

# CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT POLICY

July 2022

**PREPARED BY:**

**COMMUNICATIONS, ENGAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER UNIT**



4-20 Eton Street,  
Sutherland NSW 2232  
T 02 9710 0333  
[sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au)

SUTHERLAND SHIRE

## 1. PURPOSE

Our community and customers are at the heart of everything we do at Sutherland Shire Council (Council). We are committed to delivering quality customer service and working in collaboration with our community to ensure our services continue to meet needs.

Engaging with our community, both through formal engagement activities and through effective management of customer feedback and complaints, provides valuable insights to inform ongoing service planning and to drive continuous improvement.

This Policy outlines Council's approach to facilitating consistent and transparent management of customer feedback and complaints, in accordance with Council's Customer Experience Charter. It provides the principles to guide the management of feedback and articulates the standards and responsibilities of all parties. For the purposes of this Policy, the term 'feedback' can encompass opinions, suggestions, compliments and complaints. Complaints have been highlighted separately where relevant to provide clearer information on Council's complaints management processes.

## 2. APPLICATION

This Policy applies to:

- all Council employees, contract workers, consultants, volunteer or other persons who engage with the community on behalf of Council;
- the management of customer feedback and complaints made to Council as defined in this Policy.

This Policy does not apply to:

- the management of requests for service;
- community engagement activities, where Council invites feedback on a specific project, initiative or policy to allow the community to participate in decision making. This is covered by Council's Community Engagement Policy; or
- complaints regarding a Council Official, which are reviewed separately in accordance with Council's Codes of Conduct and associated procedures.
- Comments or messages received via Council's social media channels – these are handled in line with Council's Social Media Policy.

The way in which the Policy is implemented is informed by the attached schedule and other related documents listed in Section 9.

## 3. PRINCIPLES

### 3.1 Application of Principles

No one principle should be applied to the detriment of another. Principles must be collectively considered and applied to the extent that is reasonable and practicable in the circumstances.

### 3.2 Right to be Involved

We are committed to ensuring our customers are heard and considered, with feedback informing ongoing service planning and enhanced customer focus.

### 3.3 Consistent and Objective

We will assess feedback or complaint on its merits, applying consistent process and involving customers and/or their representative in the process where appropriate.

### 3.4 Accessible

We will empower our customers by providing a range of easily accessible channels to provide feedback, with clear information on how their feedback is managed.

### 3.5 Continuous Improvement

We strive for a best practice approach in management of customer feedback. We will continue to evolve our processes and systems and utilise feedback data to drive improvements.

### 3.6 Ethical

Council is committed to a high standard of ethical conduct with a zero-tolerance approach to fraudulent or corrupt conduct. For more information, please refer to Council's Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy available via Council's website.

## 4. STANDARDS

We will ensure the following in the management of customer feedback and complaints:

- Council will acknowledge receipt of complaints within five working days. Acknowledgement of a complaint does not necessarily include a resolution to the complaint. Council will triage complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the matter raised. If a matter relates to an immediate risk to safety or security, the response will be marked for urgent attention and escalated appropriately.
- We are committed to managing customer expectations, and where appropriate will inform customers of the following:

- The complaints process
  - Expected time frames for our actions
  - The possible or likely outcome of the complaint, including where Council is unable to deal with any part of a complaint.
- Customers may submit feedback and/or complaints via:
    - Council's website
    - mail addressed to the Chief Executive Officer
    - by contacting Council's Customer Service Team either via phone or in person; or
    - in person at Council facilities where Council employees are present (e.g. Leisure Centres, Hazelhurst, Animal Shelter, etc.).
  - Anonymous complaints will be recorded by Council and acted on accordingly where there is sufficient information provided at the time that the complaint is lodged. Should further assessment be required, the matter may be referred to a reviewer who may be internal or external to Council. Customer data will be handled in accordance with the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW).
  - Where a complaint relates to a specific person, the complaint will be reviewed by a party who is independent from the subject of the complaint. Conflicts of interests will be managed in accordance with Council's Codes of Conduct. Any internal reviews relating to how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person independent from the original complaint handler.

## 5. RESPONSIBILITIES

### 5.1 Responsible Officer

The Manager Communication, Engagement and Customer is the Responsible Officer for this Policy and is responsible for ensuring it is updated and available as required.

### 5.2 Chief Executive Officer

The Chief Executive Officer has delegated responsibilities to relevant staff to manage customer complaints in accordance with this Policy.

### 5.3 Directors

Directors are responsible for ensuring their directorate adheres to the requirements of this Policy and provide guidance in respect of the handling of customer feedback within their directorate and the organisation.

### 5.4 Employees

Employees must adhere to the requirements of this Policy and operate within its authorities.

## 5.5 Individual Rights and Mutual Responsibilities

Please see Schedule A.

## 6. POLICY COMPLIANCE

Customer feedback or complaints where this Policy is applied may be captured in Council's Customer Request Management System (CRMS) where it is reasonable to do so. Where customer feedback or complaints are received and the matter is resolved in an immediate interaction, it may not be captured in Council's CRMS. All complaints are managed according to the relevant service standards and escalation protocols.

## 7. RECORD KEEPING, CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

Council adheres to and complies with the *NSW State Records Act 1998* and *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* through its Access to Information Policy and Privacy Management Plan.

## 8. BREACHES OF POLICY

Breaches of this Policy will be dealt with in accordance with normal disciplinary procedures and will be advised to the Chief Executive Officer and / or Director of the relevant Council directorate, via the appropriate Manager.

## 9. RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Customer Experience Charter
- Code of Conduct for Council Staff
- Code of Conduct for Councillors
- Code of Conduct for Council Committee Members Delegates of Council and Council Advisers
- Unreasonable Customer Conduct Policy
- Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy
- Work Health and Safety Policy
- Community Engagement Policy
- Social Media Policy

## 10. RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

- *Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)*
- *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021*
- *Library Act 1939 No 40*
- *State Records Act 1998 (NSW)*
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)*

- *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW)*
- *Inclosed Lands Protection Act 1901 (NSW)*

## 11. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Term	Meaning
Complaint	<p>A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with Council services, staff or procedures. Complaints will be managed in accordance with Council's Customer Feedback and Complaints Management Guidelines.</p> <p>Requests for service (unless they are complaints related to Council's response times to a request for service) and requests for information or explanation of Council policies or procedures are not classified as complaints. Similarly, comments of a harassing nature with no identifiable purpose are not classified as complaints and will not be looked into further.</p> <p>Council defines a complaint as an expression of concern about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct</li> <li>• Delivery of a Council service</li> <li>• Customer service</li> <li>• Failure to provide information</li> <li>• Competence or conduct of staff</li> <li>• Errors of judgement or misinterpretation of information</li> <li>• Poor administrative processes</li> </ul> <p>Council defines that a complaint is not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback relating to a Council resolution.</li> <li>• Feedback relating to the determination outcome of a development application.</li> <li>• Feedback relating to a development application made during the assessment process.</li> <li>• A matter that has already been reviewed by an external agency.</li> <li>• Feedback relating to a particular Councillor outside their role as a Councillor.</li> <li>• Any work-related grievance from a Council employee.</li> <li>• A request for service or works – unless it is a second request where it is outside Council's service standards and there has been no response to the first request.</li> <li>• A complaint captured as a request for service – e.g. a customer complaining about a neighbour's pool fence would not be a complaint under this Policy. It would be a request for service (inspection) and therefore would fall under the normal service standards (may become a complaint if request not actioned).</li> <li>• A request for information or an explanation of policies or procedures.</li> </ul>

# CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT POLICY



Term	Meaning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making an expression of opinion – for example, a DA submission, a submission to a community engagement/consultation, social media comment or feedback on a service.</li> </ul>
Compliment	Compliments relate to positive feedback received for meeting or exceeded the expectations of the community.
Council Official	For the purpose of this Policy, the term 'Council Official' refers to, Councillors, Council employees and anyone who may be representing Council (e.g. volunteers, contractors, etc.).
Feedback	Feedback is information, insights and input provided by customers about their experience with Council in relation to service(s), products, programs or Council representatives. Feedback guides improvements of the customer experience and can empower positive change in the services Council offers and the manner in which they are delivered.

End of Document

<b>UNCONTROLLED COPY WHEN PRINTED</b> - For up to date copy please refer to Sutherland Shire Council Intranet / Website			
<b>Document Name:</b> Customer Feedback and Complaints Management Policy		<b>Policy Accountability:</b> Manager Community, Engagement and Customer	
<b>Version:</b> 1.0	<b>Approved by:</b> Council (GOV019-22)	<b>Minute No:</b> <a href="#">148</a>	<b>Date approved:</b> 25 July 2022
<b>Original:</b> July 2022	<b>Last Revision:</b> July 2022	<b>Next Revision:</b> July 2026	

## Schedule A - Individual Rights and Mutual Responsibilities of the Parties to a Complaint

*[Note – The term ‘rights’ is used to demonstrate a guarantee of the standard of service and behaviour that all parties should meet if a complaints process is to be effective. It is not used to depict a legally enforceable entitlement – although some are.]*

For Sutherland Shire Council to ensure that all complaints are dealt with fairly, efficiently and effectively and that occupational health and safety standards and duty of care obligations are adhered to, the following rights and responsibilities must be observed and respected by all of the parties to the complaint process.

### 1. Individual Rights

#### Customers have the right:

- to make a complaint and to express their opinions in ways that are reasonable, lawful and appropriate
- to a reasonable explanation of the organisation’s complaints procedure, including details of the confidentiality, secrecy and/or privacy rights or obligations that may apply
- to a fair and impartial assessment and, where appropriate, investigation of their complaint based on the merits of the case
- to a fair hearing
- to a timely response
- to be informed in at least general terms about the actions taken and outcome of their complaint
- to be given reasons that explain decisions affecting them
- to at least one right of review of the decision on the complaint
- to be treated with courtesy and respect
- to communicate valid concerns and views without fear of reprisal or other unreasonable response.

#### Staff have the right:

- to determine whether, and if so how, a complaint will be dealt with
- to finalise matters on the basis of outcomes they consider to be satisfactory in the circumstances
- to expect honesty, cooperation and reasonable assistance from customers
- to expect honesty, cooperation and reasonable assistance from organisations and people within jurisdiction who are the subject of a complaint
- to be treated with courtesy and respect
- to a safe and healthy working environment
- to modify, curtail or decline service (if appropriate) in response to unacceptable behaviour by a customer.



## Subjects of a complaint have the right:

- to a fair and impartial assessment and, where appropriate, investigation of the allegations made against them.
- to be treated with courtesy and respect by staff of the Sutherland Shire Council.
- to be informed (at an appropriate time) about the substance of the allegations made against them that are being investigated.
- to be informed about the substance of any proposed adverse comment or decision.
- to be given a reasonable opportunity to put their case during the course of any investigation and before any final decision is made.
- to be told the outcome of any investigation into allegations about their conduct, including the reasons for any decision or recommendation that may be detrimental to them.
- to be protected from harassment by disgruntled customers acting unreasonably.

## 2. Mutual Responsibilities

### Customers are responsible for:

- treating staff of the Sutherland Shire Council with courtesy and respect.
- clearly identifying to the best of their ability the issues of complaint or asking for help from the staff of the Sutherland Shire Council to assist them in doing so.
- providing to the best of their ability the Sutherland Shire Council with all the relevant information available to them at the time of making the complaint.
- being honest in all communications with the Sutherland Shire Council.
- informing the Sutherland Shire Council of any other action they have taken in relation to their complaint.
- cooperating with the staff who are assigned to assess/ investigate/resolve/determine or otherwise deal with their complaint.

If customers do not meet their responsibilities, Sutherland Shire Council may consider placing limitations or conditions on their ability to communicate with staff or access certain services.

Sutherland Shire Council has a zero-tolerance policy in relation to any harm, abuse or threats directed towards its staff. Any conduct of this kind may result in a refusal to take any further action on a complaint or to have further dealings with the customer. Any such conduct of a criminal nature will be reported to police and in certain cases legal action may also be considered.

### Staff are responsible for:

- providing reasonable assistance to customers who need help to make a complaint and, where appropriate, during the complaint process.
- dealing with all complaints, customers and people or organisations the subject of complaint professionally, fairly and impartially.
- giving customers or their advocates a reasonable opportunity to explain their complaint, subject to the circumstances of the case and the conduct of the customer.

- giving people or organisations the subject of complaint a reasonable opportunity to put their case during the course of any investigation and before any final decision is made.
- informing people or organisations the subject of investigation, at an appropriate time, about the substance of the allegations made against them and the substance of any proposed adverse comment or decision that they may need to answer or address.
- keeping customers informed of the actions taken and the outcome of their complaints.
- giving customers reasons that are clear and appropriate to their circumstances and adequately explaining the basis of any decisions that affect them.
- treating customers and any people the subject of complaint with courtesy and respect at all times and in all circumstances.
- taking all reasonable and practical steps to ensure that customers are not subjected to any detrimental action in reprisal for making their complaint.
- giving adequate warning of the consequences of unacceptable behaviour.

If the Sutherland Shire Council or its staff fail to comply with these responsibilities, customers may complain to the Public Officer.

#### **Subjects of a complaint are responsible for:**

- cooperating with the staff of the Sutherland Shire Council who are assigned to handle the complaint, particularly where they are exercising a lawful power in relation to a person or body within their jurisdiction.
- providing all relevant information in their possession to the Sutherland Shire Council or its authorised staff when required to do so by a properly authorised direction or notice.
- being honest in all communications with Sutherland Shire Council and its staff.
- treating the staff of the Sutherland Shire Council with courtesy and respect at all times and in all circumstances.
- refraining from taking any detrimental action against the customer in reprisal for them making the complaint.

If subjects of a complaint fail to comply with these responsibilities, action may be taken under relevant laws and/or Codes of Conduct.

#### **Sutherland Shire Council is responsible for:**

- having an appropriate and effective complaint handling system in place for receiving, assessing, handling, recording and reviewing complaints.
- decisions about how all complaints will be dealt with.
- ensuring that all complaints are dealt with professionally, fairly and impartially.
- ensuring that staff treat all parties to a complaint with courtesy and respect.
- ensuring that the assessment and any inquiry into the investigation of a complaint is based on sound reasoning and logically probative information and evidence.

# SCHEDULE TO CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT POLICY



- finalising complaints on the basis of outcomes that the organisation, or its responsible staff, consider to be satisfactory in the circumstances.
- implementing reasonable and appropriate policies/procedures/practices to ensure that customers are not subjected to any detrimental action in reprisal for making a complaint, including maintaining separate complaint files and other operational files relating to the issues raised by individuals who make complaints.
- giving adequate consideration to any confidentiality, secrecy and/or privacy obligations or responsibilities that may arise in the handling of complaints and the conduct of investigations.

If the Sutherland Shire Council fails to comply with these responsibilities, customers may complain to the Public Officer.

End of Document

<b>UNCONTROLLED COPY WHEN PRINTED</b> - For up to date copy please refer to Sutherland Shire Council Intranet / Website			
<b>Document Name:</b> Schedule to Customer Feedback and Complaints Management Policy		<b>Policy Accountability:</b> Manager Community, Engagement and Customer	
<b>Version:</b> 1.0	<b>Approved by:</b> Council (GOV019-22)	<b>Minute No:</b> <a href="#">148</a>	<b>Date approved:</b> 25 July 2022
<b>Original:</b> July 2022	<b>Last Revision:</b> July 2022	<b>Next Revision:</b> July 2026	