

# Complaint Management Policy

## Purpose

This policy is intended to ensure that the City of Sydney (the City) handles complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively.

Our complaint management system is intended to:

- enable us to respond to issues raised by people making complaints in a timely and cost-effective way
- boost public confidence in our administrative process, and
- provide information that can be used by us to deliver quality improvements to our services, employees and complaint handling.

This policy provides guidance to our employees and people who wish to make a complaint based on the key principles and concepts of our complaint management system.

## Scope

This policy applies to all employees receiving or managing complaints from the public made to or about us (the City of Sydney), regarding our services, employees and/or complaint handling.

Complaints that are out of scope of this policy include:

- service requests
- requests for information [see the City's Access to information policy]
- complaints about the City's policies or procedures when the City is following its legal duties.
- an appeal or objection to a standard City procedure or policy e.g. objection to a development application, comments on a Policy on Exhibition
- employee grievances
- privacy complaints
- data breaches
- statutory review complaint
- public interest disclosures made by our employees [see the City's Public Interest Disclosure policy]
- code of conduct complaints [see the City's Code of conduct]
- 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'].

## Definitions

Term	Meaning
Complaint	<p>Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, employees or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.</p> <p>Examples of a complaint are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• failure to achieve specified standards of service</li> <li>• delay in responding</li> <li>• behaviour or attitude of employees</li> <li>• a Council decision or policy and/ or</li> <li>• withdrawal or reduction of service</li> <li>• content on our online channels (including third party comments) that is defamatory</li> </ul>
Complaint Management System	All policies, procedures, practices, employees, hardware and software used in the management of complaints.
Dispute	An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of our organisation.
Employees	All City of Sydney employees including permanent (whether full-time or part-time), temporary, casual employees and apprentices.
Feedback	Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about us, services or complaint handling where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
Service request	<p>The definition of a service request includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requests for the provision of works or services</li> <li>• routine inquiries about the organisation’s business</li> <li>• requests for the provision of services and assistance</li> <li>• reports of failure to comply with laws regulated by the organisation</li> <li>• requests for information or explanation of policies, procedures and decisions</li> </ul>
Grievance	A clear, formal written statement by an individual employee about another employee or a work-related problem.
Policy	A statement of instruction that sets out how we should fulfill our vision, mission and goals.
Procedure	A statement or instruction that sets out how our policies will be implemented and by whom.

Term	Meaning
Public interest disclosure	A report about wrongdoing made by a public official in New South Wales that meets the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022

**Policy Statement**

The City of Sydney is committed to delivering quality service and communicating effectively with our community.

We understand that sometimes, despite our best efforts, people may not be happy with the way we have performed a service. The following is a three-step framework for the management of complaints to the City.



**Facilitating Complaints**

**People focus**

We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our services, systems, practices, procedures and complaint handling.

We will acknowledge complaints within two working days and aim to resolve them within 10 business days. If more time is needed we will provide an update.

People making complaints will receive:

- information about our complaint handling process
- various and accessible ways to make complaints
- respectful and attentive service, with involvement in the process where appropriate
- clear explanations of our decision/s and any options for redress or review.

**No detriment to people making complaints**

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that no one is treated unfairly for making a complaint or adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

**Anonymous complaints**

We accept anonymous complaints and will investigate them if there is sufficient information.

**No charge**

Complaining to us is free.

**Accessibility**

We will make information on how and where to file complaints easy to find on the City's website and through our employees. We will ensure that our systems to manage complaints are easy to use and accessible, especially for those needing assistance.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them to make or resolve their complaint, we will communicate with that representative if desired. Anyone can represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

**Responding to complaints****Early resolution**

We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible, ideally at the first point of contact.

**Responsiveness**

We will acknowledge complaints within two working days.

We will assess and prioritise complaints based on urgency and seriousness of the issues raised with immediate action for safety or security concerns. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

We will manage people's expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible about:

- the complaint process
- expected time frames
- progress of the complaint and any delays
- their role in the process, and
- likely outcomes of their complaint.

If we cannot address any part of a complaint, we will advise the complainant as soon as possible and provide guidance on where to direct the issue, if known.

Where a complaint alleges content on the City's website or a City social media channel is defamatory, we must 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 of the content as soon as possible.

**Objectivity and fairness**

We will address each complaint with integrity and in a fair, objective and unbiased manner.

- We will handle each complaint fairly, objectively, and without bias.
- We will avoid conflicts of interest and ensure the person handling the complaint is not involved in the issue.
- Internal reviews will be conducted by someone other than the original decision-maker.

**Responding flexibly**

Our employees are empowered to resolve complaints quickly and informally.

We will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.

We will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints and/or their representative in the process as much as possible.

**Confidentiality**

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate. Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by the City as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

**Managing the parties responding to a complaint****Complaints involving multiple agencies**

When a complaint involves multiple organisations, we will work with them to ensure clear and coordinated communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

**Complaints involving multiple areas with the City**

For complaints involving several areas within the city, we will coordinate communication with the person making the complaint and/or their representative

**We also accept complaints about our service providers.**

We expect these providers to have their own accessible and comprehensive complaint management systems.

**Complaints involving multiple parties**

For similar complaints from related parties, we will try to communicate through a single representative

**Empowering Employees**

All employees managing complaints are empowered to implement our complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Employees are encouraged to provide feedback on how our complaint management system can be approved.

**Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints**

We are committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or 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 our resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

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.

Examples of unreasonable behaviour includes

- unreasonable persistence
- unreasonable demands
- unreasonable absence of cooperation
- unreasonable arguments
- unreasonable behaviours

For further information on managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints please see the City’s Unreasonable Conduct Towards the City and its Employees Policy (2023).

**Our complaint management system**

When responding to complaints, employees should follow our complaint handling procedures as well as any other internal documents providing guidance on the management of complaints. Employees should also consider any relevant legislation and/or regulations when responding to complaints and feedback.



**Receipt of complaints**

Unless the complaint has been resolved at the outset, we will record the complaint and its supporting information. We will also assign a unique identifier to the complaint file.

The record of the complaint will document:

- the contact information of the person making a complaint
- issues raised and the outcome/s they want
- any other relevant information
- any additional support the person making a complaint requires, including translation and/or accessibility requirements.

**Acknowledgement of complaints**

We will acknowledge each complaint within two business days, using the most appropriate method (e.g., email, letter, phone call, in-person meeting). Assessing complaints

After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, we will confirm whether the issues raised are within our control. We will also consider the outcomes sought and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed.

We will consider:

- the seriousness, complexity, or urgency of the complaint.
- any health and safety concerns.
- how the complainant is affected.
- risks of delaying resolution.
- whether other organizations need to be involved

### **Addressing complaints**

Based on the assessment, we may:

- provide information or an explanation.
- gather information from the relevant area or person.
- investigate the claims made in the complaint.

We will keep the person making the complaint informed, especially if there are delays, and communicate the outcome through the best medium for the situation. Actions will be tailored to each case, considering any legal requirements.

### **Providing reasons for decisions**

After reviewing the complaint, we will inform the person making the complaint of:

- the outcome and actions taken
- reasons for our decision
- any remedies or resolutions.
- options for review, such as internal or external reviews or appeals.

If our investigation results in adverse findings against an individual, we will consider any applicable privacy obligations under the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 and any applicable exemptions in or made pursuant to that Act, before sharing our findings with the person making the complaint.

### **Closing the complaint, record keeping, redress and review**

We will keep detailed records about:

- how the complaint was handled
- the outcome, including recommendations and decisions
- any follow up actions.

We will ensure that outcomes are implemented, monitored and reported to the complaint handling manager and/or senior management.

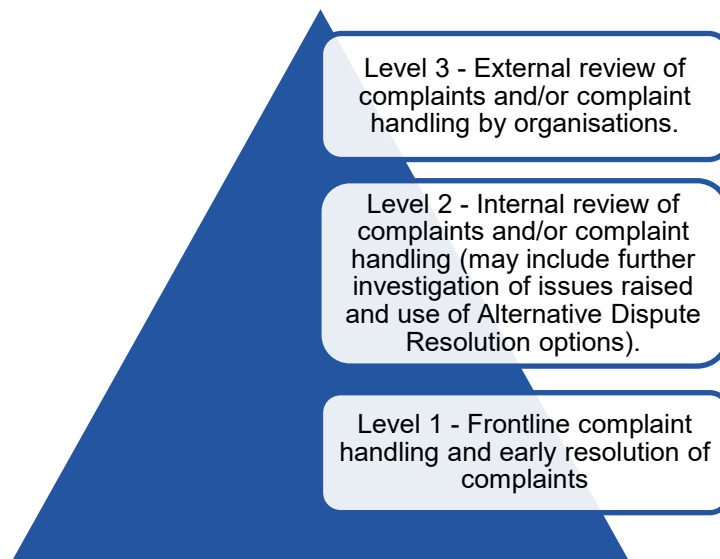
### **Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints**

We will inform people who make complaints to or about us about internal or external review options, such as

- NSW Ombudsman
- NSW Office of Local Government
- The Information and Privacy Commission NSW
- The Independent Commission Against Corruption

- NSW Small Business Commission

## The three levels of complaint handling



1. **Frontline Resolution:** We aim to resolve complaints at the first level. Employees will be trained and given the authority to handle complaints effectively.
2. **Escalation:** If a complaint cannot be resolved at the frontline, it may be escalated to a senior officer for further review or investigation.
3. **External Review:** If the complainant is dissatisfied with our internal review, they may seek an external review.

## Accountability and learning

### Analysis and evaluation of complaints

We will record complaints for easy retrieval and analysis.

Regular reports will track:

- The number of complaints.
- Outcomes, including those resolved at the frontline.
- Issues and trends.
- Requests for internal and external reviews.

We will regularly analyse these reports to identify trends, measure customer service quality, and make improvements.

### Monitoring of the complaint management system

We will continually monitor our complaint management system to ensure its effectiveness and address any deficiencies. Monitoring may include audits, satisfaction surveys, and online feedback tools.



**Continuous improvement**

We are committed to improving our complaint management system. We will:

- support the making and effective resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- recognise and reward exemplary performance by employees in complain handling
- regularly review the system and data,
- make necessary changes based on our analysis.

**Responsibilities**

**City Employees will:**

- follow the City’s Complaint Management Policy.

**The Chief Executive Officer will:**

- ensure that the necessary systems, policies, and procedures are in place for effective complaint management.

**The Manager of Customer Service will:**

- report on complaint handling to the Chief Executive Officer, Executive and Senior Managers.

**Consultation**

This policy is based on the NSW Ombudsman Complaint Handling Model Policy (2015).

The policy and procedure were developed in conjunction with a wide range of business areas including, Legal, Governance, Workforce Services, Rates, Health & Building, Waste & Cleansing, City Rangers, Data & Information Management Services, Social Programs & Services and Office of the CEO.

**References**

Laws and Standards
• NSW Ombudsman Complaint Management Framework and Model Policy 2015
• NSW Ombudsman Effective Complaint Handling Guideline 2017
• Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act (1998)
Policies and Procedures
• Managing unreasonable conduct towards the City and its employees Policy
• Code of Conduct
• Access to Information Policy
• Public Interest Disclosure Policy
• Complaint Management Procedure

**Review period**

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years.

**Approval Status**

The Chief Executive Officer approved this policy on 23/12/24.



**Monica Barone, Chief Executive Officer**

**Approval History**

Stage	Date	Comment	TRIM
Procedure	11 February 2015	Original was a procedure and was approved by CEO.	2014/161466
Original Policy	18 November 2021	Adapted to a policy, Complaint Management Policy aligning to Ombudsman NSW Complaints Management Policy.	2021/551113
Reviewed	23 December 2024	Added complaints alleging defamation. Substituted references to 'workers' and 'employees' Simplified the wording.	2021/551113
Commence Review Date	23 March 2027		
Approval Due Date	23 December 2027		

**Ownership and approval**

Responsibility	Role
Author	Manager Customer Service
Owner	Manager Customer Service
Endorser	City of Sydney Executive
Approver	Chief Executive Officer