

Complaints Policy

November 2014

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1 Policy statement

At Auckland Council we value our customers' feedback. We are committed to ensuring customers, citizens, ratepayers and visitors have the best possible experience with us.

We will take their complaints seriously, work with them to resolve the issue, and will use their comments as an opportunity to learn and improve our services.

2 Policy purpose

The purpose of the policy is to explain:

- our definition of a complaint and a suggestion
- principles we will apply when dealing with complaints and suggestions
- roles and responsibilities.

3 Policy scope

What:

This policy applies specifically to complaints and suggestions.

“LGOIMA”, “Privacy”, and “Ombudsman” requests are managed under the relevant legislation.

Who:

This policy applies to all employees, casual staff, contractors, and temporary staff at Auckland Council and the following Council Controlled Organisations (CCO):

- Auckland Council Property Ltd
- Auckland Council Investments Ltd
- Regional Facilities Auckland
- Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development Ltd
- Waterfront Auckland

This policy does not apply to

- Elected representatives
- Auckland Transport
- Watercare Services Limited
- Externally leased and managed community centres

For the purpose of this policy any reference to Auckland Council shall be interpreted to include the five CCO's described above.

4 Complaints management model



* Covered in this document

5 Definitions

Complaint

A complaint is:

An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of our customers, citizens, ratepayers and visitors about the council's:

- action or lack of action,
- decision, or
- the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the council.

Where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

A complaint is not:

- a request for routine services, but a complaint may result in a request for service
- a request for readily available information
- allegations against a contractor or staff member of serious misconduct such as sexual harassment, fraud, or assault
- complaints from one staff member about another
- matters for which there is a right of appeal and/or legal remedy
- feedback as part of a formal consultation process
- a part of a process that the council is obliged or required by statute to apply.

Suggestion

A suggestion is:

Feedback from one of our customers, citizens, ratepayers and visitors about Auckland Council's:

- actions,
- decisions, or
- services provided by or on behalf of the council, for consideration.

Where a response or resolution is not expected.

Complaint level

Level one complaint:

The first time a complaint is raised with the council it is categorised as a level one complaint and follows the standard complaints management process with set service levels.

Level two complaint:

The following may trigger a complaint being escalated to level two:

- request for review of level one decision by customer, either explicit or implicit
- significant risk or complexity
- volume of complaints is significant
- organisational reputation
- difficult behaviour from the complainant.

Level 2 complaint management process and timeframe will be defined on a case by case basis.

6 Principles

This policy adheres to the Auckland Council Guiding Principles.

The following principles are core to how we handle complaints.

We will:

- be mindful of the need to minimise customer effort
- try to see things from the customer's perspective, to understand and address why they think we were wrong
- resolve the complaint as close to the point of service delivery as possible
- treat complaints with priority and give a timely response
- communicate in a way that is easy to understand
- be fair and act with integrity
- take a genuine, fresh look at the issues raised
- not be defensive
- ensure that the issues raised are assessed on their own merits
- learn from complaints and use this knowledge to improve how we do things
- acknowledge our mistakes and put them right if we can
- maintain a centralised register of all complaints, suggestions and compliments
- manage complaints in accordance with the defined and agreed processes and procedures
- actively manage any customer conduct that negatively and unreasonably impacts on the organisation and our staff
- educate our staff to apply the policy, processes and procedures for complaints resolution.

As far as possible, complaints will be handled with discretion and in accordance with the Auckland Council's Privacy Policy.

7 If we can't resolve the issue together

Sometimes Auckland Council cannot provide the outcome that the complainant seeks.

- If all the Auckland Council Guiding Principles have been adhered to and procedural requirements met, a final response will be provided and the matter closed
- If the complainant thinks that they have been treated unfairly by the council, they can refer the matter to the Ombudsman who may be able to assist.

In a very small number of cases, the complainant may choose to interact with the council in a manner that is inappropriate.

This behaviour may impact on:

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

When this happens, the council will take action to manage any customer conduct that negatively and unreasonably impacts on the organisation and its staff.

The council's action to this may include:

- the opportunity for the complainant to re-engage in an more appropriate manner
- consideration of the customers' behavior under the Unreasonable Complainants Conduct (UCC) Policy
- no response taken in relation to the conduct.

In very rare occasions where there is a threat to person or property, staff should use standard security processes or call the Police.

8 Roles and responsibilities

Everyone in the council is responsible for listening and responding to customer feedback.

Refer to Appendix A for setting out the roles and responsibilities of staff for dealing with complaints and suggestions.

9 Related policies and documents

- Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy
- Auckland Council Guiding Principles
- Auckland Council Code of Conduct: Elected Members
- Auckland Council Social Media Policy 2013
- Auckland Council Customer Privacy Policy.

10 Related legislation

- Privacy Act 1993
- Local Government Act 2002
- Health and Safety Act 1992
- Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.

11 Appendix A – roles and responsibilities

Role	Description
Front Line	<p>Where staff have direct contact with customers as part of their role.</p> <p>Responsible for listening to what our customers say, for resolving issues wherever they can and escalating if they cannot resolve them.</p>
Central Admin Hub	<p>Staff with responsibility for conducting initial assessment of incoming complaints, resolving complaints within predetermined boundaries with the support of senior management, or if outside these boundaries, assigning to the relevant expert.</p>
Complaint Owner	<p>Every complaint must have an owner. The owner is defined as the person to whom the complaint has been assigned. The owner is accountable for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the relationship with the customer • communication about the complaint, timeframes and outcome with the customer • delegation of investigation and communication to appropriate experts.
Expert	<p>All staff are experts within their field and anyone may be asked by a complaint owner to investigate and respond to a customer regarding a complaint.</p> <p>As part of this activity, experts will identify any areas for improvement resulting from their investigation.</p>
Complaint Champion	<p>Within their Business Unit, responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting, managing and maintaining the council complaints policy and procedures • providing advice, guidance and constructive challenge on all aspects of complaint handling and resolution • being the conduit for business improvements identified as a result of the complaints process. <p>Complaint champions form part of the governance group for council complaints.</p>
Specialist Advisor	<p>Responsible for providing specialist support and advice to council staff engaged in handling and resolution of complaints.</p>
Approver	<p>Responsible for sign off of Level 2 complaint outcomes and UCC.</p>

Governance Group	<p>The governance group are responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• review complaints information for the entire organisation periodically• ensuring that there is consistency across the council in handling complaints• that learning and improvement opportunities are identified and actioned.
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**Auckland
Council**

Tā Kōwhiri o Tāmaki Makaurau

