

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS **POLICY**

POLICY OWNER	Executive Leadership Team
POLICY ADMINISTRATOR	Manager, Customer Experience
POLICY REVIEW	Every triennium by the Manager, Customer Experience
SIGNED BY CEO	Final
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1 INTRODUCTION

At Waikato Regional Council we value our customers' feedback. It is important we know when we have got it right so we can continue to meet the expectations of our customers at every opportunity.

However, we know that like every agency that serves the public, we will receive complaints. We provide a wide range of services and often make decisions on issues where people have conflicting opinions, particularly in relation to regulatory and enforcement matters. We also know that sometimes we'll make mistakes or fail to meet customer expectations. Whatever the cause of dissatisfaction, we want people to let us know so that we can positively resolve issues before they become serious problems, improve our decision-making and quality of services, and enhance relationships with our customers.

This policy aims to provide a framework and process to enhance customer satisfaction by supporting an organisational culture that is:

- open to feedback, including complaints.
- focused on reinforcing good practices and resolving complaints.
- committed to learning from feedback and complaints so that we can keep improving our services and the way we do things.

We will provide complainants with an open, effective, and easy-to-use complaints process. We will encourage staff to treat feedback as a tool to help us to identify necessary improvements to services, which help to remove causes of complaints, support a high-performing culture and improve customer satisfaction by showing that we're listening and taking feedback seriously.

Policy scope

This policy is relevant for all full and part-time employees, casual staff, contractors and

elected representatives of Waikato Regional Council.

This policy does not relate to submissions made through any formal submission processes or any council decisions that have other legal pathways for appeal.

Relevant legislation and Council policy

Waikato Regional Council will manage complaints within the requirements of legislation and codes of practice that we work under, including:

- Employment Relations Act 2000
- The Local Government Official Information and Meeting Act (LGOIMA)1987
- Privacy Act 1993
- The Local Government Act 2002
- The Resource Management Act 1991
- Health and Safety at Work Act 2015
- Criminal Disclosure Act 2008
- Biosecurity Act 1993

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the following Waikato Regional Council policies and guidelines which can be found in discover [here](#)

- Privacy policy
- Hazard management policies
- Social media policy
- Enforcement Policies
- Customer engagement promise
- Feedback and Complaints Process.

2 Definitions

Customer feedback may be any one of the following types:

COMPLIMENT An expression of satisfaction, thanks or appreciation for something Waikato Regional Council or a specific staff member has done.

COMPLAINT An expression of dissatisfaction with council policy, decision, process, charge, employee/contractor conduct or quality of service that is accompanied by a request for a formal response. A suggestion can be made without the requirement for a formal response

A complaint requiring a formal response is distinguished from customer contacts of the following nature:

- Request for service or information
- Reporting an environmental incident
- LGOIMA request
- Feedback as part of a formal consultation process
- A part of a process that the council is obliged or required by statute to apply
- Any internal complaint from one staff member against another
- A complaint over which the customer or council have begun legal proceedings or has already been heard by a court or tribunal
- Allegations against a contractor or staff member of serious misconduct such as sexual harassment, fraud or assault
- Insurance claims.

SUGGESTION A suggestion may be substantively like a complaint, but the customer does not require a formal response. This type of customer contact will also be logged, assessed and used for process improvement but will not involve further communication with the customer.

CONFIDENTIAL / ANONYMOUS COMPLAINT Is one for which the complainant does not wish to provide information that might identify them. These complaints will be logged, assessed and used for process improvement but will not involve further communication with the customer.

UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT A complainant may be deemed to be unreasonable where current or previous contact with them shows that they have met **two** or more of the following criteria:

- Persisting in pursuing a complaint where the Waikato Regional Council's Feedback and Complaints Process has been fully and properly implemented.
- Changing the substance of a complaint or persistently raising new issues or seeking to prolong contact by unreasonably raising further matters while the complaint is being dealt with.

- Unwillingness to accept documented evidence as being factual (this could include persons who do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify after a long period of time has elapsed).
- Denying receipt of an adequate response despite correspondence specifically answering their questions or concerns.
- Focusing on a trivial matter to an extent which is out of proportion to its significance (while aware that determining what is trivial can be subjective, and that careful judgement is required).
- Have had an excessive number of contacts with Waikato Regional Council or our contractors when pursuing their complaint, placing unreasonable demands on staff.
- Are known to have electronically recorded meetings or conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other parties involved.
- Display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable once a clear explanation is provided as to what constitutes an unreasonable demand.

A complainant may be deemed unreasonable if any **one** of the following criteria is exhibited:

- Physical violence has been used or threatened towards staff or their families or associates at any time.
- Staff, their families or associates have been harassed or verbally abused on more than one occasion.

Managing unreasonable complainant conduct

Most complainants act responsibly. In a small number of cases, the complainant may be difficult to satisfy and that prompts them to interact with the council in a manner that is inappropriate by being:

- unreasonably persistent
- unreasonably demanding
- unreasonably argumentative
- uncooperative
- physically threatening, abusive or violent.

It is important to remember that even where a person's conduct may be unreasonable, they could have a valid complaint and that complaint should be handled appropriately. The key to managing unreasonable complainant conduct is to give fair consideration to the complaint, while ensuring there is no undue imposition on the agency or staff in doing so.

However, it is also necessary to remember that such conduct may impact on:

- the health, safety and security of Waikato Regional Council staff.
- staff ability to do their work and perform their functions in the most effective and efficient ways possible.
- staff ability to allocate resources fairly across all the complaints Waikato Regional Council receives.

When this happens, the council will take action to manage any customer conduct that negatively and unreasonably impacts on the organisation and its staff.

The council will follow the guidelines set out in Ombudsman's *Managing unreasonable complainant conduct: A manual for frontline staff, supervisors and senior managers*. Which can be found here www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources/managing-unreasonable-complainant-conduct

These actions may include:

- offering an opportunity for the complainant to re-engage in a more appropriate manner
- set limits on the scope of response that a customer might receive from council
- impose conditions on the written and verbal information received from the customer
- refusing to work with the customer any longer and refer them to the ombudsman's office

In very rare occasions where there is a threat to person or property, staff will follow the procedures set out under the Waikato Regional Council Hazard Management Policies.

Waikato Regional Council customer commitment

“Exceptional customer service built on a foundation of authenticity, empathy and trust.”

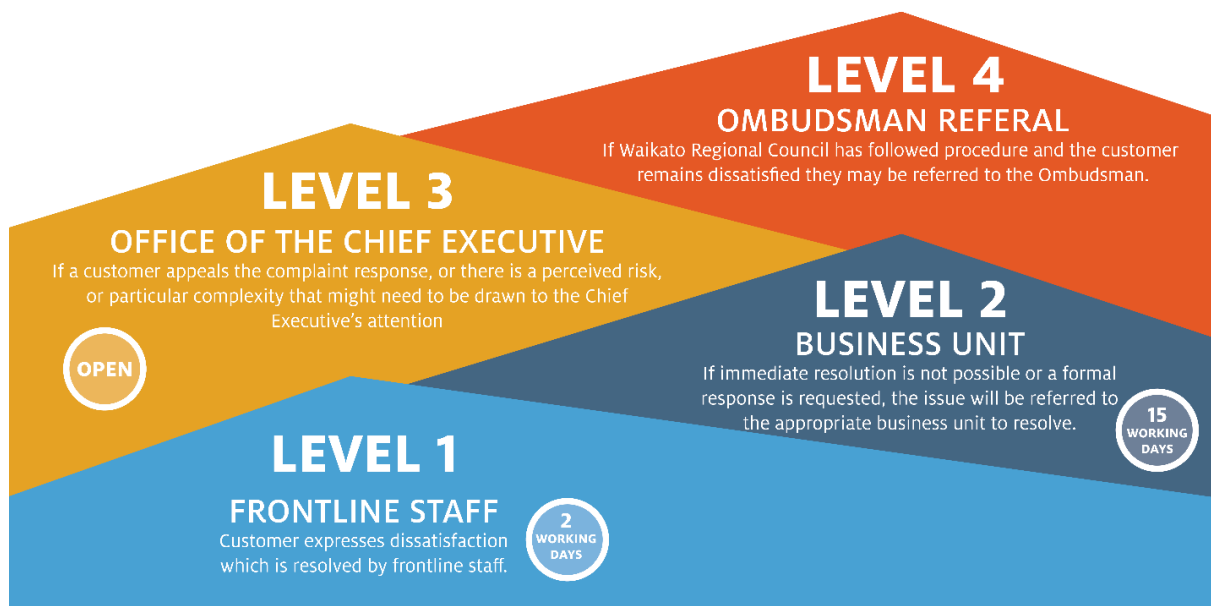
This means we pursue the consistent delivery of exceptional customer service, earning your trust and acting with integrity and transparency across all transactions.

We are great listeners and we will work with you to provide the right information, the first time, with choice and visibility that is easy to understand.

Engaging in our processes is easy and you will feel empowered to take part in the decision-making for what is important to you, in ways that work for you.

When we do this, you will trust that we are making a difference – to your life – and the future of our region.

3 Customer resolution process



4 Policy review

The policy will be reviewed at the end of each triennium, along with any councillor briefing materials, in preparation for the new council following the elections.