

Compliments and Complaints Policy

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Policy owner	Ross McLeod, Chief Executive Officer
Owner Department	Economic Growth and Organisational Improvement
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1. Purpose

Hastings District Council is committed to continual improvement of service delivery throughout the organisation and has made significant advancements in this area over the last ten years. A process for registering and responding to compliments and complaints is an important next stage in this commitment, particularly for addressing circumstances where the customer experience falls short of acceptable standards.

The policy provides context to the process for recording and review of public feedback about organisational performance (good and bad), including systems, people and service delivery. Council intend to use the feedback to help drive improvements in service delivery by Council staff and contractors.

1.1. Background

Previously compliments and complaints received have been assessed and assigned to the appropriate area/manager for investigation, appropriate action (if any) and response. The introduction of a formal policy, while largely keeping this approach in place, centralises the process and enables an improved reporting framework to be introduced.

2. Scope

Council takes responsibility for Council-related matters within its legislative and common law boundaries. Council is responsible for the services delivered by staff and contractors engaged to carry out work on behalf of Council.

This policy relates to:

- compliments for excellent performance, and
- complaints where the customer believes that either a Council service does not meet the expected standard or the conduct of a Council officer or contractor is unsatisfactory.

The policy does not apply to concerns raised with staff that are resolved immediately.

2.1. Interpretation

A **compliment** is:

- A written or verbal expression of praise or commendation for a job well done or where the service provided exceeds the expected standards

A **complaint** is:

- an allegation that a Council service was performed in a substandard manner or has not met reasonable timeframes
- an allegation regarding an employee acting contrary to their duties or conduct below expected standards
- an allegation regarding Council activity contrary to its by-laws, regulations, policies, legislative requirements or reasonable professional standards

2.2. Limitations

A complaint under this policy is **not**:

- an **enquiry**, or question regarding council policies, management, service or regulations that can be addressed directly by the relevant staff. An enquiry may become a complaint if the customer is dissatisfied with the service provided

- a **request for service** - for example reporting an issue requiring maintenance
- a **complaint about the actions of a third party** such as noise or dog complaints, *unless* the concern relates to the action of Council or its officers in managing such a complaint
- a dispute under the Building Act 2004
- a dispute about development and/or financial contributions
- an objection or appeal under the Resource Management Act

Council sometimes encounters situations where the proper implementation of the law or a Council policy is criticised and a complaint alleging poor performance is submitted. Where it becomes clear this is the case, the issue will be addressed (in whole, or in part) as a policy matter.

3. Policy statement

Council strives to deliver excellent service to the community and build trust and confidence in Council through efficient and effective performance. Compliments positively reinforce excellent service and complaints provide valuable insight into public expectations. The learnings from these situations are used to improve Council operating practices.

3.1. Mandate and commitment

The Mayor and Chief Executive are committed to continuous improvement of Council services. The investigation of compliments and complaints, followed by implementation of enhancements is an integral part of the improvement cycle.

3.2. Channels for reporting a compliment or complaint

Compliments and complaints can be made verbally or in writing. The channels for reporting include:

- Calling the Council contact centre or speaking with a staff member and requesting the matter is logged for review.
- Completing the online compliments/complaints form on a Council website or at a Council facility.
- Emailing Council's customer service team.
- Posting a letter to Council.
- Contacting an elected representative. Elected members will raise all matters for formal review with the Chief Executive, unless the matter relates to the Chief Executive, in which case the matter will be handled by the Mayor.

3.3. Service Standards, Process and Principles

- All compliments and complaints will be recorded in an appropriate system for investigation and resolution.
- Compliments will be shared with staff and management.
- Complaints will be assigned to the appropriate staff member for investigation, and the complainant will be kept informed of the estimated timeframe for completion.
- Complaints involving or alleging staff misconduct will be handled in accordance with Council employment policies and obligations under law.
- Complex or serious matters may, at the Chief Executive's discretion, be referred to an independent party for investigation or review if an initial assessment indicates there are grounds for doing so.
- Fairness is a fundamental principle, both to those making complaints and those who are the subject of a complaint. All individuals involved will be treated fairly.
- The complainant has the right of appeal to Council's Chief Executive, who may review the situation and attempt to resolve the matter.

3.4. Strategic alignment

The policy supports a fundamental Council Long Term Plan objective to provide responsive Council services that are customer centric.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
All Staff	Record details and notify line manager or Human Resources (if employee related) of all customer compliments and complaints received via the designated communication channels.
Team Leaders/Managers	Ensuring compliments and complaints are recorded in the appropriate system, properly investigated and any improvement opportunities identified are implemented.
District Customer Services Manager	Monitoring the compliments and complaints process to ensure the guiding principles, service standards and process are followed, and any trends are identified. Coordination of reporting to the Leadership Management Team.
Human Resources	Manage the investigation and employment relations processes in conjunction with relevant managers in relation to complaints about staff members.
Leadership Management Team	Investigate complaints where appropriate, share compliments with teams, and have oversight of volumes and emerging trends. Ensure best practice is reinforced and any identified improvements are implemented.
Chief Executive	Consider matters passed on by Elected Members and assign for review as considered appropriate. Review any matters escalated via the customer's right of appeal.

5. Review

The District Customer Services Manager is responsible for undertaking a review of the policy on an annual basis. The timeframe for review may be shortened at the direction of the Chief Executive if considered appropriate.

6. Change history

Amendment (s)	Date	Updated by and authority

