City of Ryde

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Feedback Management Policy

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Version	Issue Date	Author	Reason for Change
0.1	12 August 2010	Customer Service	Initial creation of Customer Feedback Policy. Endorsed by Council
1.0	9 March 2011	Customer Service	Implementation date
2.0	23 April 2021	Communications and Engagement	Document transitioned to new template, revised for plain English and made consistent with current best practices for policies. Procedures removed and placed in their own document.
3.0	11 November 2025	Executive Services and Governance	Amalgamation of Council's previously adopted Customer Feedback, Managing Unreasonable Complainant and Competitive Neutrality and Complaints Handling Policies. Further updates in accordance with current organisational structure and NSW Ombudsman's Guidelines

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1. Scope

The Policy applies to all Council staff, contractors and volunteers who deal with customers, members of the public, other agencies, service providers and community organisations.

2. Purpose

This Policy is intended to ensure that the City of Ryde (Council) handles feedback, including compliments and complaints from the public fairly, efficiently and effectively.

This Policy aims to increase customer satisfaction, strengthen customer input into our services and acknowledge areas of excellence.

This Policy also describes the way in which Council will manage unreasonable complainant conduct.

3. Definitions

Compliment

A compliment is an expression of satisfaction with a Council service or interaction.

Complaint

A complaint is defined by the NSW Ombudsman as:

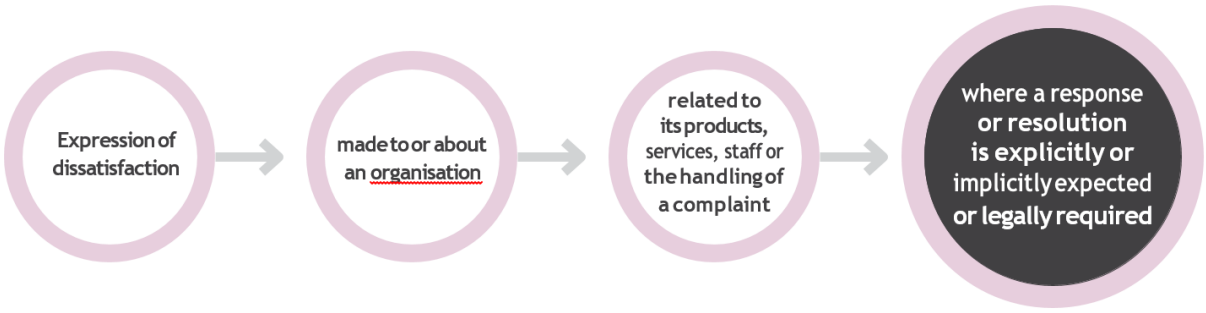


Image copied from NSW Ombudsman, *Effective Complaint Management Guidelines*, November 2024

Complaints can be about:

- a failure to achieve specified standards of service
- a delay in responding
- the behaviour or attitude of Council officials
- the withdrawal or reduction of service
- content on Council's online channels (including third party comments) that is considered to be defamatory

Anonymous complaints
Council encourages complainants to provide full contact information when lodging complaints.

Where complaints are received with no information identifying the complainant, they will be recorded and reviewed with further investigation based on an assessment of the information provided and the seriousness of the complaint.

Feedback
Feedback includes the following:

- Advice on how a service or process could be improved
- Suggestions on new services or facilities
- Expression of dissatisfaction with legislation or regulation
- Expressing an opinion without requiring a response or outcome.

4. Principles

The implementation of this Policy will:

- increase public confidence in Council's administrative processes and service delivery;
- enable Council to respond to issues raised by people making complaints in a timely and cost-effective way; and
- provide information that can be used by Council to deliver improvements to our services, employees and complaint handling procedures.

The objectives of this Policy will be achieved by:

- Ensuring customer complaints are received and considered, and, where necessary, reviewed independently.
- Encouraging and facilitating feedback from customers and using this information to improve levels of service and facilities
- Enhancing staff and customer awareness of the Council's customer service standards and Council's commitment to process improvements.
- Ensuring a high level of customer satisfaction and experience in all areas of service delivery.
- Recognising and acknowledging staff who have excelled in the service they provide to our community.

- Best practice management of complainants who display unreasonable behaviours in their interactions with us.

5. Responsibilities

Position	Responsibility
Customer service officer/ Records officer/ All Staff	• Receive and register compliments and complaints into Council's record keeping systems and referral to the appropriate Council officer
Manager/Director/CEO	• Investigate and respond to complaints
Feedback & Business Improvement Coordinator	• Review complaint process and coordinate regular reporting to Managers and ELT • Identify, review and recommend options for managing unreasonable complainant conduct. • Suggest process or business improvements based on customer feedback
Manager Executive Services and Governance / Chief Executive Officer	• Advise a complainant when Council considers an ongoing matter is closed. • Advise a complainant who Council considers is engaging in unreasonable complainant conduct. • Inform Councillors when a decision has been made in relation to the way in which a person can contact Council as a result of unreasonable complainant conduct • Authorise a warning letter to a person whose conduct is becoming unreasonable
Chief Executive Officer	• Authorise an alternative service arrangement in relation to a person whose conduct is determined to be unreasonable.

6. Service Guarantee

Council appreciates the importance of receiving customer feedback and commits to the following principles:

- Council will accept feedback with courtesy and respect.
- Council will provide options for providing feedback.
- Council will handle feedback in accordance with this Policy and the Complaints Management Procedure.
- Council will publicise on our website and Customer Service Centre how residents, businesses and members of the community can provide feedback to the City of Ryde.
- If a complaint is unable to be resolved by staff, staff will provide advice on the options for referral to an external agency for review.
- Wherever possible, complaints will be resolved as soon as practicable without the need for escalation.
- Council will attend to improvements and educational programs to improve services.
- Council will use the outcomes derived from complaints and feedback as an opportunity to review processes and procedures.
- Council will be fair and respectful in the management of unreasonable conduct.
- Council may issue a warning letter where customers display increasing unreasonable conduct but reserve the right to enact an alternate service agreement if the situation warrants.
- Council will consider an alternative service arrangement when all other reasonable options to address unreasonable conduct have been exhausted.

Lodging a complaint

A complaint can be lodged with City of Ryde by letter, email, verbally (in person or over the telephone) or via a Councillor request and no distinction will be made in the treatment of complaints based on the method in which they are submitted.

Responding to complaints

An acknowledgement of the complaint will be issued within 5 working days of the complaint being received and allocated to the relevant Council officer.

Council staff will aim to complete and respond to complaints within 10 working days.

Complaints of a more complex nature may take longer to resolve. Complainants will be advised if additional time is required.

Should Council decide not to investigate a complaint, the complainant will be advised of the reason for the decision.

7. Complaints - Exceptions

Both compliments and complaints will be recorded and reviewed in accordance with the City of Ryde's Complaints Management Procedure, which serves as an efficient, fair, and accessible mechanism for resolving complaints. It is designed to recognise, promote, and protect the rights of individuals or organisations to comment and lodge complaints.

The City of Ryde will not consider the following as a complaint:

- a second request for service received within the service level timeframe
- complaints about Council's policies or procedures when Council is following its legal duties
- an appeal or objection to a standard Council procedure or policy e.g. objection to a development application, comments on a policy on public exhibition
- employee grievances
- privacy complaints
- data breaches
- responses to requests for feedback about the standard of our service provision
- reports of problems or wrongdoing merely intended to bring a problem to our notice with no expectation of a response (see definition of 'feedback')
- those considered frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith or concerning a trivial matter
- a matter where an adequate remedy or right of appeal exists, whether or not the complainant uses the remedy or right of appeal
- contractual disputes
- a matter that is subject to an existing mediation process
- private neighbourhood disputes
- matters awaiting determination by the Council

Complaints handled outside of this policy
This policy does not apply in circumstance where there is legislation covering the making of a complaint. For example:

- The making of a public interest disclosure under the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022*
- The making of applications for internal review of alleged breaches of privacy under the *Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998*
- The making of applications for access to information under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act)

Complaint Protection
Allegations of victimisation and retribution as a result of lodging a complaint will be investigated. If a complainant experiences such behaviour they should lodge a complaint for the attention of the Chief Executive Officer.

8. Unreasonable Conduct

Council is committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with 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 employees; and
- our ability to allocate resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

Definition
Unreasonable complainant conduct is any behaviour by a person which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the people involved in the complaint process.

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 employees to do the same in accordance with this policy. Council will not tolerate any abusive behaviour or harassment directed towards staff.

Council follows the guidance of the NSW Ombudsman on what constitutes unreasonable complainant conduct and how to respond to it.

Alternative service arrangement
Where Council determines that unreasonable complainant conduct warrants an alternative service arrangement, a formal warning may be issued prior to implementing that arrangement. However, in circumstances assessed as urgent or where there is an immediate risk, Council reserves the right to implement an alternative service arrangement without prior warning.

Reviewing alternative service arrangements
Complainants are entitled to request a review of any decision to implement an alternative service arrangement. A review will be undertaken no less than 6 months and no more than 12 months after any such restriction is imposed, except in exceptional cases.

An alternative service arrangement will stay in effect until written notification is issued by Council that either removes, modifies, or extends the arrangement.

9. Special Complaints

Complaints Concerning the Mayor and Councillors
Complaints concerning the Mayor and Councillors of the City of Ryde Council will be managed in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct and will be referred in the first instance to the Chief Executive Officer.

The Chief Executive Officer will assess the complaint in accordance with Council's Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct to determine if the complaint is to be referred to Council's Conduct Review Panel.

Any matter referred to the Conduct Review Panel will be managed in accordance with Council's Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct.

Complaints Concerning the Chief Executive Officer
Complaints concerning the Chief Executive Officer will be managed in accordance with Council's Code of Conduct and will be referred in the first instance to the Mayor.

The Mayor will assess the complaint in accordance with Council's Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct to determine if the complaint is to be referred to Council's Conduct Review Panel. Any matter referred to the Conduct Review Panel will be managed in accordance with Council's Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct.

Complaints Concerning Corrupt Conduct
Complaints concerning allegations of corrupt conduct (as defined by Sections 7, 8 and 9 of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988*) will be referred immediately and directly to the Chief Executive Officer.

Where there is reasonable suspicion that corrupt conduct is or may be involved, a report will be forwarded to the ICAC.

Under Section 11 of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988*, the Chief Executive Officer must report to the Independent Commission Against Corruption in circumstances where there is reasonable suspicion that corruption in any form has occurred that relates to Council.

Complaints Concerning Child Protection
Council is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Complaints involving children, including allegations of abuse, neglect or inappropriate conduct by Council staff, contractors or volunteers will be promptly assessed and managed by appropriately trained staff in accordance with legislative requirements. Where required, Council will report such matters to the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Police, and/or the NSW Ombudsman in accordance with mandatory reporting and reportable conduct obligations.

Complaints Concerning Pecuniary Interests
Complaints concerning pecuniary interest matters are required to be assessed and investigated by the Deputy Secretary of the NSW Office of Local Government.

All complaints relating to pecuniary interest matters will be forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer for referral to the Deputy Secretary of the NSW Office of Local Government.

Complaints Concerning Public Interest Disclosures
All complaints made that are public interest disclosures will be managed in accordance with Council's Public Interest Disclosures Policy.

Complaints Concerning Defamation
Where a complaint relates to content on the City of Ryde's online channels (including third party comments) and alleges that it is defamatory, Council will act within 7 days of the complaint being made (e.g. by removing the material) to meet legislative obligations. The complainant should be advised of the removal as soon as possible.

Complaints Concerning Competitive Neutrality
Complaints are to be referred to the Manager Executive Services and Governance and will be referred on to the Office of Local Government. Complaints are required to be reported in Council's Annual report.

Complaints alleging breaches of the Competition and Consumer Act 2010
Complaints relating to breaches of the Competition and Consumer Act are to be referred to the Manager, Executive Services and Governance.

Complaints relating to the Modern Slavery Act
Council is committed to identifying, preventing and addressing modern slavery risks in its operations and supply chains in accordance with applicable Modern Slavery legislation. Complaints or concerns relating to suspected modern slavery may be made confidentially through the Council's complaints management process and will be assessed promptly, fairly and sensitively. Such complaints will be referred to the appropriate senior officer for investigation, with due regard to confidentiality, procedural fairness and the safety of affected persons. Where modern slavery risks are identified, the Council will take reasonable steps to address and remediate the issue, including engaging with suppliers, reporting as required, and cooperating with relevant authorities. No person will be disadvantaged or subject to reprisal for raising a genuine concern in good faith.

Complaints relating to the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act
Complaints relating to privacy and breaches of the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act are to be referred to the Manager Executive Services and Governance.

Breaches of the Code of Conduct by Council Staff

Complaints that entail, or are substantially based on, an allegation of a breach of the Code of Conduct by a Council staff member, will be managed in accordance with the relevant provisions of the applicable award under which the staff member is employed.

10. References and Legislation

- Code of Conduct
- Complaint Management Procedure
- NSW Ombudsman, Effective Complaint Handling Guidelines January 2025
- Managing Unreasonable Conduct by Complainants (NSW Ombudsman) August 2021.
- Australia and New Zealand Standard Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations (AS 10002:2022)
- Statement of Business Ethics
- Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW)
- Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)
- Local Government (General) Regulation 2005
- Independent Commission against Corruption Act 1988