

Name of policy:	Complaint Handling		
Adoption by Council:	14 July 2021	Minute number:	206/2021
Last review date:	June 2021		
Review timeframe:	4 years		
Next scheduled review date:	June 2025		
Related legislation:	<i>Local Government Act 1993</i>		
Associated policies/documents:	Complaint Handling Procedure Code of Conduct Customer Service Charter NSW Ombudsman's Complaint Management Framework and Model Policy - June 2015		
Responsible division:	Corporate Services		

Policy objective

This policy is intended to ensure that we handle 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 in our services, staff and complaint handling.
- This policy provides guidance to our staff and people who wish to make a complaint on the key principles and concepts of our complaint management system.

Policy statement

MidCoast Council expects staff at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling. The following table outlines the nature of the commitment expected from staff and the way that commitment should be implemented.

Who	Commitment	How
General Manager	Promote a culture that values complaints and their effective resolution	<p>Provide adequate support and direction to key staff responsible for handling complaints.</p> <p>Regularly review reports about complaint trends and issues arising from complaints.</p> <p>Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints resolve them promptly.</p> <p>Encourage staff to make recommendations for system improvements.</p> <p>Recognise and reward good complaint handling by staff.</p> <p>Support recommendations for service, staff and complaint handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaint data.</p>
Manager Governance	Establish and manage Council's complaint management system	<p>Provide regular reports to the General Manager on issues arising from complaint handling work.</p> <p>Ensure recommendations arising out of complaint data analysis are canvassed with the General Manager and implemented where appropriate.</p> <p>Train and empower staff to resolve complaints promptly and in accordance with MidCoast Council's policies and procedures.</p> <p>Encourage staff managing complaints to provide suggestions on ways to improve the organisation's complaint management system.</p> <p>Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints resolve them promptly.</p> <p>Recognise and reward good complaint handling by staff.</p>
Staff whose duties include complaint handling	Demonstrate exemplary complaint handling practices	<p>Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints.</p> <p>Assist people make a complaint, if needed.</p> <p>Comply with this policy and its associated procedures.</p>

		<p>Keep informed about best practice in complaint handling.</p> <p>Provide feedback to management on issues arising from complaints.</p> <p>Provide suggestions to management on ways to improve the organisation's complaints management system.</p> <p>Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis of complaint data as directed by management.</p>
All staff	Understand and comply with MidCoast Council's complaint handling practices	<p>Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints.</p> <p>Be aware of MidCoast Council's complaint handling policies and procedures.</p> <p>Assist people who wish to make complaints access to MidCoast Council's complaints process.</p> <p>Be alert to complaints and assist staff handling complaints resolve matters promptly.</p> <p>Provide feedback to management on issues arising from complaints.</p> <p>Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis and evaluation of complaint data as directed by management.</p>

Coverage of the policy

This policy applies to all staff receiving or managing complaints from the public made to or about MidCoast Council, regarding our services, staff and complaint handling.

Staff grievances, code of conduct complaints and public interest disclosures are dealt with through separate mechanisms.

Strategic plan link

Direction – Strong leadership and shared vision

Policy content

Council recognises, promotes and protects the rights of individuals or organisations to make a complaint, and promotes and manages complaints in a timely and confidential manner at the first point of contact. Complaints will be managed in line with Council's policies and procedures.

The following principles apply to Council's Complaint Handling Policy:

- a) any person, group or organisation (or their representative) using Council's services or impacted by Council's decisions, actions or lack of actions, has the right to lodge a complaint;
- b) staff will be appropriately trained to assist customers to make complaints whether presented in person at Council offices, by telephone or in writing (letter or email). This may include directing customers to the online options or customer service as required dependant on the nature of the complaint. Staff will record the complaint and initiate appropriate action;
- c) if the matter falls outside this policy staff will assist in directing the person to the appropriate person or authority or assist with any request for service as warranted;
- d) all complaints will be acknowledged in accordance with Council's Customer Service Charter.
- e) if Council is unable to resolve the matter to the complainant's satisfaction advice will be given as to how they may pursue their complaint further or referred to the appropriate statutory authority;
- f) complainants will not be subject to disadvantage or victimisation pursuant to lodging a complaint and any such allegations received will be investigated by the General Manager;
- g) confidentiality will be maintained where warranted and/or specifically requested by the complainant, in accordance with relevant legislation and policies;
- h) anonymous complaints will be accepted however Council's ability to action and investigate will be dependent on the information supplied; and
- i) reports on the number and types of complaints received will be monitored by Council's Management Team.
- j) Unreasonable complainant conduct will be managed in accordance with Council's Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy.

Definitions

Complaint - Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about MidCoast Council, services, staff or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

A complaint in the context of this policy will not include requests for:

- Provision of a Service
- Staff grievances [see Conflict Resolution Policy]
- Public Interest Disclosures made by our staff [see Public Interest Disclosures and Internal Reporting Policy]
- Code of Conduct complaints [see Code of Conduct]
- Responses to requests for feedback about the standard of our service provision [see the definition of 'feedback' below]

- Reports of problems or wrongdoing merely intended to bring a problem to our notice with no expectation of a response [see definition of 'feedback']
- Service requests [see definition of 'service request' below], and
- Requests for information [see Agency Information Guide/GIPA].

Complaint management system - All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by us in the management of complaints.

Dispute - An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of our organisation.

Feedback - Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about Council, about Council products [where relevant], services or complaint handling where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Service request - Includes the following:

- requests for approval
- requests for action or service delivery
- routine inquiries about the organisation's business
- requests for the provision of services and assistance
- reports of failure to comply with laws regulated by the organisation
- requests for explanation of policies, procedures and decisions.

Grievance - A clear, formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member 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.

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 1994*.

References and related documents

MidCoast Council Complaint Handling Procedure

MidCoast Council Customer Complaint Form

MidCoast Council's Code of Conduct

MidCoast Council's Customer Service Charter

NSW Ombudsman's Complaint Management Framework and Model Policy (June 2015)

Responsible officer (position)

Manager Governance