

# Council Policy NB-P-29

## Complaints Resolution



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beaches  
council

## Policy Statement

This policy sets out the approach that Northern Beaches Council (Council) takes to ensuring that all customers are given the opportunity to make a complaint about issues they may have regarding Council services and potentially inappropriate, unethical or unfair behaviours or practices committed by Council Officials - including members of the elected Council (Councillors), or Council officers (staff, contractors and volunteers).

Council values our customers' right to complain about our decisions and actions in regard to the way we conduct our business. We commit to treating complaints seriously and dealing with them promptly, fairly and genuinely. Complaints provide unique information about the quality of services from the perspective of our residents and customers.

Council commits to continuous improvement, viewing complaints as an improvement opportunity, and uses the information gained from them to assist with identifying and improving policies, systems and services.

Effective management of complaints ensures that a complainant's issues are responded to in a consistent and timely manner.

Furthermore, a robust complaints management framework promotes transparency and builds community confidence.

All complaints (as defined in this policy) will be treated in accordance with this policy, and the associated *Complaints Resolution Guidelines*. Depending on the nature of the complaint, they may also be assessed in accordance with other relevant policies, as outlined.

Where Council is unable to resolve complaints internally, complainants will be provided information about their avenues for seeking resolution and/or appeal externally.

Code of Conduct complaints about the Councillors and the CEO are managed under Council's *Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct* and may be referred to an external Conduct Reviewer.

Complaints that fall under the assessment criteria of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022 (PID Act)* can be made directly to any manager, or to a Nominated Disclosures Officer (refer to Council's *Public Interest Disclosures (PID) Policy* for further details).

## Policy Principles

Council:

- has a strong 'top down' senior management ownership approach for complaints management.
- acknowledges that everyone has a right to make a complaint, and is responsive when liaising with complainants.
- is proactive in seeking feedback and complaints; and also makes it easy for complainants to get in touch.
- respects all complainants, and ensures they do not experience reprisal.
- is objective, unbiased and consistent in how we receive, consider and resolve complaints.
- resolves complaints in a transparent, timely and efficient manner.
- respects the privacy of complainants, particularly in relation to disclosure of their personal information.
- has in place the necessary suite of policies, procedures, suitably qualified personnel and ancillary.

## The Complaints Resolution Team

The Complaints Resolution Team (the CRT) is Council's focal point for complaints in relation to matters concerning staff, councillors, contractors and volunteers, Council processes that have not been followed or Council services that have not been adequately provided, in addition to matters concerning allegations of corruption, maladministration and misconduct.

The CRT does not seek to substitute any complaint handling or investigative function by oversight agencies, such as the NSW Ombudsman, the Office of Local Government (OLG) or the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

The CRT seeks to ensure that Council's dealings with the community are consistent with the principles set out above and associated Complaints Resolution Guidelines.

The CRT also seeks to identify opportunities for systemic improvements to Council's processes. The CRT does not overturn operational decisions made by Council.

In accordance with this approach, the CRT provides a professional complaint handling service and utilises the opportunity of investigation and complaint handling to enhance and develop best practice and education across Council.

## Scope and application

The guiding principles set out in this policy apply to how Council addresses complaints, referring to operational decisions, staff behaviour and services delivered by Council.

Service complaints are managed by the individual business units in the first instance. Staff grievances are dealt with through internal Human Resources related procedures, and Public Interest Disclosures are dealt with via Council's PID Policy.

Complainants who are considered to be unreasonable in their dealings with Council are specifically managed by Council's Unreasonable Conduct by a Complainant Policy.

Council expects staff at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling.

## References and related documents

- *Complaints Resolution Guidelines*
- *Code of Conduct*
- *Procedures for the Administration of the Code of Conduct*
- *Unreasonable Conduct by a Complainant Policy*
- *Public Interest Disclosure Policy*
- *Managing Unsatisfactory Conduct Guideline*
- *Privacy Management Plan*

## Definitions

### Complainant

A person who makes a complaint.

### Complaint

Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about Council, the probity of our services, the conduct of staff or the handling of a complaint; and 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
- public interest disclosures made by our staff (refer to the PID policy)
- responses to requests for feedback about the standard of our service provision (refer to the definition of 'feedback' below)
- reports of problems or wrongdoing merely intended to bring a problem to our notice with no expectation of a response (refer to definition of 'feedback')
- service requests (refer to definition of 'service request' below)
- requests for information (refer to our access to information policy)

### Conduct reviewer

A person appointed by Council to review allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct by councillors or the CEO.

### Dispute

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

### Feedback

Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about us, about our 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 or service
- routine inquiries about the organisation's business
- requests for the provision of services and assistance
- reports of failure to comply with laws regulated by the organisation
- 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 Council's position on an issue defining the guiding principles used to set the organisation direction, administer its statutory requirements, address corporate risk and promote consistency of approach and administrative efficiency.

### Procedures and guidelines

Supports the Policies of the organisation by detailing what steps are to be taken to apply or implement Policy principles.

### Public Interest Disclosure

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

### Community Strategic Plan

This Council policy relates to the  
Community Strategic Plan Outcome of:

- Good governance - Goal 19 Our Council is transparent and trusted to make decisions that reflect the values of the community
- Good governance - Goal 20 Our Council is proactive, and efficiently and effectively responds to, and delivers on, the evolving needs of the community

### Responsible officer

Executive Manager Internal Audit  
& Complaints Resolution

### Review date

November 2028

### Revision history

Policy number	Date	Detail	TRIM #
	7 June 2017	First Internal draft	
	17 June 2017	Draft version for EMT Review, and endorsement for Council place on public exhibition	
	3 July 2017	Draft version incorporating feedback from CET (previously EMT)	
	2 February 2018	Change effective date to 24 October 2017 as per 2017/414396	2018/176978
NB-P-29	12 November 2024	Policy reviewed and minor administrative changes made. Adopted by Council (Resolution 290/24)	2024/716491



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