	<b>PROCEDURE 142</b>	Version:	2
	<b>Compliments and Complaints Handling</b>	Date Adopted:	12 Nov 2019
		Next Review Due:	Oct 2023

This procedure relates to the Customer Experience Policy

## 1. DEFINITIONS

Please refer to the Customer Experience Policy for definitions that apply to this procedure.

## 2. 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.

### 2.1 Receiving and Recording a Compliment or Complaint

A person can provide a compliment and complaint verbally or in writing in the following formats:

Online Form	Available on Council's website <a href="http://www.wattlerange.sa.gov.au">www.wattlerange.sa.gov.au</a>
Email	<a href="mailto:council@wattlerange.sa.gov.au">council@wattlerange.sa.gov.au</a> 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 identity for their compliment or complaint to be fully processed. A person may remain anonymous, but where insufficient information is provided in a request, the matter may not be able to be properly investigated and notification on progress may not be able to be provided to the informant.

All compliments and complaints will be recorded in Council's Customer Request or Records Management System.

### 2.2 Recording and acknowledging a Compliment or Complaint


Details recorded into the Council's Customer Request System include

- Date and time request received
- Lodged by
- Customers Name
- Customers Address
- Customers Contact Phone Number
- Customers Email
- Details of complaints or compliment
- Officer assigned to
- Department

*If the complaint or compliment is being made on another person's behalf the other person's details will need to be captured.*

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 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.

## 2.3 Compliments

Compliments will be forwarded to the relevant officer and their supervisor/manager.

## 2.4 Address and Investigate Complaints

Each complaint must be assessed to determine its nature, how and when it should be handled, who should be involved and whether further information or investigation is required.

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

Issues to consider in the assessment of a complaint may include:

- whether there is a risk to public safety;
- how serious the complaint is and the significance it has for the complainant and for Council;
- the need and requirement of immediate action;
- 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 event and complaint.

All complaints will be handled in accordance with the three (3) Levels of escalation.

- Level 1 – Frontline Handling & Early Resolution
- Level 2 – Escalation to a Senior Officer
- Level 3 – Internal Review of Council Decisions


### 2.4.1 Level 1 - Frontline Handling & 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

How first contact with a complainant is handled is extremely important. Council Employee's will try to resolve the complaint at the first point of contact.

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The relevant Council Employee (first point of contact) is responsible for:

- advising the complainant of the process to be undertaken and the time of the next contact; and
- 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 first point of contact should brief the employee such that they feel comfortable discussing the complaint with the customer.

Ensure that the complaint has been logged and updated before transferring.

Having their complaint transferred can be frustrating for the complainant, so ensure that they do not have to explain everything again.

Advise the complainant of the reason for the transfer of responsibility and explain the process and timeframes which will be followed.

#### **2.4.2 Level 2 - Escalation to a Senior Level**

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

The Senior Level Employee (Manager level or above) must ensure all information has been received from the first point of contact and is comfortable contacting the customer.

Senior Level Employee's will be involved in complaint handling when:

- It ranges across 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 the great majority of cases, complaints should be resolved 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.

#### **2.4.3 Level 3 - Internal Review of Council Decisions**

Where complaints require a formal investigation the Internal Review of Decisions Procedure is to be followed

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## 2.5 Provide Reasons for Decisions

Where a complaint is considered justified, Council will provide a response on the outcome of the complaints review or investigation.

Appropriate Outcomes for the complaint may include:

- Providing the customer further information on 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 policy, procedure or practice
- Adding a file note acknowledging a correction of misleading records,
- The remission of a penalty
- Protection to the complainant
- Disciplinary action
- Referral of a matter to an external agency for further investigation or prosecution.

Any outcomes which involve compensation or admission of fault will be provided to the CEO for final review.

In cases where others have been affected outside the customer raising the complaint the outcome may be provided to them.

Even when the outcome is not what they want, people should feel that they have been treated decently and that the process has been fair.

## 2.6 Options for Redress and Close

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

If the customer is not satisfied with the closure of the complaint, they can lodge a *Level 3 – Internal Review of Council Decisions* and will need to follow the *Internal Review of Decisions Procedure*.


## 2.7 Records Management and Review

All complaints and compliments must be recorded in Council's Customer Request and/or Records Management system for analysis and service improvement opportunities.

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

A quarterly report of compliments and complaints will be provided to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

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## 2.8 Alternative Complaint Procedures


There are also other complaint procedures which 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 outset. For example:

- Freedom of Information applications
- Insurance claims
- Decisions made under legislation other than the *Local Government Act*, such as the *Development Act 1993* or *Expiation of Offences Act 1996*.

Ensure that the complainant has enough information to initiate the alternative process. There are some types of complaints which must be automatically transferred

- Complaints about a Council decision
- Complaints in relation to a Council Member or the CEO
- Where the problem is clearly outside of the staff member's delegation or area of expertise
- Complaints alleging fraud, corruption or other criminal behaviour, which should be referred to the Anti-Corruption Branch or other relevant branch of SAPOL
- Complaints involving an allegation of serious or controversial conduct by a staff member where disciplinary action is a possible outcome

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### 3. REVIEW

This Procedure will be reviewed every four years after each general election.

Reviews must be done in consultation with the ELT, Council Staff and Council Members.

### 4. AVAILABILITY

This procedure is available for inspection without charge at the following location during ordinary business hours:

- Principal Office, "Civic Centre", George Street, Millicent
- Council Website: [www.wattlerange.sa.gov.au](http://www.wattlerange.sa.gov.au)

A copy of the Procedure may be purchased from the Principal Office upon payment of a prescribed fee in accordance with Council's Schedule of Fees and Charges.

### 5. REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Practice Manual, Endorsed by Australian Parliamentary Ombudsman – Section 3.4</li> </ul>
Relevant Legislation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Local Government Act 1999</i> – Sections 125, 270;</li> <li>• <i>Development Act 1993</i> – (Repealed by <i>Planning, Development &amp; Infrastructure Act 2016</i>);</li> <li>• <i>Expiation of Offences Act 1996</i>;</li> <li>• <i>Freedom of Information Act 1991</i></li> </ul>
Relevant Policies / Procedures / Guidelines	<p>This Procedure should be read in conjunction with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Experience Policy;</li> <li>• Employee's Code of Conduct;</li> <li>• Whistleblowers Protection Policy;</li> <li>• Fraud &amp; Corruption Prevention Policy;</li> <li>• Internal Review of Decisions Procedure</li> <li>• Unreasonable Customer Conduct Procedure</li> </ul>

### 6. ADOPTION & AMENDMENT HISTORY

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

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