

# Complaints Handling Policy

Council has adopted a Complaints Handling Policy which details the Policy's objectives, principals, methods and processes; and provides an application form (downloadable below) with which to submit a complaint.

A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction made about a standard of service provided by Council or the actions taken by Council or its employees. Importantly, this policy *does not* apply to requests for services, reports of hazards or requests for information or explanation for policies etc.

## Gloucester Shire Council

### Complaints Handling Policy (Adopted 19 July 2006)

#### 1. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are:

- (a) to promote a high standard of customer service in all areas of Council's operations by responding effectively and positively to complaints received.
- (b) to ensure that complaints are managed in a manner that endeavours to provide satisfaction to complainants.
- (c) to inform Council's customers and citizens of the process and to handle complaints received.
- (d) to recognise the importance of complaints in providing feedback about Council's services and performance, and to utilise that information to improve services and identify appropriate training needs.

#### 2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction made about standard of service provided by Council or the actions or lack of actions by Council or its workforce.

#### 3. Application

This policy covers all complaints made to Council regarding its operations and personnel other than:

- (a) Requests for services (unless there was no response to a previous request).
- (b) Reports of hazards or damaged infrastructure.
- (c) Requests for information/explanation of Council policies, decisions or procedures (unless there was no response to a previous request).
- (d) Appeals or objections regarding development applications.

#### 4. Principles

The following principles apply to Gloucester Shire complaints 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 trained to receive complaints whether presented in person at Council offices, by telephone or in writing (fax, letter, e-mail). 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 within 7 working days and every endeavour made to finalise them within 20 working days.
- (e) If Council is unable to resolve the matter to the complainants 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 victimization pursuant to the lodging of 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 investigate will be dependent on the information supplied.

(i) Reports on numbers and types of complaints received will be monitored by Council's Senior Management Team (General Manager and Directors) on a quarterly basis.

## **5. Methods of Lodging Complaints**

Complaints can be made to Council:

### **(a) In Writing:**

- Gloucester Shire Council, PO Box 11, Gloucester NSW 2422
- Fax (02)6558 2343
- [council@gloucester.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@gloucester.nsw.gov.au)

### **(b) In Person:**

- Council's Administrative Building, 89 King Street, Gloucester

### **(c) By Telephone:**

- Council Office, Gloucester on (02) 6538 5250

Note: Dependent on the seriousness or complexity of the complaint. The complainant may be requested to submit the complaint in writing with all relevant information.

## **6. Registration of Complaints**

Upon receipt of a complaint the staff member receiving the complaint must ensure that the complaint is appropriately registered and marked for immediate follow up action.

## **7. Complaint Handling Process**

Council has adopted a three level approach to handling complaints.

### **7.1 Level One – First Line Complaint Handling**

(a) First line staff will endeavour to resolve straightforward minor complaints on the spot if practicable.

(b) First line staff will record full details of the complaint to assist with investigation (including the outcome expected by the complainant) and register the complaint in the records system.

(c) First line staff may then refer the complaint to their Supervisor or Manager to ascertain who should attend to the issue and then proceed with the necessary action. Where practicable, complaints are resolved within the relevant Department responsible for the matter. All officers are to resolve the complaints within the guidelines, timeframes and principles established in this policy.

(d) In some cases of serious or more complex issues first line staff shall direct the complaint to the most appropriate Authority within the Council or to an outside agency. Guidance will be provided by the Public Officer on these matters.

(e) Complaints alleging pecuniary interest, corrupt conduct, significant breaches of laws/regulations or competitive neutrality issues are to be immediately referred to the Public officer or General Manager who will investigate the issues in accordance with policies and statutory requirements.

(f) Complaints which include issues relating to personal injury, property damage or other matter which may give rise to a claim against Council are to be dealt with in full consultation with Council's Insurance/Risk Management Officer.

### **7.2 Level Two – Internal Review of Complaint**

(a) Where the complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome, the matter is to be reviewed by the relevant Senior Manager in each Department in consultation with the Director, and every endeavour made to resolve the issues.

(b) The Director may refer the matter to Council's Senior Management Team (General Manager and Directors) if he considers it will assist in resolving the issues. If warranted, the General Manager will consult with the Mayor and/or report to Council.

### **7.3 Level Three – Independent Review Options**

(a) If the complaint cannot be resolved within Council, the complainant will be referred to the appropriate outside agency, eg The Department of Local Government, Ombudsman and the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

(b) An alternate dispute resolution procedure involving mediation may be considered in appropriate circumstances.

There may be cases where Council is unable to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the complainant (after all the relevant processes have been followed) and is not reasonably in a position to take any further action on the matter. Whilst the complainant can still pursue the matter legally or with other agencies, Council may in certain circumstances (determined by the General Manager or Council) have to consider imposing a limit on communication with the complainant if the same issue continues to be

raised. This also applies to vexatious complaints.

## **8. Complaints Made to Councillors**

In many instances complaints are made directly to Councillors rather than to Council Officers. In such cases the complaint needs to be registered and dealt with in accordance with the above processes. Councillors are requested to encourage the complainant to contact the Council office if they have not previously made the complaint to Council, so that the matter can be recorded and followed up.

## **9. Contacting External Agencies**

The following provides contact information for some of the relevant agencies:

### **(a) Department of Local Government (NSW)**

Sydney Office: Level 9, 323 Castlereagh Street, Sydney  
Phone (02) 9289 4000 Fax (02) 9289 4099  
E-mail: [dlg@dlg.nsw.gov.au](mailto:dlg@dlg.nsw.gov.au)

Postal Address:  
The Director General, Department of Local Government  
Locked Bag 3015 Nowra NSW 2541

Information on the Department of Local Government is available on the Department's website [www.dlg.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au)

### **(b) The Ombudsman (NSW)**

The NSW Ombudsman, Level 24, 580 George Street, Sydney NSW 2000  
Phone (02) 9286 1000 Fax (02) 9283 2911  
E-mail: [nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au)

Information on the role of the Ombudsman is available on the NSW Ombudsman website [www.nswombudsman.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nswombudsman.nsw.gov.au)

### **(c) The Independent Commission Against Corruption**

Sydney Office: Level 21, 133 Castlereagh Street, Sydney 2000  
Phone (02) 8281 5999 Fax (02) 9264 5364  
E-mail [icac@icac.nsw.gov.au](mailto:icac@icac.nsw.gov.au)

Postal Address:  
The Commissioner, ICAC, Box 500 GPO, Sydney NSW 2001

Information on the role of the ICAC is available on the ICAC website [www.icac.nsw.gov.au](http://www.icac.nsw.gov.au)

## **10. Communication of this Policy**

Council Complaints Handling policy will be communicated to all interested persons as follows:

- (a) Providing an easy to read brochure at Council Office, Library and facilities which advises of the procedure for lodging a complaint.
- (b) By including Council's Complaints procedure on Council's website and providing a downloadable form for the purpose of lodging a complaint.
- (c) Training Council staff on how to provide information to customers on Council's Complaints Handling Policy.
- (d) Providing all Councillors with a printed copy of the policy and including it in new Councillor induction processes.

(19.07.2006)

### **Contact details**

General Manager - Gloucester Shire Council  
02 6538 5250 (ph)  
02 6558 2343 (fax)  
[council@gloucester.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@gloucester.nsw.gov.au)



Gloucester  
Shire Council

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