

ADMINISTRATION POLICIES



COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

OBJECTIVE:

To provide a consistent procedure for the expedient management and responses to complaints from members of the public.

POLICY:

1.0 STATEMENT OF INTENT

Walcha Council is a service organisation which aims to provide a high level of Customer Service that exceeds expectation. It is acknowledged that from time to time, Council will not succeed in meeting all customers' expectations. As a result Walcha Council treats all complaints with the utmost seriousness. Every complaint received by Council will be given immediate attention by appropriate staff in order to resolve the issues raised by the complainant.

The intent of this Complaints Policy is to provide a framework to Council for receiving and responding to complaints from the public as a means of improving customer service in all areas of Council's operations. This policy also aims to ensure that issues which are the subject of complaints are addressed promptly, to the satisfaction of the complainant (where possible), and in a manner which, as far as possible, ensures that such issues will not be the subject of future similar complaints.

2.0 DEFINITION

A complaint may be defined as: "an expression of dissatisfaction with the Council's Policies, procedures, charges, staff, agents, or quality of service. A complaint may relate to a specific incident or issue involving Council, or to matters of a more philosophical or general nature regarding Council's processes and/or procedures."

3.0 TYPE AND SERIOUSNESS OF COMPLAINTS

Complaints to Council will vary in type and seriousness. In many circumstances the onus will fall on staff to determine the seriousness of the complaint, and what action may be appropriate in responding to the complainant. Under such circumstances, and where the complaint is deemed to be of a more serious nature, staff should make a written record of the complaint and the advice offered to the complainant, and inform their Manager or Director immediately. Some circumstances however, will not require such action. Minor complaints may be able to be dealt with immediately, to the satisfaction of the complainant.

The following is a guide to dealing with complaints according to their seriousness and implications:

- (a) Complaints addressing issues such as non-urgent maintenance work required at a specific location, non-collection of household waste, or other matters of a minor nature, may be referred to the appropriate Council officer and resolved on the spot. In circumstances where an

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appropriate officer is not available, the complaint should be logged in Council's Action Request System, and referred to the appropriate officer.

- (b) Where the complaint is serious and requires investigation, the Steps for Complaint Handling, outlined in Section 6 of this policy should be followed.
- (c) Where a report to Council is required due to the seriousness or complexity of the complaint, the matter should be referred directly to the relevant Director or General Manager.

4.0 LODGEMENT OF COMPLAINTS:

4.1 Complaints may be lodged with Council in the following ways:

1. By telephone;
2. In person;
3. In writing to the General Manager or other council Officer.
4. Complaints to Councillors who will refer the complaint to the General Manager.

Confidentiality will be maintained where requested by the complainant and principles of Council's Privacy Plan will be observed.

4.2 All complaints within the following categories must be directed to the Public Officer, General Manager or Mayor immediately:

- Complaints about practices or procedures underpinning, or arising from Council's decision making processes; and
- Complaints about the conduct of, or alleging impropriety in the actions of, Council staff or Councillors.

5.0 PUBLIC OFFICER

Under the Local Government act, Council's Public Officer is specifically charged with the responsibility of dealing with complaints from the public concerning Council's affairs (Council's Public Officer is the General Manager's Personal Assistant).

6.0 STEPS FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS

Where a complaint has been lodged with Council, the following steps must be followed by appropriate staff immediately:

1. Where a complaint is received via phone or at the counter, the Customer Service Staff will enter the details in Councils customer service request system and immediately refer the matter to the relevant officer for their attention. All efforts should be made to resolve the issue on the spot. Where this is not possible, the relevant Council officer should provide a written reply within 14 days. If the

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complainant is not satisfied with the response provided, they are to be requested to put their grievance in writing to Council.

2. Where a complaint is received in writing, either as a result of Step 1 above or as the first instance of bringing the issue to Council's attention. The details of the complaint will be entered into Council's Customer Service request system and referred to the relevant officer for investigation. An appropriate written response will be drafted by the investigating officer, reviewed by the relevant Director and signed off by the General Manager. All complaints should be responded to within 14 days. All responses are to stipulate the reasons for making the particular determination.
3. In some instances, particularly where the issues involved are complex; have policy implication; require a policy or require expenditure outside of Council's budget allocations; will require the complaint to be referred directly to a meeting of Council for determination. In this case, the complainant will be advised of this process and when they could be expected to be advised of Council's decision (generally within 7 days of the Council meeting).
4. The result of all complaints, details of the progress made in resolving complaints, any inspections carried out and the date the complaint was resolved are to be recorded in Council's Customer Service Request System.

7.0 APPEALS PROCESS

1. All complainants that appeal are to be provided with a copy of Council's "Compliant Handling" policy.
2. If a complainant is not satisfied with the response provided by a staff member, they are entitled to lodge an official appeal against the decisions. The appeal must be in writing and address the reasons Council provided in making its original decision. The appeal will be placed before Council for determination.
3. If the complainant still remains dissatisfied with the decision of Council, the complainant is to be advised that they may choose to take their grievance to an independent third party, being the NSW Office of the Ombudsman, Level 3, 580 George St, Sydney 2000. Tel: 9286 1000.

8.0 STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES IN DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

Every member of staff is required to be aware of the content of this policy, and the means by which complaints are handled within Council.

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Staff are also required to be aware of their potential role in assisting and directing complainants, and in recording and referring to the Public Officer, any discussion that occurs with complainants.

9.0 COMPLAINTS ALLEGING CORRUPT CONDUCT, PECUNIARY INTEREST, OR IMPROPER USE OF POSITIONS

All complaints alleging corrupt conduct, pecuniary interest, or improper use of position, including complaints made verbally or even anonymously, are to be recorded in the customer request system and referred immediately and directly to the Public Officer, General Manager or Mayor.

Staff receiving and recording such a complaint must ensure that the complaint, and all allegations contained therein, remains confidential, and is not discussed other than with the Public Officer, General Manager or Mayor.

10.0 REPORTING OF COMPLAINTS

On a quarterly basis the Public Officer will provide a summary of all complaints received, to the Directors, General Manager and Councillors. This summary will comprise details of the type and number of complaints received an outline of how complaints were resolved, the average time for resolution of complaints, and recommendations of any changes to procedures etc, made as a result of complaints.

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