

Complaints Handling Policy

Purpose

Dealing with complaints is a core part of Council business.

We are committed to being accessible, equitable, inclusive and responsive to the needs of our diverse community.

Council policies, programs, and services affect people in different ways. We acknowledge that individual and personal experiences, identities, rights, and unique needs shape expectations of Council.

We value complaints and encourage people to contact us when they have a problem with our services, actions, decisions, and policies.

We are committed to:

- enabling members of the public to make complaints about the Council
- responding to complaints by taking action to resolve complaints as effectively and quickly as possible
- learning from complaints to improve our services.

We treat every complaint we receive on its individual merits, through the application of this policy and procedure.

We will work with complainants to find a mutually agreeable resolution or let them know their rights to appeal if they are not satisfied with the outcome.

Scope

This policy applies to all complaints from members of the public about Council services, staff, contractors, volunteers and decisions made at Council meetings. This policy does not apply to complaints about individual Councillors.

This policy does not apply to complaints that are required to be handled according to the requirements of other legislation or policies, such as:

- Infringements
- Planning matters and enforcement
- Health
- Building
- Human Rights
- Child Safe Standards
- Public Interest Disclosures
- Breach of Local Government Act
- Aged and Disability Service Delivery Business Unit

Where a complaint does not fall within Council’s responsibility, we will direct the customer to the appropriate authority or organisation for resolution.

Definitions and Abbreviations

Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction with the quality of an action taken, decision made, or service provided by Darebin City Council, contractor/volunteer, or a delay or failure in providing a service, taking an action, or planning by Darebin City Council or its contractor/volunteer.

	<p>Customer: the public, residents, potential residents, citizens, service user, stakeholders, business owners, rate payers, students, organisations, agencies and visitors.</p> <p>A service request A request for help in obtaining a new service, getting information from Council, or to inform us about a matter for which Council has responsibility.</p> <p>Resolution A complaint is resolved after an initial investigation has taken place and the customer has been updated with the outcome. The outcome could be a service recovery action that has or will take place or an explanation for why no action will be taken. This could also include advising the customer if Council is not the responsible authority.</p> <p>Contractor Third parties carrying out services on behalf of council.</p> <p>Public Interest Disclosure A specific class of Complaint (governed by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012) that requires a high level of confidentiality and protection of the Complainant</p>
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<p>Policy Statement(s)</p>	<p>Guiding Principles</p> <p>This policy is based on seven guiding principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <p>1. Commitment</p> <p>We recognise customers' right to complain and we are committed to resolving the complaints we receive. We consider complaints handling to be part of our core responsibility to serve the Darebin community to continually improve service delivery, so our services are accessible, quality, equitable, inclusive and responsive.</p> <p>2. Accessibility</p> <p>Regardless of their needs (language other than English, disability or impairment, educational level, 'digital divide' or other), people can easily find out how to complain to Council, and we actively and respectfully assist them with the complaints process.</p> <p>3. Transparency</p> <p>The complaints handling system clearly sets out how to lodge a complaint, where to complain, and how the complaint will be handled. The steps taken to respond to a complaint are recorded and will stand up to scrutiny.</p> <p>4. Objectivity and Fairness</p> <p>Complaints are dealt with courteously, respectfully and impartially, within established timeframes and are assessed on merit and facts, while paying attention to particular circumstances of hardship or other barriers to equity that the complainant might face. Any conflict of interest should be declared at the start of the complaint and the complaint referred to another Officer.</p> <p>5. Confidentiality</p> <p>The complaints handling system protects the personal information of people making a complaint, in accordance with our obligations under privacy laws and internal policy. We provide clear information about how we handle personal information. Complaint data is de-identified if reported on more widely. Our staff and contractors</p>
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are only informed should their expertise or knowledge be required to resolve the complaint.

6. Accountability

We are accountable, both internally and externally, for our decision making and complaints handling performance. We provide explanations and reasons for decisions, and ensure our decisions are subject to appropriate review processes.

7. Continuous Improvement

We act on complaints promptly, as set out in this policy. We regularly analyse complaints data to find ways to improve how we operate and how we deliver our services. We then implement these changes.

What is a 'complaint'?

A complaint includes a communication (verbal or written) to Council which expresses dissatisfaction about:

- the quality of an action, decision or service provided by Council Officers or a Council contractor
- a delay by Council Officers or a Council contractor in taking an action, making a decision or delivering a service
- a policy or decision made by the Council, Council Officers or a Council contractor.

A request for service is an issue that needs to be addressed by Council. These will be actioned as per usual business processes.

The below table provides an example of a request for service compared to a complaint.

In this policy:

'Council staff' is any person employed by the Council to carry out the functions of the Council, and the Council's CEO.

'Council contractor' is any third-party engaged by the Council to carry out functions on the Council's behalf.

'the Council' means the body of elected Councillors.

How to make a complaint

Any member of the public can make a complaint. Complaints can be made by:

Mail:

Customer Resolutions
Darebin City Council
PO Box 91
Preston Vic 3072

Telephone:

Customer Service team 03 8470 8888
National Relay Service 133 677
Speak your language 03 8470 8470

Email:
 Customer Resolutions
 mailbox@darebin.vic.gov.au

Website:
<https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/About-Council/Contact-us>

In person:
 Preston Customer Service Centre, Address: 274 Gower Street, Preston
 Northcote Customer Service Centre, Address: 32-38 Separation Street, Northcote
 Reservoir Community and Learning Centre, Address: 23 Edwardes Street, Reservoir

Accessibility:
 We are committed to ensuring our complaints process is accessible to everyone. Tell us if you have specific communication needs or barriers, and we can assist you by:

- Multilingual Telephone Line which can be accessed by customers who speak a language other than English available Monday to Friday 8.30am – 5.00pm (Telephone: 8470 8470).
- Support communication with customers through the National Relay Service (TTY Dial 133677; Speak and Listen Call 1300 555 727; relay.service.gov.au enter 03 8470 8888).
- Auslan sign language interpreters with prior notice.
- Use plain English in all information about the complaints process as well as the process itself.
- Utilise Customer Service staff to provide a face-to-face explanation of the policy and procedures.

Council’s Complaint Handling Procedure

Some complaints may be critical in nature and require immediate action by Council. Where this is not the case Council takes a four-tiered approach to complaint handlings as follows:

1. First Point Resolution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We aim to resolve complaints at the first point of contact. • If we are unable to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact, we will refer it to the relevant department for investigation • We acknowledge the complaint, record all details, provide the customer with a reference number and the expected timeframes.
2. Investigation

- Complaints not resolved at first point will be assigned to a council officer for investigation. This will be the Coordinator in the first instance.
- As part of the investigation we will
 - assess the information against relevant legislation, policies and procedures
 - refer to Council documents and records
 - contact you about your complaint and we may ask you to provide more information
 - consider possible solutions and talk to you about them
 - advise you in writing of the outcome and our reasons
 - keep you updated on how long it will take and if that changes changes for any reason

3. Internal Review

- If you are dissatisfied with our decision and how we responded to your complaint, you can request an internal review.
- Internal reviews will be conducted by either the Manager of the relevant Department or the Customer Resolution Manager if the Manager was involved in the original complaint
- We will review the original complaint and the process
- We will inform you of the outcome and explain our reasons

4. External Review

- If you are dissatisfied with our internal review decision you can request an external review
- We will endeavour to advise which external organisation is most appropriate and may be one of the following:
- Victorian Ombudsman www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au
- Local Government Inspectorate www.lgi.vic.gov.au
- Office of the Victorian Information Commission www.ovic.vic.gov.au
- Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission www.ibac.vic.gov.au
- Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission www.humanrights.vic.gov.au
- Victorian Electoral Commission www.vec.vic.gov.au

Anonymous complaints

We will accept anonymous complaints and thoroughly investigate the issue utilising all available information. Council may be limited in what actions they can take

based on the information provided. Council is unable to provide a responses or information on the outcome.

Service Level Agreements

Council will endeavour to achieve the following Service Level Agreements to ensure we deliver on our commitments, provide timely resolutions and provide a great customer experience.

Area	Council Commitment
Acknowledge the complaint	Within 2 business days
Investigate and resolve the complaint advising of the outcome	Within 21 business days
If the complaint cannot be resolved within 21 days, we will advise revised timeframes and keep you updated on the progress	Within 5 business days
Acknowledge the request for an Internal review	Within 2 business days
Complete internal review and advise you of outcome	Within 21 business days
Acknowledge the complaint	Within 2 business days

**Some areas of the business may have specific service levels agreements for service types which are required by legislations. These will be communicated to the complainant.*

Complaints about specific matters – alternative procedures

Some complaints are governed by specific statutory and regulatory processes which fall outside the scope of the Policy.

Complaints about Staff	Complaints about a member of Council staff or a volunteer will be referred to the relevant Manager in the first instance or the Chief People Officer where appropriate. The complaint will be investigated in accordance with the Employee Code of Conduct and other relevant people policies.
Complaints about allegations of corrupt conduct	Complaints involving allegations of corrupt conduct will be handled in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosures Policy .
Complaints about Councillors	There are a range of external integrity agencies that deal with complaints regarding

	<p>Councillors. Depending on the nature of the complaint it will be handled in accordance with the relevant legislation.</p> <p>In the first instance a complaint about a Councillor should be directed to the Councillor Conduct Officer who will undertake a preliminary assessment of the complaint and assist the complainant(s) to progress the matter.</p>
Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer	Complaints regarding the Chief Executive Officer will be referred to the Mayor and handled in accordance with the Local Government Act 2020, Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012 and City of Darebin Public Interest Disclosures Procedures.
Human Rights	<p>Complaints or reports or allegations concerning abuse harm or neglect of a child or young person by an employee, Councillors, contractor or Volunteer.</p> <p>Darebin City Council is required by law to implement Child Safe Standards in order to protect children from harm.</p> <p>If you are concerned about the conduct of a Darebin staff member, volunteer or work experience students towards a child, report it:</p> <p>Darebin City Council Child Safe Officer Phone: 03 8470 8575 Email: childsafety@darebin.vic.gov.au</p> <p>Our child safe polices can be found on our website. Safeguarding children City of Darebin</p> <p>We are committed to protect, fulfil and promote the human rights of all citizens in the City of Darebin</p> <p>Council has developed a step by step guide(PDF, 453KB) to advocating for human rights using the Charter, which can be used by citizens and community groups.</p> <p>Please get in touch with Darebin’s Human Rights Officer. By contacting customer service on 8470 8888.</p>

Remedies

Where Council has made an error, steps will be taken to address the situation, offering an apology and explanation as to why the error occurred and the actions taken to prevent it happening again.

Privacy and confidentiality

We keep your personal information secure. We use your information to respond to your complaint and may also analyse the information you have provided for the purpose of improving services that relate to your complaint.

When gathering information to respond to a complaint, we will only:

- Use it to deal with the complaint or to address systemic issues arising from the complaint.
- Release the information in a de-identified format when disclosing data to the public.
- Share the information with Council staff on a need to know basis.

Details about how we collect and use personal information can be found in the Darebin City Council's *Information Privacy Policy 2015*.

How we learn from complaints

All complaints made to Council are recorded in our centralised system. This enables us to monitor progress to ensure complaints are resolved and to obtain data that enables us to learn from our complaints and improve our customer experience.

Complaints from people who use or who are affected by our services provide us with valuable feedback about how we are performing.

We regularly analyse our complaint data to identify trends and potential issues that deserve further attention. We use this information to come up with solutions about how we can improve our services.

We are open and transparent about the complaints we have received, and what we have done to resolve them. We publish our complaint data in our annual report.

Unreasonable complainant conduct

Most complainants who lodge a complaint with Council act reasonably and responsibly in their interactions with us. We expect customers to:

- treat us in a courteous and respectful manner
- respect the privacy, safety and needs of other members of the community
- provide us with the information we need and as required by statutory authorities.

Unreasonable complainant conduct is any behaviour by a current or former complainant which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for our organisation, our staff, other service users or the complainant themselves.

Unreasonable complainant conduct will be managed via council's Complex Customer Behaviour Policy and monitored and recorded by Customer Resolutions

<p>Responsibilities</p>	<p>All Council staff, Councillors and Council contractors are responsible for contributing to our complaints process.</p> <p>How are individuals responsible for the success of the policy?</p> <p>All employees are expected to read and understand this policy and to work within their teams to support and enable its implementation.</p> <p>How are Senior Leaders responsible for the success of the policy?</p> <p>All Senior Leaders are expected to understand, effectively implement and both support and demonstrate a positive commitment to the policy.</p> <p>How are Councillors responsible for the success of the policy?</p> <p>Councillors should familiarise themselves with this policy and refer community members directly to Council to submit a complaint.</p>	
<p>Organisational Values</p>	<p>Council's organisational values enable and support the effective design and application of this policy by guiding staff in the course of their work.</p> <p>We Make a Difference: We are driven by our desire to make a difference for the people we serve. Our work is purposeful and creates a positive impact for the community. We are proud to work here. Our work matters.</p> <p>We are Accountable: We are empowered to own and take responsibility for our actions. We follow through on our commitments and deliver on our promises. We make it happen.</p> <p>We are Collaborative: We are united by a common purpose to serve the community. We work together, connecting within our teams and across the organisation. We are inclusive and collaborative. We are one.</p>	<p>We have Integrity: We act with integrity and transparency in conversations and decision-making. Through open and clear communication, we build trust. We're honest. We walk the talk.</p> <p>We show Respect: We are diverse, inclusive, respectful and caring. We encourage everyone to have a voice and we listen to each other. We recognise one another's contributions and treat people fairly. We look after each other.</p> <p>We are Creative: We are bold, courageous and innovative. We try new things, experiment and continuously improve. We are open-minded, creative and forward-thinking. We are leaders.</p>
<p>Breach of Policy</p>	<p>Breaches of policies are treated seriously. Any concerns about non-compliance should be reported immediately to the owner of this policy.</p>	

GOVERNANCE

<p>Parent Strategy/ Plan</p>	<p>NA</p>
<p>Related Documents</p>	<p>This policy should be read in conjunction with Council's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Towards Equality – Council's Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019-2029 (draft)</i> • Gender Equity and Preventing Violence Against Women Action Plan 2019 – 2023 • Aboriginal Cultural Protocols Guide • Access & Inclusion Plan 2015-19

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Age and Disability Process for handling feedback</i> • <i>Safeguarding Children Policy</i> • <i>Managing Complex Customer Behaviour Policy</i> <p>These can be accessed from the intranet.</p>
Supporting Procedures and Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle Customer Complaints Procedure • Complaint Handling Policy quick reference guide • Pathway step by step guides • Toolkit supporting documents • These can be accessed from the intranet. Complaint handling Darebin Intranet
Legislation/ Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) • Disability Discrimination Act 1992 • Freedom of Information Act 1982 • Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) • Local Government Act 2020 (Vic) • Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012 • Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
Author	Manager Customer & Corporate Performance
Policy Owner/ Sponsor	General Manager Customer & Corporate
Date Effective	12 Dec 2024
Review Date	12 Dec 2028
Version Number	Final
Document ID	TBA
Content enquiries	Customer Resolutions Manager