

## KĀPITI COAST DISTRICT COUNCIL – CORPORATE POLICY

<b>Corporate Policy Title:</b>	<b>CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS, AND SUGGESTIONS POLICY</b>		
<b>Policy No:</b>	CP-20-048	<b>Pages:</b>	1 - 22
<b>Group Responsible:</b>	PEOPLE AND PARTNERSHIPS		
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### 1 POLICY OBJECTIVE

1.1 The Customer Complaints, Compliments, and Suggestions Policy (Policy) has been developed to assist all employees to better manage complaints, compliments, and suggestions, including what they are, how to deal with them, and roles and responsibilities of employees when dealing with complaints, compliments, or suggestions, to ensure the best possible experience for those that interact with Council and/or complainant.

1.2 When receiving a complaint, Council will:

- Take appropriate action to remedy a complaint;
- Ensure complaints are investigated objectively and promptly;
- Communicate the outcome of any complaint investigation to all parties, in a way that is easy to understand, and in a timely and transparent matter;
- Monitor the nature and outcome of complaints received in order to identify improvements to the services we provide.

1.3 Everyone in the Council is responsible for listening and responding to what people that interact with Council have to say.

**1.4 Council has a zero-tolerance policy towards any harm, abuse or threats directed at employees. Any conduct of this kind will be dealt with under the Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy, and in accordance with our duty of care and occupational health and safety responsibilities, and where appropriate with the Police and courts.**

### 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 At Kāpiti Coast District Council (Council) we value feedback and are committed to ensuring customers, citizens, ratepayers, and visitors have the best possible experience with us. We will take their complaints seriously, work with them to resolve the issue, and will use their comments as an opportunity to learn and improve our services.

### 3 SCOPE

3.1 This Policy applies to all employees of Kāpiti Coast District Council.

3.2 It does not apply to the Mayor or Elected Members.

3.3 This Policy relates to:

- Compliments for excellent performance,
- Suggestions for improved service delivery, and
- Complaints where the complainant believes that either a Council service does not meet the expected standard or the conduct of a Council officer or contractor is unsatisfactory.

3.4 This Policy does not apply to:

- Service requests (though a complaint may result in a request for service);
- Complaints or requests which are managed under relevant legislation, such as Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (LGOIMA), Privacy Act 1993, the Protected Disclosures Act 2000, and Ombudsman requests;
- Internal complaints from one employee against another;
- Allegations against a contractor or employee of fraud or any form of misconduct which may include such as sexual harassment or assault;
- Allegations against a contractor or employee which would constitute a breach of the Council's Code of Conduct;
- Feedback received as part of a formal consultation process;
- Complaints about the actions of third parties, *unless* the complaint relates to the action of Council or its officers in managing such a complaint;
- Objections or appeals under the Resource Management Act;
- A dispute about development and/or financial contributions;
- A dispute under the Building Act 2004; or
- A dispute where there is an alternate disputes resolution process under legislation.

**3.5 Sensitive complaints relating to employee or contractor misconduct should not be logged in MAGIQ. Please consult with the Organisational Development Manager and Governance and Legal Services Team in these instances.**

### 4 DEFINITIONS

**Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of our customers, citizens, ratepayers and visitors about the Council. This may related to the Council's:

- action or lack of action,
- decisions believed to be contrary to Council bylaws, regulations, policies, legislative requirements, or
- the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Council,

where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

A complaint is not:

- a request for readily available information,
- matters for which there is a right of appeal and/or legal remedy,
- a part of a process that the Council is obliged or required by statute to follow.

**Compliment:** An expression of praise or commendation for a job well done, or where the service provided exceeds the expected standards.

**Suggestion:** An idea or plan put forward for consideration.

## 5 POLICY STATEMENT

### 5.1 Guiding Principles

The following principles are core to how we handle complaints.

We will:

- a) minimise customer effort during the complaint's process
- b) try to see things from the customer's perspective, to understand and address what they think went wrong
- c) resolve the complaint as close to the point of service delivery as possible
- d) treat complaints with priority and give a timely response
- e) communicate in a way that is easy to understand
- f) be fair and act with integrity
- g) take a genuine, fresh look at the issues raised
- h) not be defensive
- i) ensure that the issues raised are assessed on their own merits
- j) learn from complaints and use this knowledge to improve how we do things
- k) acknowledge our mistakes and put them right if we can
- l) maintain a centralised register of all complaints, compliments and feedback
- m) manage complaints in accordance with the defined and agreed processes and procedures
- n) actively manage any customer conduct that negatively and unreasonably impacts on the organisation and our staff
- o) educate our staff to apply the policy, processes and procedures for complaints resolution.

Complaints will be handled with discretion, involving only the required parties, and in accordance with relevant legislation (i.e. Privacy Act 2020) and Council's Privacy Policy.

## **5.2 Making a Complaint**

Complainants are encouraged to make formal complaints in writing, however complaints received in person or over the telephone will also be accepted.

All complainants must include contact details and a description of the complaint to allow Council to effectively deal with the matters raised in the complaint.

When making a complaint, complainants must:

1. Provide a description of the complaint that clearly identifies the issues or concerns being raised
2. Provide all relevant information about the complaint – to the best of their ability
3. Cooperate with requests for additional information or investigations necessary to deal with the complaint
4. Act honestly and declare any conflicts of interest
5. Treat the people handling the complaint with courtesy and respect.

Where Council receives a complaint that does not meet the above criteria, the staff member responsible for managing the complaint should contact the complainant for further information and/or to provide additional guidance on raising a complaint with Council in accordance with this policy.

Refer to Appendix B for an overview of the complaints procedure, and Appendices D, E and F for guidance on dealing with complaints and managing complainants (including complainant anger).

## **5.3 Providing a Compliment or Suggestion**

People that interact with Council are encouraged to provide any compliments or suggestions in writing, however those received in person or over the phone are also accepted.

Contact details of those providing compliments or suggestions are not required, however the person providing the feedback may choose to provide them if they wish.

The person providing feedback should be encouraged to provide as much information as possible surrounding their compliment or suggestion to allow Council to see where we have done well or where we may be able to improve.

Refer to Appendix C for an overview of the compliment/suggestion procedure.

## 5.4 Complaints Management Model



### **Level 0 Frontline**

Simple complaints that can be easily remedied and where a formal response is not requested will be managed informally by the employee who receives the complaint. Issues resolved at the first point of contact must be registered as a complaint in MAGIQ, with the resolution also recorded. The complaint can then be closed. Employees should also consider if any organisational improvements can be logged as a suggestion based on the remedied simple complaint.

### **Level 1 Complaint**

A Level 1 Complaint is where a complaint cannot be remedied immediately under *Level 0 Frontline*, or where the complainant would like a formal response to their complaint. Level 1 complaints follow the standard complaints management process with set service levels and are recorded as complaints in MAGIQ.

Level 1 complaints will be escalated to the relevant Manager for response and sign-off. If the complaint is particularly complex or high risk, the relevant Group Manager must be advised.

Complaints will be resolved in accordance with the Complaint Handling Procedure (refer Appendix B) and within the 10 working days. See 5.5 Complaint Timeframes for further information.

The Manager must check Magiq for any previous history of complaints from the complainant on the same subject before finalising any complaint responses.

The templates for acknowledging receipt of a complaint and for responding to a complaint are available under Appendix F – Response Templates.

### **Level 2 Complaint**

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response they receive from Council, they may appeal.

Appeals to responses will be managed and responded to by the relevant one-up Manager (i.e. Activity Manager). Where the one-up Manager was involved in the original complaint handling, an independent Manager must be appointed to handle the level 2 complaint by the Group Manager. The Group Manager must sign-off the response to the level 2 complaint. The Group Manager will consider the response and determine if the matter requires further investigation. The complainant will be formally advised of this decision and any further outcomes.

Level 2 complaints will be resolved in accordance with the Complaint Handling Procedure (refer Appendix B) and within 10 working days. See 5.5 Complaint Timeframes for further information.

*The following may trigger a complaint being escalated to level two -*

- request for review of level 1 decision by complainant, either explicit or implicit
- significant risk or complexity
- volume of complaints is significant
- organisational reputation
- difficult behaviour from the complainant.

The template for responding to a complaint is available under Appendix F – Response Templates.

### **Level 3 Ombudsmen**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response to their appeal, the complainant will be advised of their right to escalate the complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman. A complaint to the Ombudsman will trigger a complaint being escalated to level 3.

Ombudsman complaints will be managed and responded to by the relevant Manager, with sign-off from the Group Manager. The Governance and Legal Services team (Governance and Legal Services Manager, Chief Legal Advisor or Legal Counsel) must review all responses provided to the Ombudsman and depending on the nature of the matter, may manage liaison with the Office of the Ombudsman.

The timeframes for responses will be advised by the Office of the Ombudsman.

The level 3 complaint management process will be defined on a case by case basis.

## **5.5 Complaint Timeframes**

Level 1 and 2 complaints will be:

- acknowledged within two working days of receipt; and
- issued a response within 10 working days of receipt.

If additional time is required to provide a response, the complainant will be advised before the expiry of the 10 working day deadline.

If a response extends over 20 working days, the relevant Group Manager must be informed.

### **5.6 Complaints about the Chief Executive, Mayor, or Elected Members**

Any complaint concerning the Chief Executive will be referred to the Mayor, who will determine the appropriate approach to investigate and resolve the matter.

A complaint concerning the Mayor or Elected Members must be referred to the Mayor's office for investigation and response, with a copy sent to the Chief Executive for their information.

Complaints relating to the Chief Executive, Mayor, or Elected Members may follow a different approach and timeframe to that stated in this Policy. The complainant must be formally advised of the timeframes applicable to each complaint.

### **5.7 Complaints received by the Chief Executive, Mayor, or Elected Members**

Any complaints received directly by the Chief Executive, Mayor, or Elected Members that are not regarding the Chief Executive, Mayor, or Elected Members must be forwarded to the most appropriate Manager for consideration and response.

### **5.8 Anonymous Complaints**

Anonymous complaints may be investigated at the discretion of the Manager, depending on the nature and seriousness of the complaint. If the complaint is complex or may be considered high risk the Group Manager must be kept informed, and the Chief Executive informed where necessary.

Anonymous complaints that meet the definition of protected disclosure under the Protected Disclosure Act 2000 should be dealt with under the Protected Disclosures Act 2000 – Whistleblower Policy and applicable legislation.

### **5.9 Unhappy with the Outcome**

Sometimes Council will be unable to provide the outcome that the complainant seeks.

- If all procedural requirements and Guiding Principles in this policy have been met, the staff member managing the complaint is to provide a final response and close the matter;
- If the complainant continues to pursue the matter, the staff member managing the complaint should refer the complainant to the final response closing their complaint; and the Unreasonable Conduct Policy may be applied where necessary;
- If the complainant thinks that they have been treated unfairly by the Council, they may be advised of their right to refer the matter to the Ombudsman who may be able to assist.

### **5.10 Unacceptable Behaviours by those Interacting with Council**

In a very small number of cases, a person may choose to interact with the Council in a manner that is inappropriate.

This behaviour may impact on:

- the health, safety and security of Council staff
- the ability for Council staff to do their work and perform their functions in the most effective and efficient ways possible

- Council's ability to allocate its resources fairly across all the complaints it receives.

When this happens, the Council will take action to manage any conduct by those that interact with Council that negatively and unreasonably impacts on the organisation and its employees. The Council does not accept that any form of unreasonable behaviour is appropriate behaviour towards Council employees. The Council will not tolerate abusive behaviour towards employees, verbal or otherwise. The Council's action in response to this may include:

- Providing the person with an opportunity to re-engage in a more appropriate manner,
- Reviewing the persons' behaviour under the Unreasonable Conduct (UC) Policy,
- Taking no action or response in relation to the conduct.

Where there is a threat to person or property, employees should immediately call the Police, and any employees in customer facing roles should move to a safe area away from the individual making threats. See *Panic Alarm Procedure – Civic Building* and *2020 Protocol Procedures for Managing Abusive Customers* for procedural information regarding abusive patrons for customer-facing roles.

#### **5.11 Confidentiality**

All complaints will be dealt with in a confidential and sensitive manner, ensuring that access to complaint information is restricted to those who need to know, and meets Council's obligations under the Privacy Act and other relevant legislation.

#### **5.12 Roles and Responsibilities**

Everyone in the Council is responsible for listening and responding to feedback from those that interact with Council.

Refer to Appendix A for setting out the roles and responsibilities of employees in relation to complaints, compliments, and suggestions.

## **6 RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy and associated procedures
- Panic Alarm Procedure – Civic Building
- 2020 Protocol Procedures for Managing Abusive Customers
- Privacy Policy
- Protected Disclosures Act 2000 – Whistleblowers Policy
- Privacy Act 2020
- Protected Disclosures Act 2000
- Local Government Act 2002
- Health and Safety Act 1992



- Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987

## 7 REVIEW PROCESS

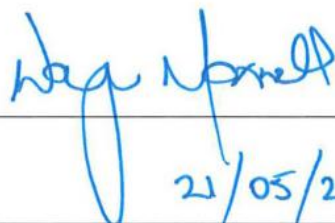
7.1 Changes to this Policy may be made on recommendation of a Group Manager and approval by the Senior Leadership Team (“SLT”).

7.2 Every three years the policy will be formally reviewed and presented to SLT for sign-off.

## 8 POLICY HISTORY

Version	Date	Policy Owner	Description of Change	Amended By	Approved By
1	22 FEBRUARY 2021	Janice McDougall, Group Manager People and Partnerships	New policy	Aston Mitchell, Policy Advisor	SLT/CE

## 9 SLT APPROVAL

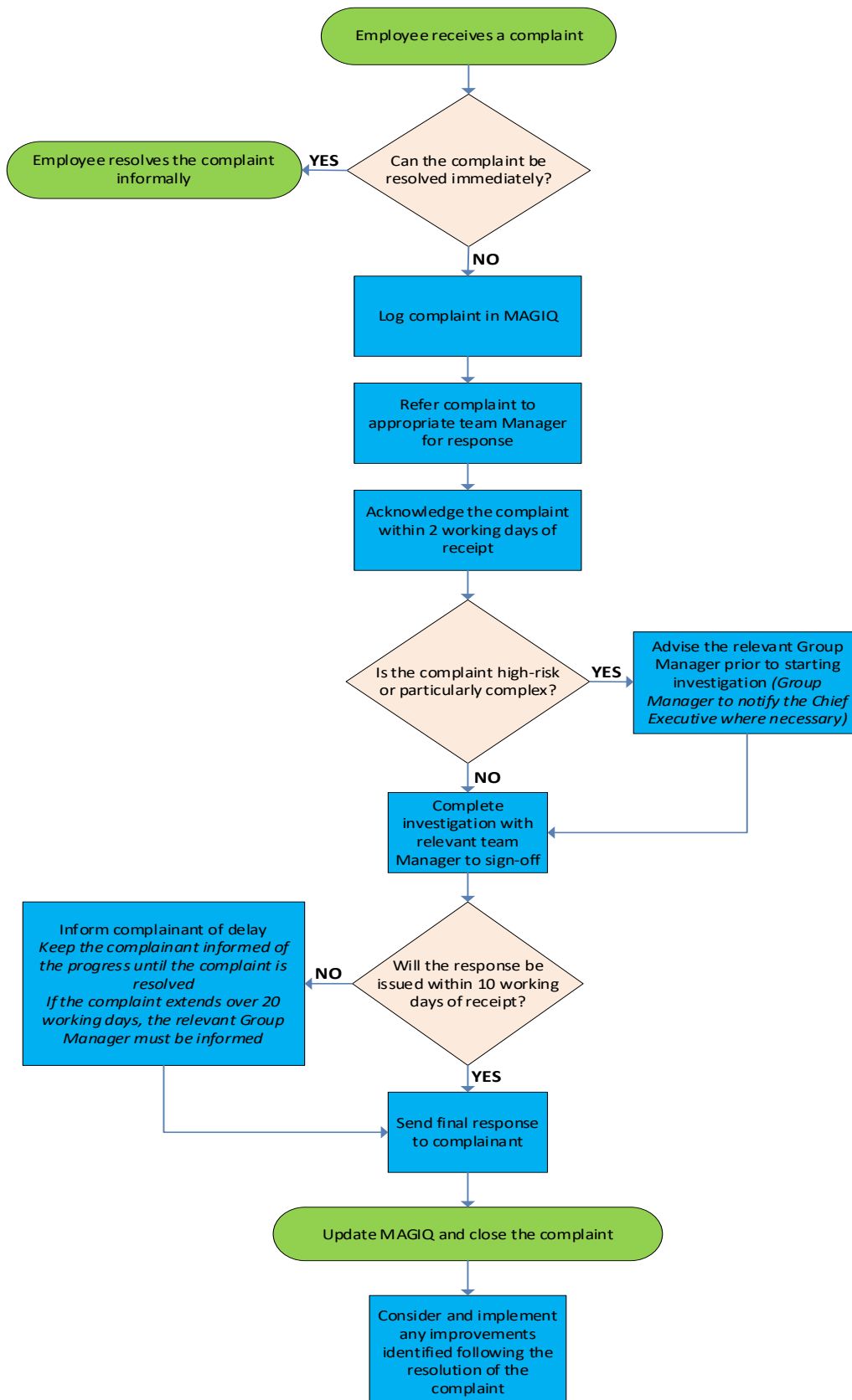
Chief Executive Name:	Wayne Maxwell
Chief Executive Signature:	
Date:	21/05/2021

## APPENDIX A – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

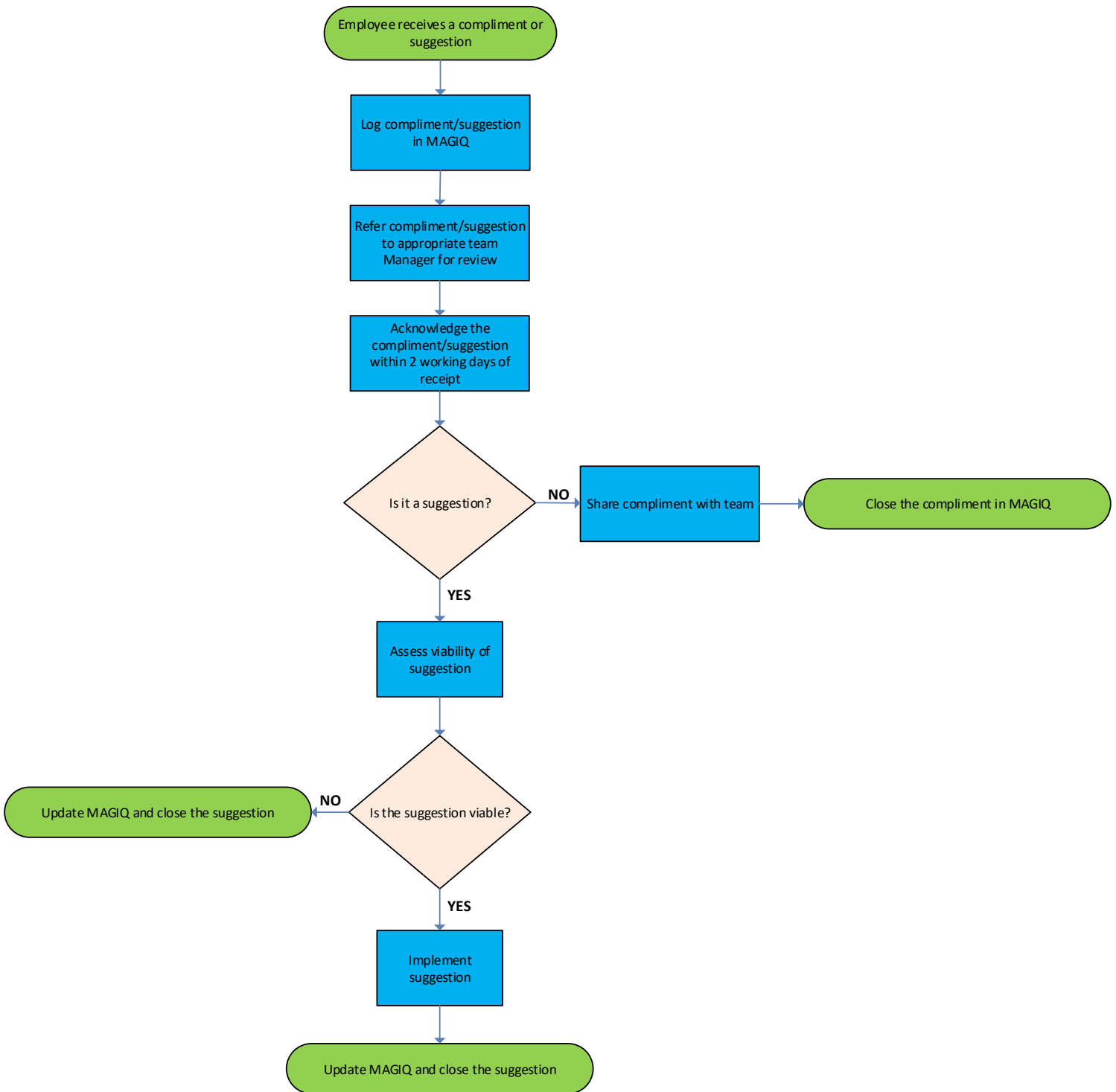
Role	Responsibilities
All Employees	<p>Must be familiar with this policy and the associated processes for receiving and responding to complaints, compliments and suggestions.</p> <p>Employees must keep an open mind when listening to complaints and suggested improvements.</p> <p>Any employee receiving a complaint/compliment/suggestion is responsible for logging this in MAGIQ under the appropriate category.</p>
Front Line Employees (where there is direct contact with people as a part of their role)	<p>Listen to what people say, resolve issues wherever they can, and escalate if they cannot resolve them.</p>
All Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring compliments, complaints, and suggestions are logged in MAGIQ;</li> <li>• Sharing compliments with their team;</li> <li>• Sharing and considering suggestions within their area of responsibility, and implementing where practical and beneficial;</li> <li>• Leading the investigation and response to complaints received in relation to their area of responsibility; and</li> <li>• Notifying the relevant Group Manager of any complaints that are particularly complex or high risk.</li> </ul>
Group Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approving responses to all Level 2 complaints within their area of responsibility;</li> <li>• Notifying the Chief Executive of any complaints that are particularly complex or high risk, or those that have been escalated to Level 3;</li> <li>• Supervising the investigation and response to Level 3 appeals.</li> </ul>
Chief Executive	<p>The CE will be made aware of any complaints that have been escalated to Level 3, and will also be made aware of any particularly complex or high-risk complaints as deemed necessary and as escalated by the relevant Group Manager.</p>

## APPENDIX B – COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE

Note: As per 3.4 and 3.5 of the Policy, to protect the privacy of employees, any allegations against employees are not logged in MAGIQ and should be reported to the Organisational Development Manager and the Governance and Legal Services team.



### APPENDIX C – COMPLIMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS HANDLING PROCEDURE



## APPENDIX D – COMPLAINANT ANGER

In complaint handling, anger is an understandable emotion, however it becomes problematic and unacceptable when it escalates into verbal abuse, hostility, threatening behaviour, or violence. When it is expressed in these ways, it must be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

As a complaint handler, it is essential to understand and recognise the signs of anger in complainants so that we can respond in the most effective and productive ways possible.

Where behaviour continues to be unreasonable, refer to section 5.9 Unacceptable Actions by Complainants and consider whether it would be more appropriate that the Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Policy be applied.

Common signs of complainant anger include:

- raised voices, yelling, slurred speech or chanting
- accusatory, dominating or even sexually explicit language
- loaded words that are intended to intimidate or to achieve a particular result
- harsh or overly sarcastic humour
- combative or inflexible behaviour
- irritability, anxiety or short temperedness
- redness in the face or flushed appearance
- intimidating expressions including lowered eye brows, stares, eye rolling or flared nostrils
- tension in the face, neck, hands, scalp or back – e.g. clenched fists or jaws, grinding teeth etc.
- intrusive behaviour such as violating your personal space or entering areas of the office that are either off limits or that they have not been invited into etc.
- exaggerated gestures including thrashing their arms around and pointing or waving their finger
- repetitive and agitated movements – including pacing around, tapping their feet continually, constant repositioning in a chair or standing up frequently
- physical aggression including throwing and shoving things around, or pounding the table.

### CARP Method to Defuse Complainant Anger

CARP assist by helping to organise and time how to defuse a complainant's anger and refocus their attention onto resolving the issue. It stands for:

- **Control** – controlling your interaction with the complainant, as well as your own anger. This is about getting them to stop and listen, and letting them know that their anger is not going to control you or the interaction. Be assertive, but not aggressive or passive.
- **Acknowledge** – acknowledging the complainant's anger and giving them an opportunity to 'let off steam'. Where it will not encourage UCC, it is important for the complainant to know that you empathise with them and that you are hearing them out. Limit the time allowed for this – usually 2-5 minutes max. Echo what they are telling you to show you are listening.
- **Refocus** – refocusing the conversation onto the substantive issues. Ask questions about the facts, and repeat, in your own words, the complainant's issues.

- **Problem solve** – finding solutions to the issues and problems that you've identified. Tell the complainant what can and cannot be done/what will and will not happen, and focus on possible solutions.

CARP should always be applied in the listed order.

## APPENDIX E – LANGUAGE

In addition to the CARP method, it is important to use effective communication strategies to avoid or minimise triggers for anger, conflict, and unreasonable complainant conduct.

The below table provides some common “Do and Don’t” examples.

Do	Don't
<p>...acknowledge their emotions and give them an opportunity to 'let off steam' by venting their anger. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I've got a sense of how strongly you feel about this.</li> <li>• It sounds like you are upset/angry about this.</li> </ul>	<p>...allow venting if it is going to encourage UCC or is going to last for more than 2-5 minutes because continued venting can do more harm than good – having the effect of reviving the complainant’s negative feelings and emotions about their experience.</p>
<p>...control your emotions.</p>	<p>...respond to fighting words. By not responding, you avoid giving the complainant ammunition to use against you. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, I know some people believe this.</li> <li>• You are entitled to your opinion.</li> <li>• I see or mmm.</li> </ul>
<p>...show empathy for the stress and anger they are feeling. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I understand how you might feel that way.</li> </ul>	<p>... allow your empathy to affect your objectivity. Also, avoid saying ‘I understand what you’re going through’ – chances are you do not.</p>
<p>... echo what they say. This shows that you are listening and usually involves repeating the last few words or the key words they have said. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So you are saying...</li> <li>• Am I correct in my understanding that ...?</li> </ul>	<p>... echo unless you clearly understand what the complainant has said. Do not put words in their mouth. Also, avoid echoing swear words and highly offensive language if it may escalate the situation.</p>
<p>... acknowledge their point of view without agreeing with it. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can see that you believe .... We have come to a different conclusion.</li> <li>• I do understand that your position is .... Our position is a little different.</li> </ul>	<p>... disregard their point of view as being outrageous, incorrect or inaccurate. There can be alternative valid viewpoints, interpretations, perceptions and recollections of the same issue/ event.</p>
<p>... anticipate likely counter arguments/valid objections that the complainant will make and address them up front. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At this point you may well say that... Let me explain why things have happened this way.</li> </ul>	<p>... present counter arguments unfairly or in a way that might be perceived as confrontational or disrespectful.</p>

<p>... find things to agree on with the complainant, without necessarily agreeing with their point of view. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I agree that \$2,000 is a lot of money to lose.</li> <li>• I agree that not hearing back from the department for over a month would be frustrating.</li> <li>• You're right! Two weeks does seem like a long time to wait...</li> </ul>	<p>... make promises or agree to something that you will need to retract later – stick to the small stuff.</p>
<p>... use 'I' and 'we' messages. 'I' messages are about sharing your concerns and taking ownership and responsibility. 'We' messages are about cooperation and inclusion and give the impression that you are on the same side. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We could look at it this way ...</li> <li>• How can we resolve this?</li> </ul>	<p>... use 'you' messages in a way that might be perceived as being confrontational or accusatory. Also avoid using 'I' messages if they might be perceived as critical, condescending, condemning or demanding.</p>
<p>... ask questions to maintain control of the interaction. This way the complainant is forced to respond to you, rather than the other way round. Use 'when', 'what', 'where' or 'how'. These types of questions can be effective when responding to accusations by a complainant because they deflect the issue back onto the complainant without being confrontational. You might say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has led you to believe that I'm not taking you seriously?</li> <li>• When did you start thinking that I don't care about your complaint?</li> </ul>	<p>... use 'why' questions – if you can avoid them. 'Why' can be perceived as being confrontational and can lead to more defensive and combative responses.</p>
<p>... keep your verbal and non-verbal cues non-threatening. Be aware of your tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures.</p>	<p>... display confrontational gestures – e.g. folding arms, rolling eyes, sighing, or doing things that might give the impression that you are not interested in the complainant or their matter.</p>
<p>... seek equality in your conversations with the complainant. Avoid jargon and use a communication style that is suited to them.</p>	<p>... say things to make the complainant feel inferior – it is likely to make them feel like they need to assert their dominance and regain control of their issue – in circumstances where they probably already feel disempowered and victimised.</p>
<p>... listen actively – be engaged and pay attention without interrupting unnecessarily. Clarify, repeat, paraphrase, summarise and check understandings.</p>	<p>... just listen to what is being said, but also listen for what is not being said. What facts/topics is the complainant avoiding/not</p>



	giving you? This information may be important to your analysis into the matter.
... clarify the issues in dispute and their impact on the complainant. This may be necessary to be able to show appropriate sympathy/empathy, and will be necessary to identify the needs (and therefore the objectives) of the complainant.	... forget to clarify your personal boundaries especially if the complainant's behaviour is escalating. State what you expect from them and the things you can and cannot do for them.
... admit ignorance and seek clarification if you are unsure or unclear about the complainant's issues or something they have said. You might say: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As I understand it, the situation is ... Is this correct?</li> <li>• From what you tell me it seems ... Is this the case?</li> </ul>	... assume anything. Encourage explanation by asking questions and giving the complainant a chance to explain their issues in their own words.
... explain the reasons behind certain processes, procedures and policies and/or why you can or cannot do something. You might say: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let me explain why our agency does it this way....</li> <li>• Perhaps I can tell you a bit about how our organisation works and why this has happened.</li> </ul>	... respond in an overly formal or bureaucratic way as this may make the complainant feel inferior of that they cannot identify with you – e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That's the policy.</li> <li>• I just follow the policies/laws.</li> </ul>
... be personable and build rapport with the complainant.	... be too informal by joking around. Jokes can be interpreted as trivialising a complainant's issue. Therefore, in difficult situations with complainants the only safe form of humour will be self-deprecating.
... express a willingness to help them and to appropriately resolve their issue.	... suggest that they need psychological help or counselling. This is unlikely to achieve anything positive.
... allow space and time to think through an issue and regain self-control. Remember: anger can affect judgement and problem solving skills. Some reasons for taking a break during an interview can include to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consult a colleague or supervisor</li> <li>• check a policy, piece of legislation or other document</li> <li>• check a file or something on the computer</li> <li>• get/offer a cup of tea or water</li> </ul>	... say to the complainant you need time to cool off. This is unlikely to be well received.

<p>... admit mistakes and apologise if a problem, delay or omission has been caused (in whole or part) by you or your organisation. An apology may be all the complainant wants</p>	<p>... give excuses, argue, defend or deny. Keep your ego out of it and try to neutralise the situation. The general principle behind non-confrontational language is that when someone pushes you don't push back!</p>
<p>... respect personal space.</p>	<p>... invade the complainant's personal space. Bear in mind that the average personal distance varies from one culture to the next. Some complainants may consider it acceptable to stand very close to you, almost to the point of touching, while others may refuse to touch you including shaking your hand – none of which is done with any intention of disrespecting you or your personal space</p>

## **APPENDIX F – DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS**

### **HOW TO DEAL WITH A COMPLAINT**

When dealing with complaints it is important to effectively manage the complainants' expectations. This can be during an initial phone conversation with the complainant, or if the complaint is received in writing, when sending a letter of acknowledgment to the complainant.

At the beginning of the complaints process, all complainants should be informed in general terms of:

- your role as a case officer and the functions of your organisation
- the complaints processes and procedures that you/your organisation intend to follow in relation to their complaint
- how their complaint will be dealt with
- the likely timeframes for completing key tasks relating to their complaint
- the likely and unlikely outcome(s) of their complaint
- their responsibilities as a complainant – e.g. acting honestly, cooperating with and respecting you as a case officer and the complaints process generally
- your responsibilities as a case officer (and those of your organisation) in relation to them and their complaint.

### **TESTING AND MANAGING COMPLAINANT EXPECTATIONS**

**Test Expectations** – what does the complainant expect and want?

- How do you propose we resolve this?
- What outcome are you hoping for?

**Define the Issue** – clarify the issue(s) to see whether we are the appropriate organisation to assist

- Let me see if I understand your issue(s)
- Thank you for going to the trouble of explaining this to me. As I understand it, you're saying...
- Are you saying that...?
- And am I correct that you want ... to happen?

**Retesting and Reframing Expectations** – correcting any misunderstandings and expectations that are unrealistic or unreasonable

- I realise that you want ... We can/can't do ... because ...
- Let me give you an idea of what our organisation can do.
- So that you aren't disappointed later on, I should clarify now that it is very unlikely that we'll be able to do ... because ...
- It seems to me you're hoping we can do ... I have to tell you now that this will not be possible because ...
- ... is what we can do ... is what we can't do

**Redefining Expectations** – correcting the expectations we create if they cannot be met, especially about timeliness

- I'm calling because I said that we would get ... to you... Unfortunately for [state reason(s)] we haven't been able to do this. I can call you in a [timeframe] to let you know exactly when we can have it done. I apologise.
- I know you were expecting that ... would happen today, but it will not be possible. It is likely that it will happen...
- I'm sorry, but we won't be able to ... However, we can ...

**Preparing the Complainant for Disappointment** – delivering bad news as early as possible to avoid the complainant developing unrealistic expectations about their complaint and any possible outcomes

- I wanted to call you and tell you about my decision/the outcome of your complaint before I send out my letter, because I know the outcome isn't what you'd hoped for (explain).
- I wanted to call you and tell you directly that we won't be able to take up your complaint, before I send you a letter saying this (explain).
- I will, of course, send you my decision in writing, but speaking with you means I can also answer any questions you have about my decision/the outcome.

## APPENDIX F – RESPONSE TEMPLATES

### *Acknowledgement of Suggestion/Compliment*

Date

Name

Address

Email

Dear [name],

Suggestion/compliment regarding [insert suggestion/compliment short-form] received on [date].

Thank you for taking the time to communicate to us your suggestion/compliment regarding Council's service/delivery.

We appreciate hearing about opportunities on how we may improve our services for the community/how our staff/services have exceeded your expectations, and will pass this information/compliment along to the relevant team for consideration/relevant staff member.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Contact details]

### *Acknowledgement of Complaint*

Date

Name

Address

Email

Dear [name],

Complaint regarding [insert complaint issue] received on [date].

Thank you for taking the time to communicate with us on why you felt Council did not meet the standards you expected.

I/we will be reviewing the information you have sent us and will be investigating the matter.

I/we will be in contact with you within 10 business days with a response to your complaint.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Contact details]

### **Response to Complaint**

Date

Name

Address

Email

Dear [name],

**Complaint regarding [insert complaint issue] received on [date].**

Thank you for taking the time to communicate to us why you felt Council did not meet the standards you expected.

[Add response to complaint]

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to appeal our response and your complaint will be escalated for review. Following this review, you will receive a response to your appealed complaint within 10 business days. *(Level 1 only – delete one when sending)* **OR**

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to contact the Office of the Ombudsman who can discuss your complaint with you. *(Level 2 only – delete one when sending).*

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Contact details]