



Complaints Policy

Building Consent Authority

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PI 1 - Complaints

Regulation 7(2)(h)

Policy and responsibilities

The BCA is committed to investigating and resolving complaints in a professional and timely manner. Complaints will be handled in accordance with this procedure and Southland District Council (SDC) customer support policies.

The BCA manager has the responsibility for the effective and consistent functioning of the BCA complaints process.

Definition of a complaint

A complaint is any situation where a customer expresses dissatisfaction about an issue that is within the SDC's scope of control and responsibility.

Complaint categories are:

- service – for example; not responding to the customer's enquiry, a charging oversight, not meeting a statutory timeframe, incorrect information given
- people – for example; perceived poor performance, attitude towards the customer, and communication style
- technology – for example; website crashing, online forms or applications not working
- policy/procedure – dissatisfaction with a Council policy/procedure, such as fees and charges
- general Council – anything not captured in the above categories.

Guiding principles

SDC core values along with the following principles should be used as a guide when handling a complaint:

- identify yourself, listen (or read carefully), take details, find out what the complainant wants
- if required, confirm with the customer the details you have taken
- empathise with the customer and be courteous
- avoid laying blame or being defensive
- take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
- escalate complaint if there is a conflict, or if outside your authority or area of expertise
- act without undue delay, prioritise complaints dependant on risk to the complainant and organisation
- if a resolution to the complaint is not immediately possible, make a commitment to do something realistic and achievable about resolving it, even if someone else will eventually handle the complaint
- avoid creating false expectations; ensure appropriate levels of objectivity and fairness to all parties

- ask if the complainant is satisfied with the action taken or proposed in respect of the process and the redress. If the complainant is not satisfied, give advice about available alternatives
- provide an acknowledgment to contacts by letter, email or phone as appropriate, taking care to record your responses
- identify problems if necessary, within your area, and address those that require remedy, initiate the BCA's improvement process
- follow up, monitor and provide feedback to each party involved in the complaint.

Process

Receiving a complaint

Complaints are received by the BCA; in person, by phone, letter, and email or by the TA, customer services agency.

The person receiving the complaint will obtain specific details and if possible resolve the complaint at the first point of contact. Where a complaint is resolved immediately and meets one of the above definitions, or it is considered improvements could be made to the BCA's systems or processes, details of the complaint should be forwarded to the BCA administrator to record in the complaints register for future analysis.

Complaints; that cannot be resolved immediately, or are considered significant, or need to be escalated for any reason, or where improvements to the BCA could be made, must be recorded in the BCA's complaints register. In these situations, a copy of the complaint and related correspondence must be forwarded to the BCA administrator to log in the register for tracking purposes.

The complaint is then allocated (with the BCA managers assistance if required) to an officer with sufficient experience and knowledge to handle the complaint (known as the responsible officer).

Follow up and resolution

The responsible officer will investigate and attempt to resolve the complaint, or if assistance is required will discuss a resolution with their BCA manager, and initiate a remedy proportionate to the issue raised.

Our standard response timeframe is two working days. The responsible officer will communicate progress of the investigation to the complainant if a resolution is going to take longer than 20 working days.

Once the complaint has been dealt with and resolved, the responsible officer will notify the complainant and advise the BCA manager.

The BCA manager will record the resolution and action taken in the complaints register and file any related correspondence.

Complaints are discussed and analysed at management meetings to identify any trends and opportunities for improvement. Further analyse takes place at the BCA's strategic meeting.

The BCA manager will initiate the continuous improvement process if the complaint has resulted from a failure, or if an improvement to the quality assurance system can be initiated to mitigate further complaints of this nature.

Records

Records relating to the complaint (for example, the original complaint, discussion notes, correspondence) must be filed in the SDC Electronic Document Management System.

Note: complaints about a specific employee will be dealt with in accordance with SDC's Human Resources Complaints Policies and Practices.