

	PROCEDURE	Version:	3
	Compliments and Complaints Handling	Date Adopted:	08 Oct 2024
		Next Review Due:	Oct 2028

1. STATEMENT

This procedure relates to the [Customer Experience Policy](#). It describes Council's procedures for handling customer compliments and complaints and complaint resolution processes.

2. DEFINITIONS

Please refer to the [Customer Experience Policy](#) for definitions that apply to this procedure.

3. PROCEDURE

Council welcomes compliments and complaints as a way of improving its services and programs as well as providing an opportunity to assess current processes.

3.1 Receiving and recording a compliment or complaint

Compliments and complaints can be made in the following formats:

Online form	available on Council's website www.wattlerange.sa.gov.au
Email	council@wattlerange.sa.gov.au Note: A system generated return email is automatically sent acknowledging receipt of an email submission, if you do not receive this, Council may not have received your email.
Letter	PO Box 27 Millicent SA 5280
In person	Wattle Range Council offices
Telephone	08 8733 0900

Council encourages customers to provide their name and contact details for their compliment or complaint to be fully processed. A person may remain anonymous, but where insufficient information is provided, it may not be possible to fully investigate the matter or provide information to the customer on the status of the investigation or actions taken by Council.

All compliments and complaints will be recorded in Council's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

3.2 Recording and acknowledging a compliment or complaint

Details recorded in the CRM may include:

- date and time request received
- name of officer logging the matter
- customer's name
- customer's address
- customer's contact phone number
- customer's email
- details of the complaint or compliment
- officer the matter is assigned to
- Council department matter assigned to

Note that if the complaint or compliment is being made on another person's behalf, the details of that person will also need to be obtained.

All compliments and complaints will be acknowledged verbally or in writing when the request is made. Council will acknowledge the receipt of compliments and complaints within ten (10) business days, unless resolved immediately.

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Any formal written compliments or complaints made to a Council member will be forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for action.

3.3 Compliments

Compliments will be forwarded to the relevant officer and their manager. The manager will recognise/celebrate the relevant officer and inform the person who gave the compliment that the recognition was made.

3.4 Assess and investigate complaints

When a complaint is received, the nature of the complaint must be assessed, as not all complaints require investigation. Many complaints involve communication problems or misunderstandings that can be resolved informally by talking to the complainant, discussion between the parties, or through other processes such as mediation.

Issues to consider in the assessment of a complaint include:

- how and when the complaint should be handled
- who should be involved
- whether further information or investigation is required
- whether there is a risk to public safety
- how serious the complaint is and its significance to the complainant or to Council
- the requirement for immediate action (i.e. urgency)
- complexity
- whether it indicates the existence of a systemic problem
- whether an alternative and satisfactory means of redress is available
- whether the parties are agreeable to informal resolution of the complaint
- whether the complaint is trivial, frivolous or without merit
- the time that has elapsed between the event and the complaint.

All complaints will be handled in accordance with Council's three (3) levels of escalation:

- Level 1 – Frontline handling and early resolution
- Level 2 – Escalation to a manager (or director)
- Level 3 – Internal review of Council decisions.

3.4.1 Level 1 - Frontline handling and early resolution

When addressing and investigating the complaint, be mindful that when people complain they want to:

- feel secure
- be listened to
- be heard but not judged
- have their point of view understood and acknowledged
- be treated as an individual, with respect and courtesy
- be provided with an explanation
- be given an apology
- have corrective action taken as soon as possible
- make sure the problem never happens again.

Council's management of the first contact with a complainant is extremely important. Council employees will try to resolve the complaint at the first contact with the complainant.

Council's employee at the first point of contact is responsible for:

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- advising the complainant of the process that will be undertaken and the timelines for processing the complaint
- accurately recording the details of the complaint.

Handling a complaint at this level can include referral to another officer who was not involved in the matter, or to a team leader or manager.

If the complaint cannot be resolved at the frontline it will be directed to a more senior officer or an officer with greater knowledge of the matter to respond.

When a complaint is to be transferred to another Council employee, all information and details are to be provided. The employee at the first point of contact should:

- advise the complainant of the reason for the transfer of the matter and explain the process and timeframes that will be followed by Council.
- ensure the complaint has been logged and updated before transferring to another Council employee
- brief the employee so that they have sufficient information about the matter to feel comfortable discussing it with the complainant

Having their complaint transferred to another officer can be frustrating for the complainant, so it is important to ensure they do not have to explain everything again.

3.4.2 Level 2 - Escalation to a manager (or director)

Complaints will be handled independently of the original decision-maker or officer involved in the matter who is the subject of the complaint.

The manager (or director, if there is no applicable manager or the manager was the previous decision maker) must ensure all information has been received from the first point of contact and that they are comfortable contacting the customer who made the complaint.

Managers or directors will be involved in complaint handling when:

- it crosses more than one service area within Council
- concerns a contractor or consultant
- alleges improper conduct by a staff member
- has a high degree of complexity and/or
- if a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome or handling of the complaint at the frontline level.

In most cases, it should be possible to resolve complaints to the satisfaction of all parties at this level.

When the complaint cannot be resolved at this level, it will be referred to the CEO who will determine the next course of action.

3.4.3 Level 3 - Internal review of Council decisions

Where complaints require a formal investigation, the [Internal Review of Decisions Procedure](#) is to be followed.

3.5 Provide reasons for decisions

Where a complaint is considered justified, Council will provide a written response to the applicant on the outcome of the complaint's review or investigation.

Appropriate outcomes for the complaint include:

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- providing the customer further information about Council's decision
- an apology for the grievance caused
- expressing empathy and understanding where there is no solution
- a process review to ensure the same issues do not occur in the future
- an explanation
- an admission of fault
- a change in decision
- a change to a Council policy, procedure or practice
- adding a file note acknowledging a correction of misleading records
- the remission of a penalty
- protecting the identity of the complainant
- disciplinary action
- referral of the matter to an external agency for further investigation or prosecution.

Any outcomes that involve the payment of compensation by Council or admission of fault will be provided to the CEO for final review.

In cases where other persons have been affected beyond the customer raising the complaint, the outcome may also include providing a written response to those persons.

Even when the outcome is not what the customer wants, people should feel that they have been listened to, treated with respect and that the process has been transparent and fair.

3.6 Options for redress and close

Council will close the compliment or complaint request once the outcome has been provided to the customer.

If the customer is not satisfied with the closure of a complaint, they can apply for an internal review of the decision in accordance with the [Internal Review of Decisions Procedure](#).

3.7 Records management and review

All complaints and compliments must be recorded in the CRM for analysis and service improvement opportunities.

Analysis of requests, compliments and complaints is a powerful way to help Council deliver service improvements. Council will review and evaluate information gained through its system(s) to identify trends, systemic issues or opportunities to improve services.

Compliments and complaints will be regularly reviewed by ELT.

3.8 Alternative complaint procedures

There are also other complaint procedures that apply to particular types of complaints.

If the complaint would be more properly handled by another process this should be explained to the complainant at the initial contact. For example:

- applications made under the *Freedom of Information Act 1991*
- insurance claims
- decisions made under legislation other than the *Local Government Act 1999*, such as the *Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* or *Expiation of Offences Act 1996*.

It is important to ensure the complainant has enough information to initiate the alternative process.

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It should be noted that there are some types of complaints that must be automatically transferred. These are:

- complaints about a Council decision
- complaints in relation to a Council member or the CEO
- where the complaint is clearly outside the staff member's delegation or area of expertise
- complaints alleging fraud, corruption or other criminal behaviour, which should be referred to SAPOL and/or the Office of Public Integrity (OPI) and/or the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)
- complaints involving an allegation of serious or controversial conduct by a staff member where disciplinary action is a possible outcome.

4. REVIEW

This procedure will be reviewed every four (4) years in consultation with the ELT, Council staff and Council members.

5. AVAILABILITY

This procedure is publicly available on Council's website: www.wattlerange.sa.gov.au.

A printed copy may be purchased from Council offices upon payment of the relevant fee in Council's Fees and Charges Schedule.

6. REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

References	• Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Practice Manual, endorsed by Australian Parliamentary Ombudsman – section 3.4
Relevant Legislation:	• <i>Local Government Act 1999</i> – sections 125, 270 • <i>Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016</i> • <i>Expiation of Offences Act 1996</i> • <i>Freedom of Information Act 1991</i>
Relevant Policies / Procedures / Guidelines	This procedure should be read in conjunction with: • Customer Experience Policy • Corporate Standards for Employees • Public Interest Disclosure Procedure • Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy • Internal Review of Decisions Procedure • Unreasonable Customer Conduct Procedure • Customer Service Charter

7. ADOPTION & AMENDMENT HISTORY

The table below sets out the adoption, review and amendment history of this procedure.

Version No:	Issue Date:	Authorised by:	Description of Change:	Minutes Reference:
1	13 March 2012	Council	Adopted	Folio 4732; Item 11.1.5
2	12 Nov 2019	Council	Reviewed	Folio 8697; Item 15.2.12
3	10 Oct 2024	Council	Reviewed	Folio 11108; Item 15.2.4

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