

Compliments and Complaints Policy

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| Policy expert | Greg Brittin, District Customer Services Manager |
| Policy owner | Bruce Allan, Group Manager Corporate |
| Owner Department | Corporate |
| Approval date | 29/06/2022 |
| Version | 3 |
| Review date | 30/06/2025 |

1. Purpose

Hastings District Council is committed to continual improvement of service delivery throughout the organisation. The process for registering and responding to compliments and complaints is an important part of 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 uses the feedback to help drive improvements in service delivery by Council staff and contractors, and where the feedback is good, to celebrate that.

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 formally received (see 3.2) for excellent performance, and
- complaints formally received (see 3.2) 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:

- An 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 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.

3.4. Complainants' rights

Complainants have the right to:

- Be treated with courtesy and respect.
- Make complaints and express their opinions in reasonable, lawful and appropriate ways.
- Communicate their concerns and views without fear of reprisal or other unreasonable response.
- Have their complaint assessed, and where appropriate investigated, fairly and impartially.
- Be heard by the complaint handler or decision-maker. This right can be modified, curtailed or lost if the complainant behaves unacceptably.
- Receive a timely response.

- Be told about the outcome of their complaint and actions Hastings District Council will be taking as a result (as long as this won't affect investigations, or disciplinary or criminal proceedings and taking account of confidentiality requirements in respect of staff).
- Be told the reasons behind decisions that affect them.
- Exercise the right of appeal to Council's Chief Executive, who may review the situation and attempt to resolve the matter.

3.5. Complainants' responsibilities

Complainants are responsible for:

- Treating Hastings District Council staff and contractors with courtesy and respect.
- Explaining their complaints as required (and can ask Hastings District Council staff to help them do this).
- Providing Hastings District Council with information they have that is relevant to their complaint.
- Communicating honestly with the Hastings District Council.
- Advising Hastings District Council if they have taken other actions relating to their complaint (such as complaining to another person or organisation, or starting legal proceedings).
- Cooperating with Hastings District Council staff who are dealing with their complaint.

If complainants do not meet these responsibilities, Hastings District Council may put conditions on how the complainant can communicate with its staff or take other appropriate steps.

3.6. 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 People & Capability (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 Lead Team. |
| People and Capability | Manage the investigation and employment relations processes in conjunction with relevant managers in relation to complaints about staff members. |
| Lead 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 a triennial 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 |
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| Policy Owner Updated to Craig Cameron Leadership Management Team renamed Lead Team | 29/05/2019 | Greg Brittin, with approval from the Lead Team. |
| Policy Owner Updated to Bruce Allan Human Resources renamed People and Capability. Complainant's rights and responsibilities added. | 29/06/2022 | Greg Brittin, with approval from the Lead Team. |
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