investigation may be needed;
- c) Disciplinary action is a strong possibility;
- d) The outcome the Complainant is demanding cannot be provided by the conciliator; or
- e) Questions of precedence for the organisation may be involved.

Apology

“A sincere apology for errors can be a potent weapon in resolving complaints.”

If an apology is warranted, it should be given immediately in a sincere manner. If not warranted, an apology for the situation arising that has caused the person to complain can be given without accepting blame for the organisation.