

1 PURPOSE

This policy is intended to ensure that City of Darwin has a framework in place for responding to customer feedback, in particular complaints, fairly, efficiently and effectively.

Whilst we appreciate all forms of feedback, it is important that we have a robust complaints management system that:

- enables us to respond to issues raised by people making complaints in a timely and cost-effective way
- boosts public confidence in our administrative process through responsiveness and procedural fairness, and
- provides information that can be used by us to deliver quality improvements in services, systems, practices, procedures, products and complaint handling.

This policy provides guidance to our staff and customers on the key principles and concepts of our complaint management system.

2 SCOPE

This policy applies to our staff receiving or managing complaints from the public made to or about us, and/or how we handle complaints. We will accept complaints regarding our decisions and actions. These complaints will be referred to the relevant department.

However, if a complaint falls into one of the categories below, we will refer the complaint appropriately as set out below and record the referral in our system.

2.1 COMPLAINTS ABOUT ELECTED MEMBERS

Complaints not relating to corruption, about the conduct of an Elected Member, are to be made to the department responsible for Local Government in accordance with the *Local Government Act. 2008* (NT).

However, if a complaint of this nature is made directly to City of Darwin staff, it will be referred directly to the department responsible for Local Government in accordance with the *Local Government Act. 2008* (NT).

2.2 CORRUPT CONDUCT

A complaint, information or matter that involves or may involve suspected corrupt conduct should be made directly to the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC). If the complaint is made to us, this will be referred directly to ICAC, and we will provide information and support the complainant.

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2.3 INTERNAL COMPLAINT OR STAFF GRIEVANCE

Complaints that are considered a staff grievance or are generated internally will be administered in accordance with our internal procedures.

2.4 REVIEWABLE DECISIONS

In some circumstances a review of administrative decisions made by us may be sought. These are in relation to decisions made that are designated as reviewable by the *Local Government Act. 2008* (NT) or by Council resolution. Other matters are dealt with through the appropriate mechanism. For details relating to reviews of administrative decisions refer to Council Policy No. 0043.100.E.R Meetings, Meeting Procedures and Committees.

3 POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 FACILITATE COMPLAINTS

As outlined in the Customer First Strategy, we are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our services, systems, practices, procedures, products and complaints handling.

Any concerns raised in feedback and complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame.

Any compliments or positive recognition will be acknowledged and passed onto the staff concerned as feedback.

We will ask people what outcome they seek from a complaint as part of our complaints processes. We will actively involve complainants in the complaints process as far as practicable and appropriate in the circumstances.

People making complaints will be:

- Provided with information about our complaint handling process
- Provided with multiple and accessible ways to make complaints
- Listened to, treated with respect by staff, and actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate
- Provided natural justice and procedural fairness, and
- Provided written reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review.

We will provide internal appeal mechanisms and will assist in any external reviews.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them, or on their behalf.

We accept anonymous complaints and will carry out an investigation of the issues raised if there is enough information provided.

We will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about us is well publicised.

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We will ensure that our systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance. If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, we will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent.

Making a complaint is free.

3.2 RESPOND TO COMPLAINTS

We will promptly acknowledge receipt of all complaints.

We will assess and prioritise 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.

We are committed to managing people's expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, of the following:

- the complaints process
- the expected timeframes for our actions
- the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- their likely involvement in the process, and
- the possible or likely outcome of their complaint.

We will advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide information about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).

We will also advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to meet our timeframes for responding to their complaint and the reason for our delay.

We will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. Internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker.

Our staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and we will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.

We will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints and/or their representative in the process as far as possible.

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under the Information Act and Council Policy No. 0033.100.E.R Privacy Policy.

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3.3 MANAGE THE PARTIES TO A COMPLAINT

Where a complaint involves multiple organisations, we will work with the other organisation/s where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

Where a complaint involves multiple areas within our organisation, responsibility for communicating with the person making the complaint and/or representative will also be coordinated.

Where our services are contracted out, we expect contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complain management system. We take complaints not only about the actions of our staff but also the actions of service providers.

When similar complaints are made by related parties we prefer to communicate with a single representative of the group.

All staff managing complaints are empowered to implement our complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Staff are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of our complaint management system.

We are committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. At the same time our success depends on:

- our ability to do our work and perform our functions in the most effective and efficient way possible
- the health, safety and security of our staff, and
- our ability to allocate our resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with us, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of our work. As a result, we will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects us and will support our staff to do the same in accordance with Council Policy No. 092 Managing Customer Conduct.

3.4 ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

We will ensure that complaints are recorded in a systematic way so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis. Regular analysis of these reports will be undertaken to monitor trends, measure the quality of our customer service and make improvements.

We will continually monitor our complaint management system to:

- ensure its suitability for responding to and resolving complaints, and
- identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system.

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Monitoring may include the use of audits, complainant satisfaction surveys and online listening tools and alerts.

We are committed to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of our complaint management system. To this end, we will:

- maintain open and regular support for the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- regularly review the complaint management systems and complaints data; and
- implement appropriate system changes arising out of analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system, and
- extract available data to provide reports.

The Chief Executive Officer shall advise Elected Members as soon as reasonably possible of any complaints from:

- the Anti-Discrimination Commission;
- ICAC (where so authorised);
- The Commissioner of Police (where so authorised);
- Fair Work Australia; and
- The NT Ombudsman.

4 DEFINITIONS

Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, products, responsiveness and/or complaint handling, where a response or resolution is expected.

A complaint covered by this policy can be distinguished from:

- staff grievances
- notifiable disclosures made by our staff
- responses to requests for feedback about the standard of our service provision
- reporting of problems or wrong doing merely intended to bring a problem to our notice
- with no expectation of a response
- services requests, and
- requests for information under the Information Act.

Complaint Management System is all policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by us in the management of complaints.

Dispute is an unresolved complaint escalated within or outside of our organisation.

Feedback is opinions, comments and expression of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about us, about our services, products and/or complaint handling where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Grievance is a statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem.

Notifiable Disclosures are disclosures about improper conduct that meet the requirements of the ICAC Act.

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Policy is a statement of intent that sets out how we should fulfil our vision and Strategic Directions.

Procedure is a statement or instruction that sets out how our policies and business will be implemented and by whom.

Service Request is contact seeking an action or outcome in an area of core business, including:

- requests for approval/permits
- requests for action
- routine inquiries about Council matters
- requests for the provision of services and assistance
- reports of failure to comply with Council by-laws or policies
- requests for explanation of policies, procedures and decisions.

5 LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES

Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Act 2017 (NT)

Information Act 2002 (NT)

Local Government Act 2008 (NT) and Associated Regulations

6 PROCEDURES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

City of Darwin 0033.100.E.R Privacy Policy

City of Darwin 0099.100.E.R Customer Conduct Policy

City of Darwin 2107.010.I.R Customer Conduct Procedure

City of Darwin 2105.010.I.R Customer Feedback Procedure

7 RESPONSIBILITY AND APPLICATION

We expect staff at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling. The following table outlines the nature of the commitment expected from staff and the way that commitment should be implemented.

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Who	Commitment	How
CEO supported by Strategic Directions Group	Promote a culture that values feedback, including complaints and their effective resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report publicly on our complaints handling. • Provide adequate support and direction to key staff responsible for handling complaints. • Regularly review reports about complaint trends and issues arising from complaints. • Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly. • Encourage staff to make recommendations for system improvement. • Recognise good complaint handling by staff. • Support recommendations for system, service and/or product improvements arising from analysis of complaint data. • Ensure that compliments and positive recognition of staff is acknowledged.
Executive Manager Corporate and Customer Service	Establish and manage City of Darwin's complaint management system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide regular reports to the CEO and SDG in issues arising from complaint handling work. • Ensure recommendations arising out of complaint data analysis are canvassed with the CEO and SDG and implemented where appropriate. • Recruit, train and empower staff to resolve complaints promptly and in accordance with policies and procedures. • Encourage staff managing complaints to provide suggestions on ways to improve the complaint management system. • Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly. • Recognise and reward good complaint handling by staff.



Staff whose duties include complaint handling	Demonstrate exemplary complaint handling practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. • Comply with complaint handling policies and procedures. • Keep informed about best practice in complaint handling. • Provide suggestions to management on ways to improve the complaint management system. • Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis and evaluation of complaint data as directed by management.
All staff	Understand and comply with complaint handling practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. • Be aware of complaint handling policies and procedures. • Assist people who wish to make complaints to access the complaints process. • Be alert to complaints and assist staff handling complaints to resolve matters promptly. • Provide feedback to management on issues arising from complaints. • Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis and evaluation of complaint data as directed by management.

