

Auckland Council



Formal Complaints Policy

15 December 2022, version 6



Formal Complaints Policy

Our approach

Auckland Council is committed to being accessible and responsive to all customers.

We value feedback and 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 complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve our services.

Included in this Policy

This policy will explain:

- our definition of a formal complaint
- principles we will apply when dealing with formal complaints
- how we will deal with formal complaints
- roles and responsibilities
- record keeping.

This policy applies to all employees, casual staff, contractors, and temporary staff at Auckland Council.

Requests under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, Privacy Act 1993 or complaints to the New Zealand Ombudsman are managed under the relevant legislation.

What is a formal complaint?

We define a formal complaint as:

“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 formal complaint can be received through any channel by any staff member.

A formal complaint is not:

- a request for delivery of 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.

Our Guiding Principles

When handling complaints, we commit to:

- see things from the customer's perspective, to understand and address why they think we were wrong
- resolve the complaint at first point of contact
- 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
- 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.

Our model for handling complaints



At the conclusion of a Level 2 Review – if a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome or feels they have been treated unfairly by council, the customer has the right to ask the New Zealand Ombudsman to consider their complaint.

Roles and Responsibilities

Everyone in council is responsible for owning the customer experience and taking responsibility to ensure issues are resolved.

Specific roles, responsibilities and procedures for staff for dealing with formal complaints are set out in the **Complaints Management Framework**.

General expectations for all staff are outlined below.

There is a wide network of people who are directly or indirectly involved in the formal complaint process whether it forms a defined part of a staff member's role or not. Any staff member could potentially be approached by a customer wishing to raise a complaint; or be asked to assist with an investigation; or approached to contribute their expertise.

As such, at a general level all staff are expected to:

- be impartial, independent, professional and accountable in handling complaints
- be familiar with this Formal Complaints Policy and Council's customer-focused approach to complaints handling
- be aware of their roles, responsibilities in respect of complaints, or where to go for help in how to receive, respond to, resolve or record any aspect of a formal complaint.

Record Keeping

The details of each complaint, key internal and external correspondence and outcomes must be recorded in Council's customer management system (SAP-CRM).

It is the responsibility of all staff to maintain full and accurate records of each complaint in this centralised and accessible location so that it can be retrieved if necessary.

Complaints will be handled with discretion and in accordance with Auckland Council's Privacy Policy. Confidentiality should be observed where appropriate.

Learning from complaints

Auckland Council values complaints and aims to use the lessons learned from complaints to inform and promote service improvements.

Unreasonable Complainant Conduct

People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress, and in a very small number of cases, customers may choose to interact with council in a manner that is inappropriate; and, because of the nature or frequency of the behaviour, is disruptive to the conduct of Council's ordinary business.

We have a separate policy titled the Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy which aims to minimise the potential impact of unreasonable behaviour on staff.

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

Related policies and documents

- Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy
- Auckland Council Code of Conduct: Elected Members
- Auckland Council Customer Privacy Policy

Related Legislation

- Privacy Act 1993
- Local Government Act 2002
- Health and Safety at Work Act 2015
- Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987

Version Control

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