

Nelson City Council

Contact:
Approved by:
Approval date:
Review date:

Organisational policy

Alec Louverdis
Executive team
15 March 2010
March 2015

Complaint and feedback policy

1. Introduction

Nelson City Council is committed to a process of continual improvement of its systems and services. Its process for registering and responding to feedback and complaints about *how it operates, particularly if that falls short of acceptable standards*, is an important part of that commitment. In the first instance, a member of the public would be encouraged to raise any issues or concerns directly with the relevant staff member or their immediate manager who would then aim to resolve the matter promptly.

2. Purpose

This policy provides the context to a process for the Nelson City Council to record public feedback about how the organisation operates, apparent systems or delivery failures or about the quality of its facilities or services, and be open and honest about any mistakes or improvement needed. The Executive Team, management and organisation intend to learn from the feedback to improve future service delivery or performance by Council staff.

3. Objectives

- i. to provide a system to resolve complaints or respond to feedback about the organisation's performance promptly and efficiently and to explain this system to the public
- ii. to improve customer relations and satisfaction with Council services, receptiveness to feedback and its resolution of complaints
- iii. to improve the organisation's performance and efficiency.

4. Background and summary

If a member of the public is unhappy about the delivery of a Council activity or service, or has feedback or suggestions they want to pass on, their first course of action is to directly contact the relevant member of staff, or their manager, who is responsible for the issue in question. In the majority of situations the issue would be resolved immediately to the member of the public's satisfaction.

Only if a member of the public considers their concern has still not been resolved would they direct a 'complaint', as defined below, to the organisation. The relevant manager would investigate the issue, or delegate its investigation, and respond to the person who raised the issue. While a complaint might initially be notified verbally, it would be captured and recorded through the 'Request for Service' system for action, that is, investigation and resolution. It is preferable that the member of the public is encouraged to put their complaint in writing themselves to reduce the possibility that their request is misunderstood.

Information describing the process to the public is to be made available at Civic House and on the Council website.

A later step for an unresolved complaint is that it be directed in writing to the Chief Executive for resolution, as required by the Office of the Ombudsmen. The Office of the Ombudsmen deals with public complaints about central and local government organisations, including the release of official information. If a member of the public considers their concern remains unresolved following recourse to the Chief Executive, they may then contact the Office of the Ombudsmen.

5. Definitions

A **complaint** is:

- an allegation regarding an employee acting contrary to their duties where their conduct or service falls below expected standards; or
- an allegation regarding the Council acting contrary to its by-laws, regulations, policies, legislative requirements or reasonable professional standards.

A complaint or feedback can include concerns that a council service was performed in a substandard manner or has not met reasonable timeframes. It can include any Council activity, including infrastructure, facilities, services or resource management issues.

A complaint may include concerns about a Council service or the reasonable time frame for the delivery of a service.

A **complaint, under this policy, is not**

- an **enquiry**, which is a question regarding council policies, management, services or regulations. These are considered an informal matter to be addressed by the relevant staff. An enquiry only becomes a complaint if the person subsequently makes it clear they wish to lodge a complaint; or
- a **request for service**, which is a request to perform a service such as maintenance and does not include applications made to Council, or
- a **complaint about the actions of a third party** such as noise or dog complaints, or records collected in accordance with **s35 of the Resource Management Act 1991** relating to third parties outside Council, *unless* the concern relates to the action of the Council or its officers in managing such a complaint; or
- a dispute under the Building Act 2004 (note cannot be a determination...that is a DBH function not a BCA function); or
- a dispute about development and/or financial contributions; or
- an objection or appeal under the Resource Management Act

6. Scope of this organisational policy

Council takes responsibility for Council-related issues within its legislative boundaries. Some Council services are provided by outside contractors and in these areas Council remains ultimately responsible for the service provided by those contractors. The contractor is the first port of call for a customer with concerns about their service, but a complaint can be raised with Council if a resolution has not been reached with the contractor.

This policy relates to formal complaints and/or feedback received by the organisation. Compliments and suggestions are also welcomed by Council, but do not fall within the scope of this policy. Neither do initial customer concerns raised with staff that are resolved immediately and directly. This policy does not apply once a complaint has been referred on to the Ombudsmen if the complainant considers has not been resolved following reference to the Chief Executive.

7. Principles

The following principles guide the process and clarify the responsibilities of Council and the person who makes the complaint or provides feedback:

- Council considers that complaints and feedback are a helpful means of improving its systems and services
- Any formal complaint or feedback is to be recorded by the organisation for action (investigation and resolution) with a right of appeal to Council's Chief Executive, who will investigate and attempt to resolve the matter
- Customers are to be informed of their right to take their complaint to the Ombudsman as a next step if it cannot be resolved according to this policy
- Sufficient information is to be supplied by the customer to clarify the nature of the complaint
- Customers can request that their complaint be kept confidential, in accordance with the Privacy Act, and this request will be respected. If a complainant has asked for the matter to be kept confidential but an investigation is not possible without raising the matter more widely the complainant will be advised.
- Responses to complaints will be provided within a reasonable timeframe; complaints will be acknowledged promptly and the complainant informed of the action to be taken and by when
- Complainants are to be informed of progress and the reasons for any delays
- In the interests of prudent management of resources, Council can ensure it is protected from minor or vexatious complaints
- All complaints will be recorded in an appropriate system maintained by the organisation and reviewed regularly by the Executive Team and summarised in Chief Executive reports to Council and annual reports.

8. Process for receiving and processing a complaint or feedback

The process is set out in document [901075](#).

9. Monitoring and Review

The total number of complaints and analysis of them, including whether any were referred to the Office of the Ombudsmen, will be included in the relevant annual report for each financial year.

The is to be regular reporting to the Executive Team, who will be responsible for addressing any trends or implementing improvements in response to the feedback and complaints.

This policy is to be reviewed within five years of approval, no later than by March 2015. It may be revised at any time before that time at the direction of the Chief Executive.