

# COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, made either verbally or in writing, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Council or its staff, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.

## The following will not be registered as complaints:

A request for service  
A request for information  
The lodgement of an appeal in accordance with legislation.

## PROCEDURE

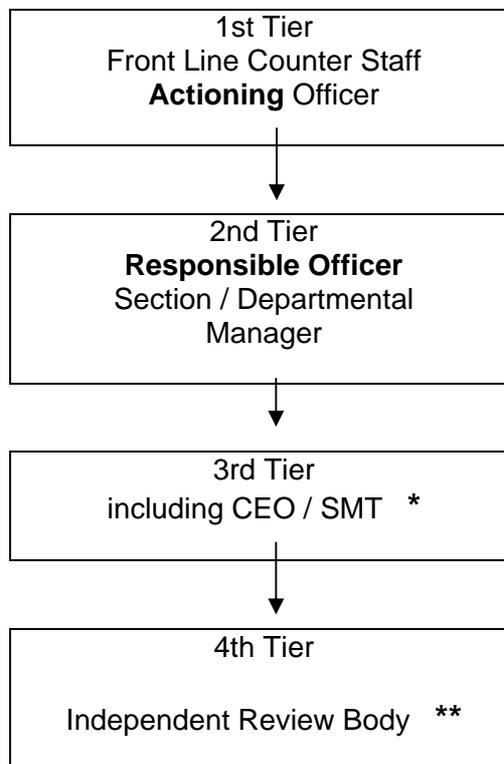
### *Responsibilities*

The Director Corporate Services is responsible for the coordination of the complaints policy and procedure, including the analysis of data.

The Customer Service Centre is responsible for overseeing the process of monitoring and reporting the progress of the complaint and any responses made.

Managers and Directors are responsible for the investigation of complaints directly related to their areas of operation.

### *The System*



\* could include the implementation of Council's Internal Review of Council Decisions

\*\* could include the Ombudsman, a judicial review etc

## *Process for complaint handling*

Complaints should preferably be in writing, addressed to the CEO and signed by the complainant, complete with address.

Telephone and verbal complaints will be entered into the complaints system, but wherever possible, should be confirmed in writing.

Anonymous complaints should also be recorded and assessed and action taken where necessary.

In order to deal with complaints effectively and efficiently in order to resolve the problem, they will be dealt with in the following manner:

1. Front line staff (1st Tier) will handle straightforward, minor complaints. Where these minor complaints cannot be dealt with immediately, they will be acknowledged in writing within 5 working days. The letter will detail what action will be taken, who the responsible officer will be and a contact number, and the anticipated time for a response where this is known.
2. Complaints which cannot be handled by front line staff should be referred to the officer responsible for resolution ie the Actioning Officer (1st Tier), in conjunction with other supervisory staff in that work area, if required. It is expected that the Actioning Officer will acknowledge the complaint and will liaise with the complainant, in order to keep him/her informed of the progress of the action being taken.
3. Any follow up complaint to an original request/complaint will progress immediately to the 2nd Tier and be handled by the Responsible Officer
4. Where a complaint involves a number of different issues which require action by different members of staff, officers in the Customer Service Centre will send a letter of acknowledgement and then enter each complaint as a separate CARS (Customer Action Request System) entry to be forwarded to each relevant officer who will follow up on each complaint until its completion.
5. All written complaints will first be registered by Records, which will then refer the complaints on to the Customer Service Centre for acknowledgement and entry into CARS.
6. Serious complaints involving inappropriate behaviour or staff (eg. rudeness, discrimination or harassment) will be directed to the relevant Divisional Director, and if appropriate, the Human Resource Manager. As in (1), the initial acknowledgement by the responsible officer, detailing the likely action to be taken, will occur within 5 working days.
7. Serious complaints involving personal injury, a breach of the law or financial implications, a Council decision, and complaints which involve the need for a detailed knowledge of Council's operations and procedures, will be directed to the responsible officer/Manager in the first instance (ie 2nd Tier), followed by the CEO / SMT (3rd Tier) where necessary. Once again, the initial acknowledgement should be made within 5 working days by the responsible officer. The Procedure for the internal review of Council decisions should be followed.
8. Any appeal against a response from 1st Tier staff can be referred to a 2nd Tier manager, director or the CEO / SMT for resolution. Any appeal against a response from 2nd Tier staff should be referred to CEO / SMT for resolution and the Procedure for the internal review of Council decisions should be followed.
9. Should the CEO / SMT consider that a complaint is of a nature that requires the involvement of an independent mediator/facilitator, this process could be employed to assist in a 3rd Tier review.

10. In cases where the customer does not accept the outcome achieved by Council as a result of following its complaints procedure, the complainant should be advised of alternative options open to them. These include approaching the Ombudsman, Office of Local Government etc as per the Procedure for the internal review of Council decisions, HACC Policy etc.

Please refer to the attached flow charts for further clarification.

### *Staff support*

Customer service training will be provided to all staff in the first instance. Front line staff will receive additional training in complaint handling and complaint resolution. If required, specialised training in conciliation and mediation could be provided to those staff involved in more serious complaints.

March 2004