



## S0019: Customer Complaint Policy

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| Policy Type:                     | Statutory Policy  |
| Responsible Department:          | City Services   |
| Responsible Officer:             | Manager Libraries, Museum and Customer Experience   |
| Related Policies and Procedures: | Procedure for Internal Review of a Council Decision<br>City of Unley Customer Service Charter |
| Date Adopted:                    | 28 May 2018: C1171/18   |
| Last Council review:             | -   |
| Next review date:                | May 2021  |
| ECM Doc Set ID:                  | 3357850   |

### 1. POLICY STATEMENT

This policy is intended to ensure that we respond to customer complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively.

It applies to all areas of Council and is applicable to all staff and volunteers.

The following is outside the scope of the Customer Complaint Policy:

- Council Member's Code of Conduct complaints (refer to the Council Member's Code of Conduct and Complaints Handling Procedure under the Council Members Code of Conduct )
- Requests for information (refer to our Freedom of Information Statement)
- Staff grievances
- Service requests. This may vary but is likely to relate to:
  - requests for approval
  - requests for action
  - routine inquiries about the organisation's business
  - requests for the provision of information, services and assistance
  - reports of failure to comply with laws regulated by the organisation
  - requests for explanation of policies, procedures and decisions
- Opinions and comments of interest made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly about our products, services, facilities and staff
- Note: Some complaints due to their substance may need to be referred directly to Independent Commissioner against Corruption (ICAC)

## 2. COMMUNITY GOAL

Theme: Civic Leadership

Goal: Council will listen to the community and make transparent decisions for the long term benefit of the City

Objective:

- 4.1 We have strong leadership and governance
- 4.2 Council provides best value services to the community
- 4.3 Our business systems are effective and transparent

## 3. POLICY OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the Policy is to satisfy the mandatory requirements of Section 270 (a1) and (a2) of the *Local Government Act 1999*.

Our complaints resolution framework is intended to:

- Proactively demonstrate Unley Values and culture through enabling our Customer First value
- Enable us to respond to customer complaints in a timely and cost-effective way
- Boost public confidence in our administrative process
- Provide information that can be used by us to deliver quality improvements in our products, services, systems and complaint handling thus reducing complaints about same issues.

## 4. PRINCIPLES

The core principles of the complaint resolution framework are:

1. *People focus*: We are open to complaints from members of the public about our decisions, products, services, facilities, staff or the resolution of a complaint.
2. *Transparency*: We publicise how and where complaints may be made to our organisation. We make the process of complaint resolution and investigating it easy for complainants to access and understand. We are flexible in how complaints may be made to or about our organisation.
3. *Responsiveness*: Complaints are acknowledged promptly and addressed according to urgency. The complainant is kept informed throughout the process, we are genuine about our communication and we follow through on our promises. Our primary focus is resolution.
4. *Fairness*: To ensure the complaint handling process is fair and reasonable complaints are dealt with in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. We take every reasonable step to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint is made by them or on their behalf.
5. *Support*: We support and assist customers who need help to make a complaint. There are opportunities for internal and external review and/or appeal about the organisation's response to the complaint, and complainants are informed about these avenues.
6. *Confidentiality*: Personal information related to complaints is kept confidential. Where appropriate the confidentiality of information related to a complaint will be respected. Complaints about staff will be kept confidential during the investigation process.

7. *Accountability*: Accountabilities for complaint handling are clearly established, and complaints and responses are monitored and regularly reported to management. Staff have appropriate authority and guidance to resolve issues that commonly arise in the resolution of complaints. We provide appropriate training, support and resources to staff who are responding to complaints. Our staff are recognised and rewarded for good complaint resolution.
8. *Continuous Improvement*: Complaints represent an opportunity for improvement in our internal procedures and processes, and support ongoing customer satisfaction monitoring such as annual surveying, interviews, forums, program evaluation forms, etc.

## **5. POLICY**

### **5.1 What is a complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about our decisions, products, services, facilities, staff or the resolution of a complaint.

### **5.2 Lodge complaints**

The City of Unley provides and promotes multiple channels for lodging complaints.

Complainants can contact Council via mail, email, in person, phone, Council's website and social media.

Complainants also have the opportunity to contact their local Ward Members when a complaint or request for service was lodged and the complainant did not receive a response within ten (10) working days.

Please take note that by lodging a complaint, the matter will not be automatically suspended or put on hold.

### **5.3 Facilitate complaints**

We are committed to receiving complaints in good faith.

Where a complaint involves multiple areas within our organisation, responsibility for communicating with the complainant and/or their representative will be coordinated.

We accept complaints about not only the actions of our staff but also the actions of providers delivering service on behalf of Council.

Where a complaint made directly to Council involves external service providers, we will refer the complaint to the relevant provider.

People making complaints will be:

- provided with information about our complaint resolution process
- provided with multiple and accessible ways to make complaints
- listened to, treated with respect by staff and actively involved in the complaint resolution process where possible and appropriate
- provided with reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review

We will not investigate or action anonymous complaints. If a complainant is concerned about disclosing their identity, they may request that their identity be kept confidential. Where relevant, a person making a disclosure of public interest information may activate protections under the Whistleblowers' Protection Act.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, we will communicate with them through their appointed representative. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with his or her written consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

#### **5.4 Respond to complaints**

We will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints and will respond within a ten (10) working day timeframe.

We will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised.

We are committed to managing people's expectations, and will inform them of the following:

- the complaints process
- the expected time frames for our actions
- the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- their likely involvement in the process, and
- the possible or likely outcome of their complaint

We will advise complainants when we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate) e.g. Ombudsman, State Government, Australian Government Aged Care Complaints Commissioner, etc. Some legislation (Act, Regulation, Rule by By-Law) specifically makes provision for an appeal, or an internal or external review of a decision.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by the City of Unley as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, legislative requirements and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

Council will also make an assessment as to whether there has been a disclosure of public interest information; whether identity protection should be afforded; and whether to protect the complainant's identity before the substance of the complaint is addressed.

#### **5.5 Complaint resolution and internal review of a Council decision**

The City of Unley is committed to resolve complaints and will undertake investigations and research where required to ensure appropriate complaint resolution.

Where possible, we endeavour to resolve complaints at first contact with the City of Unley. Our staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. We will adopt flexible approaches to problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives. Note regulatory investigations must be formal.

The person handling the complaint will be different from the staff member whose service or conduct is being complained about.

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

We will meet statutory requirements and processes as needed.

Complainants will be advised of the outcome of the complaint, action taken and the reasons for the decision.

In the event the complainant is not satisfied or does not agree with the outcome or decision, it is still considered a resolution. However, we will advise complainants of any options for review that may be available to them, such as an internal review, external review or appeal if they are not satisfied with the outcome or decision made.

An internal review will examine the process by which the original decision was made, not the decision itself. The review may or may not result in the disputed decision being reconsidered and overturned. The internal review process will aim for procedural fairness to ensure that all parties have the opportunity to express their point of view in relation to the decision under review, provide relevant information and respond to issues raised.

## **5.6 Corporate Reporting**

Reports on Council's complaint resolution will be published in the City of Unley Corporate Half Yearly Report (January and July), available on [www.unley.sa.gov.au](http://www.unley.sa.gov.au)

## **6. DEFINITIONS**

*Comments* - Positive or negative, verbal or written opinions or reactions (a view or judgement formed which is not based on fact or knowledge) about our products, services, facilities or staff.

*Complaint* - An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about our decisions, products, services, facilities, staff or the handling of a complaint.

*Complaint framework* - All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by us in the resolution of complaints.

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

*Feedback* - Customer participation in formal Council consultation processes (formal feedback opportunities through various public consultation channels such as focus groups, surveys, Your Say Unley, etc).

*Policy* - A statement or set of principles that guides decisions and the achievement of our vision, mission and goals.

*Procedure* - A statement or instruction that sets out how our policies will be implemented and by whom.

*Resolution* - Completion of the complaint process within the agreed time frame, inclusive of receipt, investigation, consideration and determination of a complaint which may or may not involve agreement of all the parties

*Request for Service* – Seeking service, approval, information, action or assistance in line with council's service offering.

## 7. LEGISLATION/REFERENCES

This is a mandatory policy as required under the Local Government Act 1999 / Section 270 which requires Council to have policies, procedures and practices for dealing with:

(a1) (a) Any reasonable request for the provision of a service by the council or for the improvement of a service provided by the council; and

(a1) (b) *Complaints about the actions of the council, employees of the council, or other persons acting on behalf of the council*

(a2) *The policies, practices and procedures required under subsection (a1) must be directed towards to (a) dealing with the relevant requests or complaints in a timely, effective and fair way; and (b) using information gained from the council's community to improve its services and operations.*

## 8. POLICY DELEGATIONS

Nil applicable

## 9. AVAILABILITY

The policy is available for public inspection during normal office hours from:

City of Unley Civic Centre  
181 Unley Road  
Unley SA 5061

A copy may be purchased for a fee as determined annually by Council.

It is also available for viewing, download and printing free of charge from the Council's website, [www.unley.sa.gov.au](http://www.unley.sa.gov.au)

## 10. DOCUMENT HISTORY

| <b>Date:</b> | <b>Council/Committee/Internal</b> | <b>Comment:</b> |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 28 May 2018  | Council: C1171/18                 |                 |
|              |                                   |                 |