

TEMORA SHIRE COUNCIL



TEMORA
The Friendly Shire

COMPLIMENT AND COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICY

ACTIVE

Review Details

ABOUT THIS RELEASE

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This policy is intended to ensure that Council handles compliments and complaints fairly, efficiently, and effectively.

Council's compliment and complaint management system is intended to:

- enable Council to respond to issues raised by people making compliments and complaints in a timely and cost-effective way
- boost public confidence in Council's administrative process, and
- provide information that can be used by Council to deliver quality improvements in our services, systems and compliment and complaint handling.

This policy provides guidance to Council staff and people who wish to make a compliment or complaint on the key principles and concepts of Council's compliment and complaint management system.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all staff receiving or managing compliments and complaints from the public made to or about Council, regarding its services, staff and compliment and complaint handling.

Staff grievances, code of conduct complaints and public interest disclosures are dealt with through separate mechanisms.

1.3 Organisational commitment

Council expects staff at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient compliment and complaint handling. The following table outlines the commitment expected from staff and the way that commitment should be implemented.

Who	Commitment	How
General Manager	Promote a culture that values compliments and complaints and their effective resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report publicly on Council's compliment and complaint handling • Provide adequate support and direction to key staff responsible for handling compliments and complaints. • Regularly review reports about compliment and complaint trends and issues arising from complaints. • Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints resolve them promptly. • Encourage staff to make recommendations for

		<p>system improvements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise and reward good complaint handling by staff. • Support recommendations for service, staff and improvements arising from the analysis of compliment and complaint data.
Director Administration & Finance	Establish and manage Council's compliment and complaint management system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide regular reports to the General Manager on issues arising from compliment and complaint handling work. • Ensure recommendations arising out of compliment and complaint data analysis are canvassed with leadership team and implemented where appropriate. • Recruit, train and empower staff to resolve complaints promptly and in accordance with Council's policies and procedures. • Encourage staff managing compliments and complaints to provide suggestions on ways to improve Council's compliments and complaint management system. • Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints resolve them promptly. • Recognise and reward good complaint handling by staff
Directors & Engineering Managers	Provide guidance and support with Council's compliments and complaints management system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider details of escalated complaint investigations and decide upon appropriate action • Implement changes to services, systems, practices and/or procedures if weaknesses are identified through the management and analysis of complaints • Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly.
Managers & Supervisors	Manage Complaints within Council complaint management procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate employees about this policy • Ensure complaints are responded to in a courteous, fair, confidential and timely manner and that the complainant is advised of progress and outcomes. • Recruit, train and empower staff to resolve

		<p>complaints promptly and in accordance with Council's policies and procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible to resolve them promptly.
Staff whose duties include compliment and complaint handing	Demonstrate exemplary compliment and complaint handling practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. • Assist people to make a compliment or complaint, if needed. • Comply with this policy and its associated procedures. • Keep informed about best practice in compliment and complaint handling. • Provide feedback to management on issues arising from complaints. • Provide suggestions to management on ways to improve Council's compliment and complaints management system. • Implement changes arising from individual compliments or complaints and from the analysis and evaluation of compliment and complaint data as directed by management.
All Staff	Understand and comply with Council's compliment and complaint handling practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. • Be aware of Council's compliment and complaint handling policies and procedures. • Assist people who wish to make compliments or complaints access the Council's process. • Be alert to complaints and assist staff handling complaints resolve matters promptly. • Provide feedback to management on issues arising from complaints. • Implement changes arising from individual compliments or complaints and from the analysis and evaluation of compliment and complaint data as directed by management.

2. Terms and definitions

Compliment

An expression of praise or regard for service received or performance given.

Complaint

Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about Council, its services, staff, or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

A complaint covered by this Policy can be distinguished from:

- staff grievances (which are handled in accordance with the NSW Local Government (State) Award)
- public interest disclosures made by Council staff (refer to Policy G10 - Internal Reporting Policy)
- code of conduct complaints (refer to Policy G17 - Code of Conduct)
- responses to requests for feedback about the standard of Council service provision (see the definition of 'feedback' below)
- reports of problems or wrongdoing merely intended to bring a problem to Council's notice with no expectation of a response (see definition of 'feedback')
- service requests (see definition of 'service request' below), and
- requests for information (refer to the Information Guide on Council's website under "Access to Information").

Complaint management system

All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware, and software used by Council in the management of complaints.

Dispute

An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of Council.

Feedback

Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about Council, about its services or complaint handling where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Service request

Includes:

- requests for approval
- requests for action
- routine enquiries about Council's business
- requests for the provision of services and assistance
- reports of failure to comply with laws regulated by Council
- requests for explanation of policies, procedures and decisions.

Grievance

A clear, formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem.

Policy

A statement of instruction that sets out how Council should fulfil its vision, mission, and goals.

Procedure

A statement or instruction that sets out how Council policies will be implemented and by whom.

Public interest disclosure

A report about serious wrongdoing made by a public official in New South Wales that meets the requirements of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022*.

3. Compliments

Compliments are valuable as they give Council an opportunity to identify services and areas of best practice by staff and incorporate those practices and standards in other areas of Council.

3.1 How compliments can be made

Compliments can be made to Council via any of the following means:

- Internet – via Council’s website at www.temora.nsw.gov.au
- Mail – to PO Box 262, Temora NSW 2666
- Email – to temshire@temora.nsw.gov.au
- In person – at 105 Loftus Street, Temora
- Telephone – on (02) 6980 1100

Where required, Council staff will provide assistance with verbal compliments and the completion of forms.

3.2 Acknowledgement

Council will be in contact with the customer regarding their compliment, via their preferred contact method, within ten business days, unless they have required not to be contacted or have chosen to remain anonymous.

3.3 How compliments will be handled

Compliments will be registered in Council’s customer request management system and assigned to the appropriate Officer/Manager for resolution. The Officer/Manager will make the staff member(s) whose service prompted the compliment aware of the recognition.

3.4 Monitoring and reporting

Compliments will be reported to the Management Executive Team on a regular basis to ensure that staff are recognised and examples of best practice are identified and acknowledged. Where appropriate compliments will be reported to Council through the Councillor’s Information Paper. Any personal information received with compliments will only be used for the purposes of addressing any compliment received.

4. Complaints - Guiding principles



4.1 Facilitate complaints

People focus

Council is committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about its services, systems, practices, procedures, products and complaint handling.

Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame.

People making complaints will be:

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

No detriment to people making complaints

Council will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

Anonymous complaints

Council will only investigate anonymous complaints if:

- The General Manager or their delegate considers that a particular complaint warrants investigation, and
- The complainant gives convincing reasons for the complaint to remain anonymous.

An anonymous complaint may still be investigated if it is considered to have some substance, is of appropriate seriousness, and if sufficient information is provided to undertake an investigation.

Accessibility

Council will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about Council is well publicised. Council will ensure that its systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolving their complaint, Council will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

No charge

Complaining to Council is free.

4.2 Responding to complaints

Early resolution

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with Council.

Responsiveness

Council will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints. Council aims to formally acknowledge complaints within 10 working days and to respond substantively within 21 working days.

Council will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

Council is committed to managing people's expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, 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.

Council will advise people as soon as possible when Council is unable to deal with any part of their complaint and advise where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).

Council will also advise people as soon as possible when it cannot meet time frames for responding to their complaint and the reason for the delay.

Objectivity and fairness

Council will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective, and unbiased manner. The person handling the complaint will be different from any staff member whose service or conduct is being complained about. Conflicts of interests, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. Internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker.

Responding flexibly

Council staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. Council will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.

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

Confidentiality

Council will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate. Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by Council as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

4.3 Manage the parties to a complaint

Complaints involving multiple agencies

Where a complaint involves multiple organisations, Council will work with the other organisation/s where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

Where a complaint involves multiple areas within Council, responsibility for communicating with the person making the complaint and/or their representative will also be coordinated.

Where Council services are contracted out, Council expects contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. Council takes complaints not only about the actions of Council staff but also the actions of Council's service providers.

Complaints involving multiple parties

When similar complaints are made by related parties Council will try to arrange to communicate with a single representative of the group.

Empowerment of staff

All staff managing complaints are empowered to implement Council's complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Staff are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of Council's complaint management system.

Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

Council is committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. At the same time our success depends on:

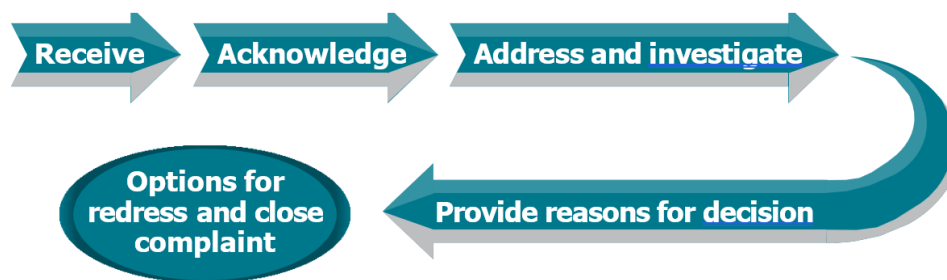
- Council's ability to do work and perform its functions in the most effective and efficient way possible
- the health, safety and security of Council staff, and

- Council's ability to allocate its resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with Council, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of Council's work. As a result, Council will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects Council and will support staff to do the same in accordance with this policy.

For further information on managing unreasonable conduct by complainants please see Council's Managing Unreasonable Conduct by Complainants Policy.

5. Complaint management system



5.1 Introduction

When responding to complaints, staff should act in accordance with Council's complaint handling procedures as well as any other internal documents providing guidance on the management of complaints. Staff should also consider any relevant legislation and/or regulations when responding to complaints and feedback.

The five key stages in Council's complaint management system are set out below.

5.2 Receipt of complaints

Unless the complaint has been resolved at the outset, Council will record the complaint and its supporting information. Council will also assign a unique identifier to the complaint file.

The record of the complaint will document:

- the contact information of the person making a complaint
- issues raised by the person making a complaint and the outcome/s they want
- any other relevant information, and
- any additional support the person making a complaint requires.

5.3 Acknowledgement of complaints

Council will acknowledge receipt of each complaint promptly, and preferably within 10 working days.

Consideration will be given to the most appropriate medium (e.g. email, letter) for communicating with the person making a complaint.

5.4 Initial assessment and addressing of complaints

Initial assessment

After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, Council will confirm whether the issue/s raised in the complaint is/are within Council's control. Council will also consider the outcome/s sought by the person making a complaint and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed.

When determining how a complaint will be managed, Council will consider:

- how serious, complicated or urgent the complaint is
- whether the complaint raises concerns about people's health and safety
- how the person making the complaint is being affected
- the risks involved if resolution of the complaint is delayed, and
- whether a resolution requires the involvement of other organisations.

Addressing complaints

After assessing the complaint, Council will consider how to manage it. To manage a complaint, Council may:

- give the person information or an explanation.
- gather information from the person or area that the complaint is about, or
- investigate the claims made in the complaint.

Council will keep the person making the complaint up to date on our progress particularly if there are any delays. Council will also communicate the outcome of the complaint using the most appropriate medium. Which actions Council decides to take will be tailored to each case and take into account any statutory requirements.

5.5 Providing reasons for decisions

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, Council will contact the person making the complaint and advise them:

- the outcome of the complaint and any action taken
- the reason/s for the decision
- the remedy or resolution/s that is/are proposed or put in place, and
- any options for review that may be available to the complainant, such as an internal review, external review or appeal.

If during investigation, Council make any adverse findings about a particular individual, Council will consider any applicable privacy obligations under the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* and any applicable exemptions in or made pursuant to that Act, before sharing the findings with the person making the complaint.

5.6 Closing the complaint, record keeping, redress and review

Council will keep comprehensive records about:

- how Council managed the complaint

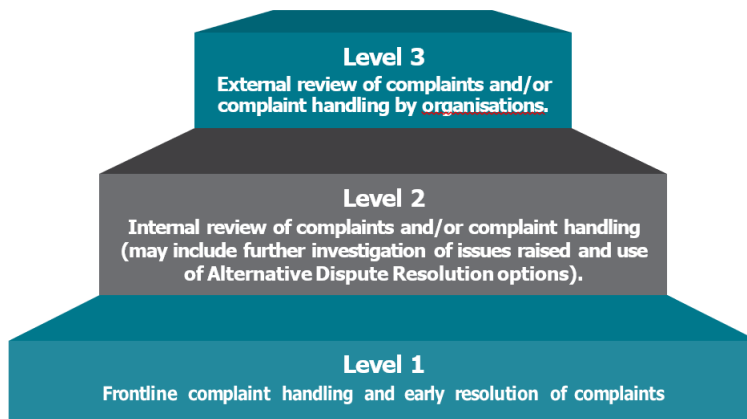
- the outcome/s of the complaint (including whether it or any aspect of it was substantiated, any recommendations made to address problems identified and any decisions made on those recommendations, and
- any outstanding actions that need to be followed up.

Council will ensure that outcomes are properly implemented, monitored, and reported to the complaint handling manager and/or senior management.

5.7 Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints

Council will inform complainants about any internal or external review options available to them (including relevant Ombudsman, the Office of Local Government or other oversight bodies).

5.8 The three levels of complaint handling



Council aims to resolve complaints at the first level, the frontline. Wherever possible staff will be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training and supervision.

Where this is not possible, Council may decide to escalate the complaint to a more senior officer within Council. This second level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:

- assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made, and/or
- facilitated resolution (where a person not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties).

Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of Council's review of their complaint, they may seek an external review of the decision by the Office of Local Government or the NSW Ombudsman, or other relevant oversight body.

6. Accountability and learning

6.1 Analysis and evaluation of compliments and complaints

Council will ensure that compliments and complaints are recorded in a systematic way so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis.

Regular reports will be run on:

- the number of compliments and complaints received.
- the outcome of complaints, including matters resolved at the frontline
- issues arising from complaints
- systemic issues identified, and
- the number of requests received for internal and/or external review of Council's complaint handling.

Regular analysis of these reports will be undertaken to monitor trends, measure the quality of our customer service and make improvements.

Both reports and their analysis will be provided to the General Manager and senior management for review.

6.2 Monitoring of the compliment and complaint management system

Council will continually monitor its compliment and complaint management system to:

- ensure effectiveness in responding to and resolving compliments and complaints, and
- identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system.

Monitoring may include the use of audits or complaint satisfaction surveys.

6.3 Continuous improvement

Council is committed to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of its compliment and complaint management system. To this end, Council will:

- support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in compliment and complaint handling
- recognise and reward exemplary complaint handling by staff
- regularly review the compliment and complaints management system and complaints data, and
- implement appropriate system changes arising out of analysis of compliments and complaints data and continual monitoring of the system