

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS **POLICY**

POLICY OWNER	Executive Leadership Team
POLICY ADMINISTRATOR	Manager, Chief Executive' Office
POLICY REVIEW	Every triennium by the Manager, Chief Executive's Office
SIGNED BY CEO	Final
DATE ADOPTED	March 2015

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INTRODUCTION

At Waikato Regional Council we value our customers' feedback. It is important we know when we have got it right so we can continue to meet the expectations of our customers at every opportunity.

However, we know that like every agency that serves the public, we will receive complaints. We provide a wide range of services and often make decisions on issues where people have conflicting opinions, particularly in relation to regulatory and enforcement matters. We also know that sometimes we'll make mistakes or fail to meet customer expectations. Whatever the cause of dissatisfaction, we want people to let us know so that we can positively resolve issues before they become serious problems, improve our decision-making and quality of services, and enhance relationships with our customers.

This policy aims to provide a framework and process to enhance customer satisfaction by supporting an organisational culture that is:

- open to feedback, including complaints
- focused on reinforcing good practices and resolving complaints
- committed to learning from feedback and complaints so that we can keep improving our services and the way we do things.

We will provide complainants with an open, effective, and easy-to-use complaints process. We will encourage staff to treat feedback as a tool to help us to identify necessary improvements to services, which help to remove causes of complaints, support a high-performing culture and improve customer satisfaction by showing that we're listening and taking feedback seriously.

Policy Scope

This policy is relevant for all full and part-time employees, casual staff, contractors and elected representatives of Waikato Regional Council.

This policy does not relate to submissions made through any formal submission processes or any council decisions that have other legal pathways for appeal.

Relevant legislation and Council policy

Waikato Regional Council will manage complaints within the requirements of legislation and codes of practice that we work under, including:

- Employment Relations Act 2000
- The Local Government Official Information and Meeting Act (LGOIMA)1987
- Privacy Act 1993
- The Local Government Act 2002
- The Resource Management Act 1991
- Health and Safety at Work Act 2015
- NZ Standard 3910 that contains contract specifications for complaints management.

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the following Waikato Regional Council policies and guidelines which can be found on the intranet:

- Privacy policy
- Hazard management policies
- Social media policy
- Customer engagement promise
- Feedback and Complaints Process.

Definitions

Customer feedback may be any one of the following types:

COMPLIMENT An expression of satisfaction, thanks or appreciation for something Waikato Regional Council or a specific staff member has done.

COMPLAINT An expression of dissatisfaction with council policy, decision, process, charge, employee/contractor conduct or quality of service that is accompanied by a request for a formal response. A suggestion can be made without the requirement for a formal response

A complaint requiring a formal response is distinguished from customer contacts of the following nature:

- Request for service or information
- Reporting an environmental incident
- LGOIMA request
- Feedback as part of a formal consultation process
- A part of a process that the council is obliged or required by statute to apply
- Any internal complaint from one staff member against another
- A complaint over which the customer or council have begun legal proceedings or has already been heard by a court or tribunal
- Allegations against a contractor or staff member of serious misconduct such as sexual harassment, fraud or assault
- Insurance claims.

SUGGESTION A suggestion may be substantively similar to a complaint but the customer does not require a formal response. This type of customer contact will also be logged, assessed and used for process improvement but will not involve further communication with the customer.

CONFIDENTIAL / ANONYMOUS COMPLAINT Is one for which the complainant does not wish to provide information that might identify them. These complaints will be logged, assessed and used for process improvement but will not involve further communication with the customer.

UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT A complainant may be deemed to be unreasonable where current or previous contact with them shows that they have met **two** or more of the following criteria:

- Persisting in pursuing a complaint where the Waikato Regional Council's Feedback and Complaints Process has been fully and properly implemented.
- Changing the substance of a complaint or persistently raising new issues or seeking to prolong contact by unreasonably raising further matters while the complaint is being dealt with.

- Unwillingness to accept documented evidence as being factual (this could include persons who do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify after a long period of time has elapsed).
- Denying receipt of an adequate response despite correspondence specifically answering their questions or concerns.
- Focusing on a trivial matter to an extent which is out of proportion to its significance (while aware that determining what is trivial can be subjective, and that careful judgement is required).
- Have had an excessive number of contacts with Waikato Regional Council or our contractors when pursuing their complaint, placing unreasonable demands on staff.
- Are known to have electronically recorded meetings or conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other parties involved.
- Display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable once a clear explanation is provided as to what constitutes an unreasonable demand.

A complainant may be deemed unreasonable if any **one** of the following criteria is exhibited:

- Physical violence has been used or threatened towards staff or their families or associates at any time.
- Staff, their families or associates have been harassed or verbally abused on more than one occasion.

Waikato Regional Council

commitment

Waikato Regional Council is committed to a robust Customer Feedback and Complaints Process. The process is underpinned by the organisation's Customer Promise from the Waikato Regional Council Customer Engagement Strategy and a commitment to use feedback to support and improve council's practice and meet the expectations of our customers.

Customer promise

The principles below are consistent with those from the Waikato Regional Council Customer Engagement Strategy. They form the basis for all Waikato Regional Council interactions with customers and staff will be mindful of them when addressing customer complaints:

- Respect and Professionalism
 - We will listen to you, work to understand your situation, treat you with courtesy, and acknowledge where we can do better
 - Action will be taken as soon as possible
 - Explanations and apologies will be provided, where appropriate.
- Helpfulness and Accessibility
 - We will provide you with an easily accessible process. We will make it

easy for you to complain by providing a user-friendly system

- We will treat all feedback as an opportunity to find better ways to work for and with you
- We will ensure clear delegations and procedures for staff to deal with complaints and provide remedies.

- Transparency and Consistency
 - Our feedback policy is a transparent one and we will treat all feedback fairly and with consistency.
- Timely, Accurate Communication
 - When you contact us, we'll get back to you promptly or within agreed timeframes. We will seek accurate information and we will keep you well-informed.
- We will operate an effective system to capture and report complaints data so we can
 - Keep in touch with you and the issues affecting you
 - Identify problems and trends
 - Focus on using complaints to continuously improve service delivery
 - Easily share improvements resulting from feedback, internally and externally

Customer resolution process



Policy Review

The policy will be reviewed at the end of each triennium, along with any councillor briefing materials, in preparation for the new council following the elections.