

## REVISED CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS POLICY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Complaints, feedback and requests for service are a useful and valuable way of collecting feedback and identifying and remedying system issues.

This policy provides an overview of how we handle complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively.

Our approach to complaints is intended to:

- enable us to respond to issues raised in a timely, efficient and confidential way
- boost public confidence in our administrative process, and
- provide information we can use to deliver improvements in our products, services, staff and complaint handling.

### 2. POLICY STATEMENT

We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our services, systems, practices, procedures, operations and complaint handling.

We recognise, promote and protect the rights of individuals or organisations to make a complaint, and will respond to complaints in a timely and confidential manner.

All customer requests and complaints should be recorded via the smart forms published on the PMHC website to ensure capture of all data and information. This facilitates efficient assessment, action and resolution and ensures that our customer complaints and service request management meets all required accessibility, security and privacy standards

Complaints will be managed in line with Council's policies and procedures.

### 3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff and elected officials receiving or managing complaints.

Code of conduct complaints, staff grievances, and public interest disclosures are dealt with through separate mechanisms. Unreasonable customer conduct is managed through the Council's Unreasonable Customer Conduct Policy.

### 3. PRINCIPLES

#### 3.1 Complaints are welcomed and facilitated.

- Our staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible.
- Complaints may be made anonymously.
- Complaints will be acknowledged within five business days and complainants will be kept informed of the expected timeframes of our actions.
- Customer complaint form and information about how complaints are managed is published on our website.
- We utilise smart forms to facilitate and capture all relevant data at the point of receipt and inform customers of our process to set expectations.
- Our customer, community members and complainants are:
  - provided with information about our complaint handling process
  - provided with multiple and accessible ways to make complaints

- listened to, and provided with reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review.

### **3.2 Complaints will be responded to.**

- Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first point of contact.
- We will protect the identity of the complainant where this is practical and appropriate.
- We are committed to managing people’s expectations and will inform them as soon as possible of the:
  - complaints process
  - expected time frames of our actions
  - progress of the complaint and any reason for delay
  - outcome of the complaint and any action we took
  - reason for our decision
  - the remedy or resolution that we have proposed or put in place
  - any options for review or appeal.
- Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable timeframe.

### **3.3 Complaints will be managed**

- We will take all reasonable steps to ensure complainants are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.
- Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived will be managed responsibly.
- Where a complaint involves multiple services or business units within Council, a complaints coordinator will ensure that communication is clear and coordinated.
- We endeavour to do our work and perform our functions in the most effective and efficient way possible, ensuring the health & safety of our staff and management of resources fairly across all complaints we receive.
- When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with us, their conduct can significantly affect progress and efficiency of our work. As a result, we will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects us via our Unreasonable Customer Conduct Policy.

## **4. RESPONSIBILITIES AND AUTHORITIES**

We respond to complaints using a three tiered approach which enables first contact resolution, internal review or investigation and/or independent review.

### **Tier one: Frontline Complaint Handling**

- a) Staff are empowered to respond to and resolve complaints at the first point of contact, with as little formality wherever possible.
- b) A complaint can be received verbally or in writing.
- c) We promote and encourage complaints, feedback and requests for service to be logged via our corporate website
- d) Complaints made over the phone, via email or in person are captured by the staff member in the online feedback form available on Council’s corporate website to ensure consistent capture of all relevant information.
- e) When a complaint or request for service is made to a Councillor, the customer should be referred in the first instance to lodge the request or complaint via the online forms on our website.
- f) Whilst in many cases, the very receipt of the complaint resolves the matter, a response must be provided either verbally or in writing and be noted with a record of the complaint.
- g) Staff must use appropriate record keeping practices so that complaints can be used for reporting and analysis purposes.
- h) When a complaint is about a Councillor, or the Mayor, the complaint is referred to the Group Manager, Governance for assessment and to determine action.
- i) When a complaint is about a staff member, the complaint is referred to the Executive Manager People, Culture & Performance for assessment and action.
- j) Complaints received via PMHC Speakup service and complaints about the CEO will be referred to the Internal Ombudsman for assessment and action.
- k) Should the complaint be unresolved at the point of receipt because of the complexities (that may include but not be limited to financial consequence or legislative breach) the matter must be

referred to the appropriate functional area and resolved within 10 business days. If this is not resolved satisfactorily or within the timeframe, the matter is to be referred to tier two.

#### **Tier two: Internal Review**

- a) If unresolvable at tier one, or should the complainant be dissatisfied with the resolution, the matter is to be referred to the relevant Group Manager, Director or Internal Ombudsman for further investigation and/or review.
- b) If a Councillor of the Mayor is notified by a customer or community member that they are dissatisfied with the outcome of their request for service or complaint, then they should refer this to the Internal Ombudsman for assessment and action.
- c) Internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker
- d) The complaint will be reviewed and/or investigated and a response provided to the complainant within 10 business days of the matter being referred.
- e) A record of the resolution offered is recorded with the original complaint.

#### **Tier three: Review by independent staff or external agencies**

- a) Should the complainant be dissatisfied with the response, they may request the matter be escalated for review by an independent staff member or by the Internal Ombudsman.
- b) The independent staff member may be a Group Manager or Director unrelated to the subject matter of the complaint or;
- c) The complainant may also refer the matter to an external agency.

### **4. REPORTING**

Records of complaints will be kept in accordance with our complaint management system so that information can be retrieved for reporting and analysis.

Annual reporting on complaint data including issue, resolution and outcome will be maintained by the Complaint Coordinator and provided to the CEO.

Reports on internal reviews and investigations will be maintained by the Internal Ombudsman and provided to the CEO.

### **5. RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Manager Customer Service** is responsible for complaint referral, coordination, ensuring complaints are responded to, investigated and closed.

**Group Manager People & Culture** provides oversight and direction for responding to, assessing, investigating and resolving complaints about employees of Council.

**Group Managers or Directors** of relevant business unit provide oversight and direction for responding to and investigating complaints about service, actions or decisions.

**Internal Ombudsman** is responsible for internal reviews of complaints including complaints about employees, services, actions, or decisions of Council.

**Group Manager Governance** is responsible for coordinating complaints about elected officials.

### **4. REFERENCES**

Office of Local Government - Complaints management in Councils

Ombudsman NSW - Effective complaint handling guidelines

Internal complaint handling procedures

PMHC Unreasonable Customer Conduct Policy

PMHC Code of Conduct

### **5. DEFINITIONS**

**CEO** Chief Executive Officer of Port Macquarie Hastings Council

**Complainant** member of the public making the complaint

**Complaint** the communication (orally or in writing) of dissatisfaction with

a decision, policy, procedure, charge, employee, agent or the quality of the service provided which may include a delay in taking action, making a decision or providing a service.

A complaint in the context of this policy does not include:

- response to requests for feedback about the standard of our service provision
- reports of problems or wrongdoings merely intended to bring a problem to our notice
- requests for information
- customer requests
- staff grievance

Complaint coordinator

Team Leader Customer Service or relevant Executive Assistant

**Customer requests**

(also known as service requests)

- requests for action
- requests for provision of a service or product
- reports of infrastructure faults
- requests for maintenance of infrastructure

**Elected officials**

The Mayor and elected Councillors of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council.

**External agencies**

any of the following: NSW Ombudsman; Independent Commission against Corruption; Anti-Discrimination Board; Australian Competition and Consumer Commission; Privacy Commissioner, NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption or the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

**PMHC Speakup service**

A service run independently by Core Integrity to receive complaints from employees of PMHC.

## 6. POLICY OWNER

Group Manager Customer Experience, Communication & Corporate Affairs

## 7. AMENDMENTS

Amended March 2022 to Internal Ombudsman, online smart technology and the Employee Speakup program.