

# CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

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Date of Adoption:	29 August, 2011
Date of Review:	5 May 2014
Responsible Officer:	Manager Customer Service
Department:	Customer Service

# CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

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## 1. POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1. The Hume City Council values of Customer focus, respect, collaboration and innovation demand that Council actively encourage feedback. Hume City Council is committed to effective Customer feedback and a complaints handling system that reflects the needs, expectations and rights of Customers. Council recognises the Customer's right to provide feedback including making a complaint.
- 1.2. This policy applies to all feedback received by Council and the accompanying Customer Feedback and Complaints Handling Procedure outlines how Customer feedback will be handled.
- 1.3. In doing this Hume City Council will:
  - 1.3.1. recognise, promote and protect our resident's rights including the right to comment and complain;
  - 1.3.2. ensure that our system for resolving complaints is fair, easily accessible and efficient, both internally and externally;
  - 1.3.3. equip staff with the skills and knowledge to ensure this policy is understood and implemented;
  - 1.3.4. provide relevant, timely and accurate information on Hume City Council's complaint handling process;
  - 1.3.5. monitor and report on all feedback and complaints with the intention of improving the quality of our services; and
  - 1.3.6. achieve increased satisfaction in the delivery of Hume City Council services for our residents, providers and third parties;

## 2. PURPOSE

- 2.1. An effective Customer feedback and complaints handling system is an essential part of the provision of quality service to the Hume community
- 2.2. This policy and associated process provides a model approach to Customer feedback and complaint handling and outlines the essential features of Council's system to deal with feedback, including complaints. The handling of all feedback will be in accordance with the Hume City Council values of respect, customer focus, collaboration and innovation.
- 2.3. There is no legislative requirement to have a feedback policy. The material in this policy is based on best practice advice from the Victorian Ombudsman's Office and a range of reference materials from other Governments and private sector companies.

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## 3. SCOPE

- 3.1 This policy has application to all employees, contractors and Councillors.
- 3.2 This policy has application to all feedback, requests, suggestions, problems and complaints received from Customers, residents, businesses and other third parties.

## 4. OBJECTIVE

One of Council's central themes is a well governed and engaged community (Hume Horizons 2040). This policy will assist in achieving this and demonstrate accountable leadership by enabling staff to operate with integrity and openness and to be accountable in the delivery of our programs and services. Providing a Feedback and Complaints Handling Policy and procedure will enable Council's key strategic objective of providing responsible and transparent governance, services and infrastructure which responds to community needs. This is in line with Council's Social Justice Charter (2014) and the Hume Citizens Bill of Rights which includes 'the right to be respected as an individual and a member of the community without distinction or discrimination.

## 5. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 This policy will be implemented through the accompanying Feedback and Complaints Handling Procedure.
- 5.2 This policy will be implemented across all of Council. It will be communicated to staff through the Service First cross organisational team site; staff newsletters and email. Management responsibility for the implementation of the policy is detailed in the accompanying procedure.
- 5.3 Information to the public will be provided on the Council website and in hard copy at Council facilities in key community languages.

## 6. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- 6.1 For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions:
- 6.1.1 **Feedback** - a response which may be either a compliment, suggestion or complaint, provided by a Customer regarding a service, product, or process of Council. Customer feedback is used to streamline processes and improve services.
- 6.1.2 **Complainant** - person or entity affected by the action or inaction of Council who brings this to the notice of Council.

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- 6.1.3 **Complaint** - an expression of dissatisfaction with a specific action or service of Council, including the failure by Council to comply with its obligations under relevant legislation.
- 6.1.4 **Complaint Handling System** – The way individual complaints are dealt with by Council including policy, procedure, technology, reporting, evaluation and improvement.

## 7. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- 7.1 In using this policy Hume City Council will act in accordance with the:
- 7.1.1 Customer Feedback and Complaints Handling Procedure
  - 7.1.2 Local Government Act 1989
  - 7.1.3 Protected Disclosure Act 2012
  - 7.1.4 Freedom of Information Act 1982
  - 7.1.5 Victorian Charter of Human Rights & Responsibilities Act 2006
  - 7.1.6 Hume City Council Social Justice Charter 2014
  - 7.1.7 Disability Discrimination Act 1992
  - 7.1.7 Information Privacy Act 2000 (Victoria)
  - 7.1.8 Health Records Act 2001 (Victoria)
  - 7.1.9 Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)
  - 7.1.10 Trade Practices Act 1974
  - 7.1.11 Infringement Act 2006
  - 7.1.12 Hume City Council Code of Conduct;
  - 7.1.13 Hume City Council Councillor Code of Conduct;
  - 7.1.14 Hume City Council Fraud Policy
  - 7.1.15 Any other relevant legislation or regulations

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# CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

The Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy commit all staff, contractors and Councillors at Hume City Council to follow this procedure to capture feedback from customers, residents, businesses and other third parties. This procedure needs to be read in conjunction with the Customer Feedback and Complaints Handling Policy.

## 1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### 1.1 Our Commitment

Council's actions and behaviours are guided by the values of Customer Focus, Respect, Collaboration and Innovation.

Council's actions are in accordance with its Social Justice Charter which states that 'all people should be guaranteed equal human rights'.

Hume City Council is committed to effective Customer feedback and a complaints handling process that reflects the needs, expectations and rights of Customers. Council recognises the Customer's right to provide feedback and requests or to make a complaint. This process provides mechanisms for requests and complaints to be addressed in a fair, timely and efficient manner.

By working to address the request or complaint, Council is committed to meeting the Customer's needs, improving services and internal processes and enhancing the reputation of Council.

With this in mind, all levels of staff will actively encourage feedback during interactions with residents, business and other stakeholders.

### 1.2 Visibility and Transparency

Hume City Council provides information on its website and freely available at its offices to advise Customers as to the steps involved in providing feedback, making requests, offering suggestions or lodging a complaint.

The Council welcomes all feedback and links this to improving its service.

This process will be promoted internally for staff and also externally for residents and other parties.

### 1.3 Accessibility

Individuals or groups wanting to provide feedback; make suggestions or make a complaint will have access to staff within Hume City Council. In the first instance a customer will have contact with a Council Officer either

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by telephone, Council website, email, post, fax or face-to-face interactions. The Council Officer will receive the feedback, request or complaint and attempt to resolve the issue immediately.

If an issue cannot be resolved at this point the Council Officer will refer the complaint to the relevant staff member as outlined by the diagram in attachment one.

Any complaints regarding the conduct of staff or Councillors will be referred to the appropriate director/manager or Chief Executive Officer respectively. The intention is to determine the most appropriate course of action and seek resolution promptly and satisfactorily.

Feedback, including suggestions and complaints, may be submitted in the format that is most appropriate and comfortable for the customer, e.g. letter, fax, email, via the Council website, face-to-face or by telephone.

Hume City Council recognises the diversity of our community and endeavours to resolve complaints by appropriately addressing each individual's particular needs. When needed, Hume City Council will engage specialised services appropriate for an individual to achieve a satisfactory resolution for all parties e.g. language or interpreting services; material in different formats for hearing and visually impaired Customers.

Details on Council's Customer Feedback and Complaints Handling Policy and Process are available from all Council facilities and on the Council website and are free of charge.

#### 1.4 Responsiveness

Hume City Council's responsiveness is outlined in Service First – Council's commitment to providing first rate Customer Service to all Customers. This is available to Customers on the website and at the Customer Service Centres. Council's responsiveness to Customer feedback and complaints will be consistent with Service First.

Hume City Council will respond to feedback, including requests, suggestions and complaints in a timely manner following the Service First Customer Commitment guidelines stated below:

When Customers contact Council by phone or face to face, their issue will be dealt with immediately for Level One complaints – grievances. For Level Two complaints – Problems, Customers will be provided with a follow up reference number to check the progress of their matter.

In accordance with Council's correspondence handling procedures, when Customers contact Council by email, fax or mail, they will be contacted within 3 days to acknowledge receipt of their feedback and be provided with an outline of the handling process and who to contact. A response to their issue will be provided within 10 working days.

If a resolution to their issue cannot be dealt with on the first contact with Council staff, the Customer will be contacted within 10 working days (or at an alternative time agreed to by both parties) and provided with information as to the progress of the matter.

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Contact will be made with the Customer not less than each 5 working days thereafter (or at an alternative time agreed to by both parties) until the suggestion or complaint is satisfactorily actioned or resolved.

Where a complaint is referred or escalated during the process of resolution, the Customer will be informed.

## 1.5 Fairness and Objectivity

Hume City Council recognises the need to be fair to the Customer providing feedback, particularly a complaint, and also the person against whom the matter is raised. Each complaint will be addressed in an equitable and unbiased manner.

It is essential for the good management of all complaints to manage complainant expectations from the very beginning of the complaint handling process. Careful management can prevent unrealistic expectations which can lead to unreasonable conduct.

To ensure fairness and objectivity, Complainants need to be made aware of:

- a. Council's role;
- b. the complaint handling procedure;
- c. the expected timeframe of the complaint handling process;
- d. what the responsibilities of Council are in relation to the complainant;
- e. what the responsibilities of the complainant are in relation to Council and
- f. what is expected of the complainant.

The Customer / complainant has the right to:

- a. be heard;
- b. know whether Council's relevant policy or guidelines have been followed;
- c. provide and request all relevant material to support the complaint where this does not breach privacy regulations;
- d. be advised how relevant material can be obtained including access through the Freedom of Information Act (if appropriate);
- e. be informed of the response to their complaint;
- f. be informed of Council's decision and the reason for this decision;
- g. know that their complaint is being reviewed independently where appropriate.

If a complaint is made regarding a staff member or Councillor, they will have the right to:

- a. be provided with sufficient detail about the complaint to enable a thorough investigation of the complaint. If it is not material to the matter, the identity of the complainant does not need to be revealed;
- b. respond to the particulars of the complaint; and
- c. be informed of the decision and the reason for this decision.

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All Customers and Council staff will be treated with respect and courtesy. The rules of natural justice are applied and, where appropriate, all parties involved in the complaint will be given the opportunity to respond to any issues raised.

Hume City Council will demonstrate fairness by:

- a. judging all complaints on their merits and facts;
- b. giving equal treatment to all people;
- c. notwithstanding the above, providing any assistance required to complainants with special needs;
- d. ensuring that any action is compatible with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006;
- e. taking all complaints seriously;
- f. treating complainants with sensitivity, respect and courtesy;
- g. giving clients the opportunity to have their complaint dealt with by a staff member not previously involved in the matter;
- h. ensuring all conflicts of interest are disclosed and acted upon;
- i. ensuring an appropriate apology and/or remedy is provided if the complaint is substantiated;
- j. having an appropriate procedure for dealing with anonymous complaints;
- k. providing all parties with clear reasons as to why any actions have been taken.

All parties involved in the transaction will be kept informed as the complaint progresses and will also be informed of the outcome of the complaint and the reason for this outcome.

#### 1.6 Privacy and Confidentiality

All personal information collected by the Council in connection with feedback or a complaint will be handled in accordance with all applicable privacy laws and will only be used for the purpose of actioning the feedback or investigating the complaint.

Information gathered during the complaint process will only be used in order to deal with, and resolve, the complaint or to address systemic issues arising from the complaint. Information will only be shared with staff on a need to know basis. If information is disclosed to the public, it will be in a non-identifiable format.

When a complainant identifies themselves as a Whistleblower (as defined in the Protected Disclosure Act 2012) they are to be immediately directed to Council's Protected Disclosure Coordinator (PDC). The identity of the Whistleblower should only be disclosed to the PDC.

Where an allegation of improper conduct or detrimental action is of a nature that raises issues that may fall within the provisions of the Act, Hume City Council has an obligation to assess the allegations in terms of the Act. It will be assessed whether the protections of the Act may apply to a disclosure regardless of whether or not the individual making the disclosure specifically requests the protections.

#### 1.7 Customer Focused Approach for Continual Improvement

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Utilising the information acquired from feedback is a vital part of making Council more Customer focused. Feedback received in one department can provide learning for many others. Hume City Council will foster a Customer-focused approach, recognising that feedback and complaints provide Council with an opportunity for improvement.

## 1.8 Accountability

Each Council employee, contractor or volunteer accepts responsibility for effective handling of feedback and complaints. The employee, with whom a Customer first has contact, has the authority to respond to the feedback or resolve a complaint and to remedy the situation within the scope of their role.

Council's Feedback and Complaint Handling Policy and Practices are open to scrutiny by Customers, Council staff, the Ombudsman Victoria or other reviewing body.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this system, the following definitions are used:

**Feedback** - a response which may be a compliment, suggestion or complaint, provided by a Customer regarding a service, product, or process of Council. Customer feedback is used to streamline processes and improve services.

**Complainant** – a person or entity affected by the action or inaction of Council who brings this to the notice of Council.

**Complaint** - an expression of dissatisfaction with a specific action or service of Council, including the failure by Council to comply with its obligations under any legislation. It will not be considered a complaint if someone has received an infringement and is unhappy about being the recipient. It will only be considered a complaint if there is an issue with the manner in which it was issued or handled.

**Complaint Handling System** - The way individual complaints are dealt with by Council including policy, procedures, technology, reporting, evaluation and improvement.

## 3. CLASSIFICATION OF FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

Feedback will be classified as a compliment, a suggestion or a complaint.

A complaint will be classified into Level 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 as noted below for action, recording and reporting purposes:

**Level 1 - Grievance** The complainant contacts Council and expresses concern however no specific action is required as Council policy or processes have been applied correctly. The complainant is advised of the Council position and accepts the explanation.

**Level 2 – Service Failure** The complainant contacts Council because a service they were expecting was not delivered. This complaint can usually be actioned

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to the complainant's satisfaction by the first person they contacted and once finalised, the matter is closed. This type of complaint will usually be conveyed to Council's Customer Service team to generate a service request in Council's Customer Request Management System, Merit which is referred to the appropriate staff member for action.

**Level 3 – Problem** The complainant contacts Council and expresses concern and is not satisfied with the explanation given. This will require further action by a staff member to rectify or referral to a supervisor / manager in accordance with the flowchart shown at appendix A. Usually a resolution to the issue will be identified and acted upon within defined timeframes established within the Customer Request Management System (Merit) or other Council strategies.

**Level 4 – Dispute** The complainant contacts Council, or an external body who then notifies Council, and expresses concern and is not satisfied with the explanation and outcome provided by a staff member or a manager and requires an internal review of the complaint. Complainants will be requested to complete a formal complaint form, either in hard copy or online (see attachment C). In most cases, these disputes will be responded to within 4 weeks.

**Level 5 – Breach of Human Rights** The complainant contacts Council, or an external body who then notifies Council, and expresses concern that an act or decision, has breached their rights as specified under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

#### 4. FEEDBACK HANDLING PROCESS

##### 4.1 Objectives

Hume City Council has established the following feedback handling objectives:

- a. feedback is dealt with by Council staff at the first point of contact;
- b. complaints are resolved by Council staff at the first point of contact in the majority of cases (except in regards to complaints regarding staff or Councillors);
- c. the need for the escalation of complaints is kept to a minimum and done on an as needed basis;
- d. where a complainant requests consideration by a senior staff member, this will be considered;
- e. complainants are responded to in a timely manner in accordance with section 4.4 of this policy
- f. feedback is recorded and analysed to streamline the customer experience and improve Council's services and processes.

##### 4.2 Responsibility and Authority

All employees and contractors will:

- a. be advised of the feedback and complaints handling policy and processes;
- b. comply with any reporting requirements determined by Council;
- c. treat customers in a courteous manner and promptly respond to their feedback or direct them to the appropriate individual to handle their matter;

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- d. show good interpersonal and communication skills;
- e. be aware of their roles, responsibilities and authorities in respect of feedback and complaints;
- f. be aware of what procedures to follow and what information to give to customers; and
- g. immediately refer any significant complaints which are outside the scope to their role to resolve to the appropriate supervisor or manager.

#### 4.3 Resourcing

Staff will be equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge and be provided with sufficient support to handle feedback appropriately.

Employees will take ownership of feedback when it is received by Hume City Council.

Employees will use this process as a resource to follow when handling feedback.

#### 4.4 Acknowledgement of Feedback and Complaints

Written feedback including complaints will be acknowledged within 3 days of receipt in accordance with clause 1.4 of this process.

Feedback provided over the telephone or face to face will be actioned immediately by the staff member who will:

- a. identify themselves;
- b. actively listen;
- c. record the details of the complaint in the Merit Customer request system (this is not necessary for minor issues that are dealt with on the spot);
- d. determine what the complainant wants;
- e. show empathy and be courteous without apportioning blame or potential liability; and
- f. explain the proposed course of action and timeframes.

If a staff member needs assistance to action the feedback, they can request the assistance of a Customer Service Officer.

#### 4.5 Recording and Tracking of Feedback

All feedback will be recorded in a simple and meaningful way, even if the feedback is perceived as a trivial or minor issue.

The progress of feedback will be tracked and recorded from initial receipt to when the Customer is either satisfied, or a final decision on the outcome of the feedback is made.

Centralised systems, the Merit Customer request management system and the TRIM document management system, will be used to track feedback, monitor progress and to ensure compliance with complaint handling timelines. Reporting on the outcome of feedback as well as analysing and reporting on trends identified to address systemic issues will be regularly undertaken.

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Critical elements to be captured in either of the electronic databases that support the Feedback Handling process are:

- a. Customer's details;
- b. classification of feedback as a compliment, suggestion or complaint;
- c. nature of feedback / complaint;
- d. requested action and/or remedy;
- e. mode of feedback (oral, e-mail, on-line form, letter, in person);
- f. responsible staff member & supervisor;
- g. service area location and
- h. action taken, response time and outcome.

## 5. ASSESSING AND INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS

5.1 Level 3, 4 and 5 complaints will need to be assessed and investigated. In assessing and investigating a complaint, the following will be considered:

- a. how serious the complaint is and the significance it has for the complainant and Council;
- b. the need and requirement for any immediate action;
- c. the complexity of the issue;
- d. whether it indicates an action not compatible with relevant legislation;
- e. whether it indicates the existence of a systemic problem;
- f. whether an alternative and satisfactory means of redress is available;
- g. whether the parties are agreeable to informal resolution of the complaint;
- h. whether the complaint is trivial, frivolous or vexatious and
- i. the time that has elapsed between event and complaint.

5.2 Assessment of the complaint will be conducted by the relevant Manager who is responsible for the conduct of the investigation (see appendix A). This person has the appropriate authorisation to conduct the investigation and will adhere to this policy and the Feedback Handling System.

5.3 Level 4 complaints – disputes that require an internal review – will be assessed with information provided by the complainants on a formal complaint form, either in hard copy or online (see attachment C).

5.4 Matters that fall within the jurisdiction of the Magistrates Court of Victoria; the County Court of Victoria; the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and the Building Control Commission will not be assessed or investigated using this procedure.

## 6. MAKING A DECISION

6.1 The decision and outcome of the complaint will be clearly communicated to the complainant and appropriate Council staff and management

6.2 For level 3 and 4 complaints, Council will provide the complainant with detailed reasons for its decision, including where possible, supporting information on which the decision has been based. Where Council has

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made specific changes as a result of a complaint, the complainant will be advised of the changes and how these will be monitored.

6.3 After a decision is made Council will:

- a. record the outcome of the complaint in the centralised system where the complaint was first recorded ie Merit or Trim;
- b. implement actions decided as part of the decision ;
- c. provide de-identified information to appropriate staff, managers and senior management to enable improvement; and
- d. monitor the effectiveness of outcomes.

## 7. PROVIDING AN APOLOGY

7.1 One of the most effective ways to diffuse a situation or to prevent a situation from escalating is to offer an apology where this is warranted. Council staff sometimes get it wrong. Mistakes, delays, omissions and misunderstandings happen, even in the most efficiently run organisations. If this occurs, action should be taken immediately to remediate the problem. Remediation on its own is generally not enough. An apology needs to be made as well.

7.2 When things go wrong, complainants generally want no more than to be listened to, understood, respected and – if appropriate – given an explanation and apology. A full apology given at the right time can:

- a. restore dignity, face and reputation;
- b. provide an acknowledgement that the recipient was indeed right;
- c. assure the recipient that they are not at fault; and
- d. prevent escalation of the matter and the associated costs in terms of time, resources and stress.

7.3 When things go wrong, the problem often is not the event that caused the damage – it is the way the person was treated afterwards. If the response to the person's concerns is respectful, positive and constructive (which can include an apology if appropriate), those concerns can often be resolved satisfactorily, enabling the person to 'move on'. If the response is rude, dismissive, negative, defensive or misleading, this is likely to result in an escalation of the problem with detrimental consequences for all the parties concerned. Unreasonable complainant conduct could well become the result.

## 8. GIVING AN APOLOGY

8.1 Apologies generally need to be given at the earliest practical opportunity. Although it is best to apologise as soon as a wrong is identified, it may be important to delay a full apology to allow time for inquiries or an investigation to establish the nature and cause of the problem – and to allow one or both parties time for cool reflection.

Apologies must be given by the right person, the one who is responsible for the error or wrong doing, or a person who is clearly perceived as speaking on behalf of the agency responsible for the wrong. Apologies

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must also be given to the right person, the one who was harmed. Apologising to a third party is generally not appropriate.

## 8.2 Our Commitment

The most appropriate form and method of communicating an apology will depend on the circumstances of the particular case. In general terms, the most effective apologies incorporate the following key elements:

## 8.3 Recognition

- a. A description of the problem, act or omission to which the apology applies.
- b. Recognition of the wrong – an explicit recognition that the action or inaction was incorrect, wrong, inappropriate, unreasonable or harmful.
- c. Acknowledgement of the harm – an acknowledgement that the affected person has suffered embarrassment, hurt, pain, damage or loss.

## 8.4 Responsibility

Acceptance of responsibility by taking responsibility for the wrong and harm caused.

## 8.5 Reasons

An explanation of the cause – a simple, plain English explanation of the reasons for, or cause of, the problem.

## 8.6 Regret

An apology statement – a sincere expression of regret for an action or inaction that was wrong.

## 8.7 Redress

A statement of what action has been or will be done to address the problem and an undertaking that it will not happen again.

## 8.8 Legal Implications of Apologising

Staff must exercise caution when offering an apology that may incur any liability to Council. Staff should discuss specific instances with their Manager.

# 9. REMEDIES

9.1 Where Council considers a complaint is justified, an appropriate remedy will be determined. Council reserves the right to uphold any decision that has been made, outside of a process that may be at issue.

9.2 The remedies offered by Council will be fair and reasonable for both Council and the complainant. The investigation may lead to one or more of a range of possible outcomes, including:

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- an explanation
- an apology
- mediation
- an admission of fault
- a change in decision
- a change to policy, procedure or practice
- a correction of misleading records
- financial reimbursement, including a refund of any fees
- the waiving of a debt
- the remission of a penalty
- disciplinary action
- referral of a matter to an external agency for further investigation or prosecution.

9.3 Where possible, remedies will be implemented as soon as possible. In cases where a remedy is provided to a complainant, steps may be taken by Council to provide a remedy to other people similarly affected, even if they have not made a complaint.

9.4 Apologies will be conveyed promptly to the complainant who will also be advised what action will be taken to ensure the problem is not repeated.

## 10. COMMUNICATING THE DECISION

10.1 Following the investigation of the complaint, Council will provide the complainant with a response and an apology or remedy as outlined above. The employee is responsible for providing a response within the agreed timeframe between themselves and the complainant.

10.2 The complainant will be contacted by the most appropriate means for their complaint e.g. letter, fax, email or telephone, in person. A formal response also needs to be documented and captured in either Merit or TRIM before the complaint is closed.

## 11. CLOSING THE COMPLAINT

11.1 If the complainant accepts Council's decision, the agreed action will be carried out and the records closed.

11.2 If the complainant does not accept Council's decision and wishes an investigation to go further, the complainant will be made aware of the ability to request an internal review and other external forms of recourse available to them.

## 12. INTERNAL REVIEW

12.1 Council has an internal review process that will be utilised if a complainant has a grievance about how their complaint was handled. This review process will be commenced with a written explanation of the grievance (see appendix C) and handled by the relevant Manager or Director of the department against whom the complaint has been made.

12.2 The internal review process will:

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- a. be accessible to all complainants;
- b. ensure the complaint or feedback is taken seriously and addressed promptly at a senior level;
- c. ensure the reviewer is a more senior officer who has not previously dealt with the matter;
- d. respond to the complainant and take appropriate remedial action; and
- e. rectify any systemic issues identified by the internal review.

12.3 Infringement reviews are excluded from this as they are dealt with separately.

### 13. ALTERNATIVE AVENUES FOR DEALING WITH A COMPLAINT

13.1 If, following an internal investigation and an internal review, the complainant is still aggrieved, they will be referred to an external complaints handling body.

13.2 An external complaints handling body is an independent avenue for complainants to lodge a complaint if they are unable to reach a satisfactory conclusion with Council. Review by an external body or tribunal aims to ensure that the decision making of an agency is fair and reasonable and that proper procedures are followed in making decisions.

13.3 If Hume City Council is not able to assist the complainant, or the complaint is outside Council's jurisdiction, there are other bodies that may be able to help.

13.4 Complainants should be advised of the following Victorian complaint and dispute resolution bodies:

- Ombudsman Victoria: Any person who thinks they may have been treated unfairly may make a complaint to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will then consider the complaint and the administrative actions of the agency.
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission: Responsible for eliminating discrimination in Victoria. Offers information, education and consultancy services, conducts research and provides legal and policy advice.
- Office of the Public Advocate: An independent statutory body established by the Victorian State Government, working to protect and promote the interests, rights and dignity of people with a disability.
- Privacy Victoria: The key body regulating the way Victorian government agencies and local councils collect and handle personal information.
- Dispute Settlement Centre (Victorian Department of Justice): Provides an informal, impartial, accessible, low cost dispute resolution service to the Victorian community. This service is best utilised when there are private disputes between neighbours that Council has no jurisdiction over.
- Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption (IBAC): the key body who investigates complaints regarding the improper conduct of public officers and public bodies.

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS	
HANDLING PROCEDURE - For current version refer to the Intranet. Printed copy for immediate use only – printed 22 May 2014.	
<b>Approved By:</b> EMT	<b>Approval Date:</b> 5 May 2014
<b>Author:</b> Manager Customer Service	<b>Review Date:</b>

## 14 CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

14.1 Council will continually improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its Feedback Handling Processes. In doing so Council will:

- a. explore, identify and apply best practices in feedback handling;
- b. foster a customer-focused approach within Council;
- c. encourage innovation in feedback handling development; and
- d. recognise exemplary feedback handling behaviour.

## 15 REPORTING AND EVALUATION

15.1 The Feedback Handling System will be reported every six months to the Executive Management Team.

15.2 Evaluation enables investigations to be assessed and any improvements identified in the investigations process recorded for future reference. Regular review of Council's Feedback Handling processes will ensure it is operating efficiently and effectively.

15.3 Feedback and complaints will be monitored and information on trends or aggregated data including the number of enquiries and complaints received each year by Council will be publically available.

15.4 Audits of investigations may also be undertaken to confirm the effectiveness of the Feedback Handling System and to ensure conformity with policy, procedures and guidelines. A self-audit checklist similar to that developed by the Ombudsman Victoria may be used for this purpose.

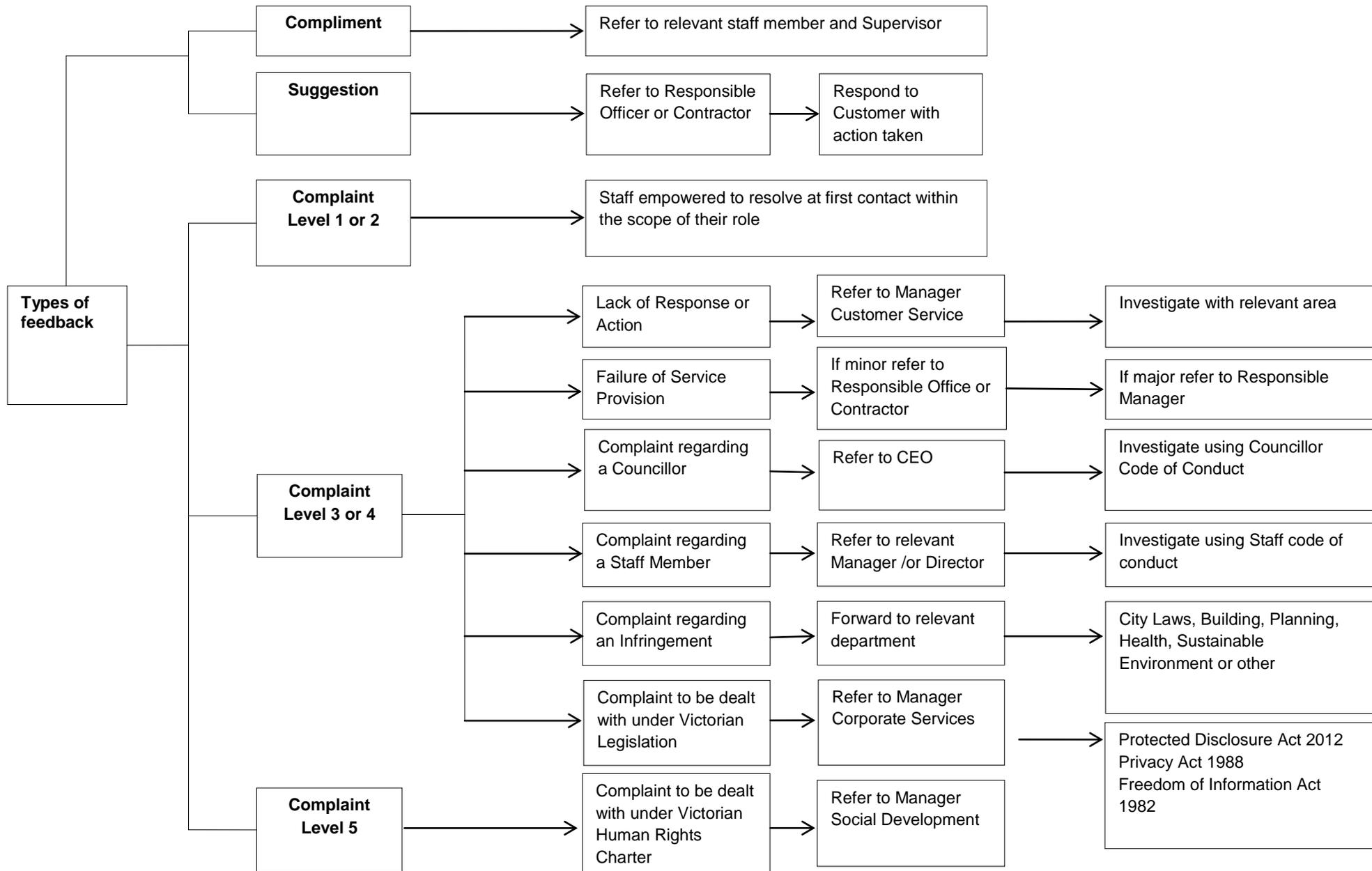
## 16 APPENDICES

Appendix A	Feedback and Complaint Handling Process
Appendix B	Complaints Flow Chart with Reference to Sections this Procedure
Appendix C	Complaint form for Level 4 complaints – disputes for internal review.

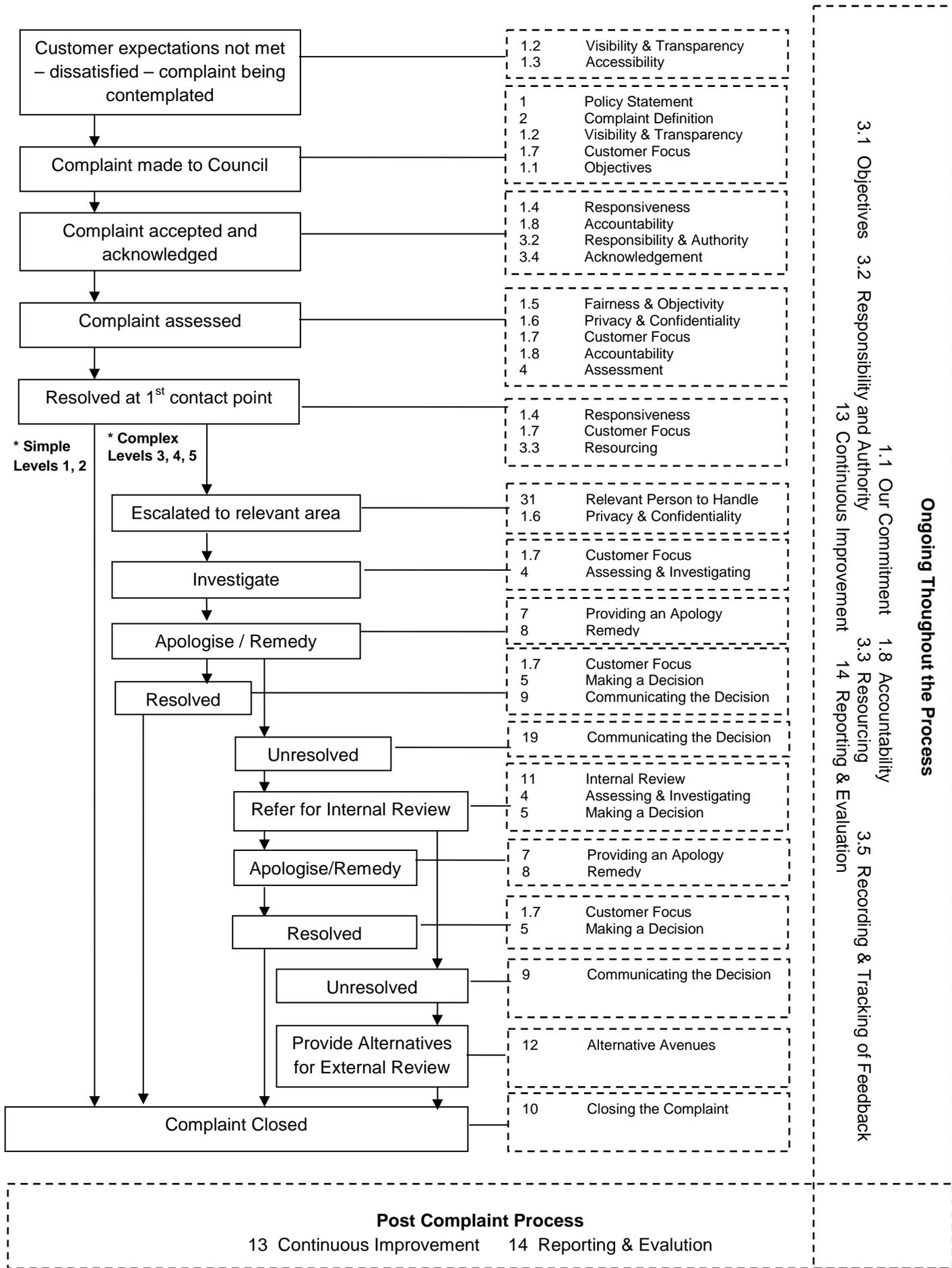
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# Feedback and Complaint Handling Procedure

# Appendix A



### Customer Feedback and Complaints Handling Flow Chart (with reference to applicable sections of the Procedure)



**Complaint – Dispute with Hume City Council requiring an internal review**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please provide a clear, concise description of your complaint including all relevant dates, times and places**

**Please detail any telephone conversations, meetings and reference numbers provided in your dealings with Council. Please attach copies of any relevant documents or correspondence with Council**

**Please provide any explanations given by Council and what you are disputing**

**Please outline the result or outcome that you are seeking**

**I acknowledge that the information provided is, to my knowledge, true and correct**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you. You will be contacted shortly and be advised of the next steps.**

Please email this to [contactus@hume.vic.gov.au](mailto:contactus@hume.vic.gov.au) ; mail to PO Box 119, Dallas 3047; or drop into one of our Customer Service Centres at Broadmeadows, Craigieburn or Sunbury.

File Reference: HCC14/12