

Complaints Resolution Policy

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Also, Refer to:	Process for Complaints Complaints leaflet		

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

The Council is committed to the delivery of quality services to meet the needs of its customers in line with our values.

The Council welcomes feedback from customers as this provides opportunities for learning and improving services.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this policy is to give assurance and guidance to both staff and the public as to how complaints are to be dealt with.

Council is committed to being accessible and responsive to all customers who approach our offices/sites for assistance and/or with a complaint.

1.3 SCOPE

Customers are encouraged to inform the Council if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of our service.

The Council will resolve complaints in a fair, timely and confidential manner to achieve positive outcomes for customers and staff.

2. DEFINITIONS

Complaint: Any expression of dissatisfaction about a Council service or action of a staff member or contractor. A complaint is a verbal or written report to a council officer by a member of the public of an incident that has directly affected them during their dealings with the Council that has not been able to be resolved at the first point of contact. The report is made with the desire that the concern be satisfactorily resolved.

A complaint received with no contact details to allow verification will be treated as an allegation until the person identifies themselves.

Allegation: An allegation is an informal suggestion or report of complaint. It may be made by the person directly affected or by another person. The person gives no indication that they want their concern followed up.

Investigating Officer: The Investigating Officer is the Council staff member assigned to investigate the complaint.

3. PRINCIPLES

Council is a service provider in the public eye. As such it is appropriate that the public expects excellent customer service and efficient and accurate processing of their requests. That expectation exists regardless of internal or external factors that may affect staff, resourcing levels or workloads. Council accepts that reality. From time to time our different functions also lead us into conflict with the views of our customers or the outcomes they desire. There are many factors which may lead to a customer complaint.

Regardless of the circumstances, it is important that the complaints process:

- a) Respects the integrity of complainants, the reputation of affected staff / contractor and the service they manage
- b) Ensures integrity and transparency of Council processes
- c) Ensures effective communication with complainants
- d) Respects the complainant by ensuring the complaint remains private to council and the complainant.

4. POLICY

We aim to resolve issues as quickly and efficiently as possible at the first point of contact. If a matter cannot be resolved at that stage, it will be escalated to the appropriate person or team for further attention.

Buller District Council has a zero-tolerance approach to any form of harm, abuse, or threats directed at staff. Any such behaviour will be managed in line with this policy and in accordance with our duty of care and health and safety obligations to protect our employees

4.1 TYPES OF COMPLAINT

There are two main types of complaints:

- Complaints about Council processes, and
- Complaints about Council officers (including employees or contractors).

In some cases, a complaint that appears to be about an individual officer may relate to dissatisfaction with a Council process. In such instances, the officer may have correctly followed procedure, but the process itself has caused frustration for the customer.

A personal complaint, by contrast, is one that has been verified as relating to the officer's conduct, specifically, how they behaved while carrying out their duties.

4.2 SERIOUSNESS OF COMPLAINTS

Most complaints are minor and can be resolved quickly by Customer Services staff or referred to the appropriate council officer. If someone wants their complaint to be formally investigated, they must submit it in writing.

All complaints are recorded in the Complaints Register, and a Line Manager or delegated Investigating Officer will assess how serious the complaint is. Each complaint is prioritised based on the level of risk to Council, and its seriousness, impact, and complexity, using the following categories:

- **Extreme** – Major financial impact, serious loss of community trust, or legal/criminal action.
- **High** – Significant financial impact, major community concern, or repeated non-compliance leading to regulatory action.
- **Medium** – Moderate financial risk, short-term reputational issues, or multiple minor issues indicating a systemic problem.
- **Low** – Minor reputational impact, limited to a small part of the community, with no financial risk.
- **Minor** – Minimal impact, individual negative feedback, and no wider consequences for Council.

Some serious complaints may also be added to the Council's Risk Register.

4.3 CONFIDENTIALITY

Those involved in the complaint (including the receiver of the complaint) are not to disclose details of the matter to others who are not involved. The receiver of the complaint is encouraged to advise the complainant of this policy and procedure for dealing with the matter, but no opinions or solutions are to be offered to them.

4.4 EXCEPTIONS

While most issues will be handled under this policy, some exceptions may apply due to other legal or formal review processes. Examples include:

- Complaints that disagree with Council policies or decisions
- Complaints about actions the Council is legally required to take
- Situations where legal action has been started by the customer or Council
- Complaints already decided by a court or tribunal
- Insurance claims
- Matters already being handled through another formal process
- Complaints covered by other policies, such as protected disclosures
- Cases where a formal right of appeal exists

These types of complaints fall outside the scope of this policy and will be managed separately based on the specific circumstances.

4.5 UNACCEPTABLE ACTIONS BY COMPLAINANTS

Council recognises that customers may be distressed or frustrated when making a complaint. However, forceful, aggressive, or abusive behaviour towards staff is never acceptable and will not be tolerated, whether verbal or otherwise.

A complainant's behaviour may be considered unacceptable if they:

- Are abusive or threatening to staff,
- Repeatedly raise the same complaint after it has been thoroughly investigated,
- Refuse to accept a reasonable outcome,
- Frequently change the details or desired outcome of the complaint during the investigation.
- Use media and social media as a mechanism to attack either Council or staff

If a staff member feels a complainant's behaviour is unacceptable, they will inform the complainant, explain the reasons, and suspend the investigation. The complaint process will only continue once the complainant agrees to modify their behaviour.

If the complainant disagrees with the suspension, they may escalate their concerns through the usual feedback procedure.

An Investigating Officer may also refuse to investigate a complaint if it is deemed frivolous, repetitive (habitual), or vexatious. Before making this decision, the Investigating Officer must consult with the relevant Group Manager. If the complaint is declined on these grounds, the decision must be communicated in writing. The complainant still has the right to escalate their complaint to the next stage.

4.6 INFORMING PUBLIC AND STAFF

The complaints policy will be publicised through the Council's website. Leaflets outlining the complaints policy will also be displayed at all Council Customer Service Desks.

All staff are to be made aware of the complaints policy. The responsibility for ensuring awareness and knowledge of the process is with each line manager and Human Resources.

4.7 PROCESS FOR ALLEGATIONS

Allegations will be treated as hearsay until such time as the person concerned makes a complaint.

4.8 PROCESS FOR COMPLAINTS

Please see attached schedule for details of the complaints process.

5. MONITORING

Complaints will be handled confidentially, as far as possible, while still allowing a fair and thorough investigation. If a higher level of confidentiality is needed, the complaint will be managed under the Protected Disclosures Policy.

To ensure the policy remains effective, Council will monitor how well it is being followed. Complaint data will be reviewed to assess performance, identify issues, and help improve services. This information will be shared with key stakeholders, including Elected Members and the Senior Leadership Team. The Manager Customer Experience is responsible for this reporting.

6. CLARIFICATION AND BREACHES

6.1 CLARIFICATION

Clarification regarding this policy can be sought from the Buller District Council Group Manager Community Services.

6.2 BREACHES

The Buller District Council Group Manager, Community Services, is responsible for monitoring compliance with this policy. All identified breaches will be escalated to the CEO and the Manager, People, Capability & Culture and will be treated as misconduct, which may result in disciplinary action.

6.3 EXCEPTIONS

The Buller District Council General Manager Community Services (being the policy owner) will need to authorise any deviations from this policy in consultation with the Senior Leadership Team.

Appendix 1 – Process for Complaints

A1.1 Making a Complaint

A customer (or their representative) can make a complaint in person, by visiting a Customer Service desk during normal business hours, or by telephone, letter, email, or via our website. Please include your name and contact details to allow a response.

A1.2 Acknowledging Customer Complaints

Acknowledgement correspondence will include a reference number, a summary of the issue, and the contact details of the person investigating.

If a full response can be made within three working days, an acknowledgement will not be sent.

A1.3 Responding to Complaints

Issues will be responded to as quickly as possible by the most appropriate method. Where a response or resolution is made by telephone, written records will be kept and written confirmation sent. This will cover:

- Reference number
- Complainant details
- Investigation details
- The outcome (e.g. whether the complaint is upheld, action taken, apology, or reason why the Council is unable to assist)
- Information on the right of further redress and escalation if the customer remains dissatisfied.

A1.4 Extending Complaint Response Times

Issues of a more complex nature may take longer than the specified time limits to investigate. If this is the case, the customer will be informed of the reasons why the time frames cannot be met and when they can expect to receive a full response.

A1.5 Escalating Complaints

If, on completion of Stages One and Two (as outlined in A1.6 below), the complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction, they will be advised that they have 28 working days from the date of the full response letter to provide details of why they consider their complaint unresolved.

At this point the customer will pass to the next and final stage (Stage Three) involving the Chief Executive or their delegate.

A1.6 Escalation and Response Times

Complaints are managed for resolution through, potentially, three stages of escalation.

- Stage one: The Service area/unit responds to the complainant. Overseen by the appropriate line manager.
 - Complaint acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt
 - Full reply within 10 working days from the date of receipt.
 - If no satisfaction at this point, the issue will escalate to Stage Two.
- Stage Two: The appropriate Group Manager reviews the first response to the customer, investigates and responds to the customer.
 - Stage Two Review acknowledged the complaint within three working days
 - Full reply within 10 working days.
 - If the customer is not satisfied, the complaint will escalate to Stage Three.
- Stage Three: The Chief Executive or delegate reviews the previous responses to the customer and responds. This is the final stage of the procedure.
 - Stage Three Review acknowledged the complaint within three working days
 - Full reply within 10 working days.

A1.7 Complaints involving more than one department

Generally, issues involving more than one unit will be managed by the first department receiving the complaint. This department will coordinate and agree on a response on behalf of any other departments concerned.

A1.8 Misdirected Complaints

If any complaint is misdirected, the receiving department will acknowledge the complaint, inform the complainant which department is responsible and pass the issue immediately to the correct group for action.

A1.9 Complaints against staff

The Council is committed to ensuring that complaints are dealt with fairly and impartially. If a complaint is received about a staff member, the appropriate Line Manager will be responsible for the management and resolution of the issue.

Any complaint against the Chief Executive will be referred to the Mayor, who will determine the most appropriate means of investigation and resolution. The procedures and timescales for any such complaint may fall outside the normal standard, and should this be the case, this would be formally advised to the complainant.

A1.10 Complaints against Elected Members

Elected Members must comply with the Councillors' Code of Conduct. This Code describes the high standards of conduct required from Councillors in carrying out their duties.

Complaints regarding the conduct of a Councillor should be referred to the Mayor, who will manage such complaints in conjunction with the Chief Executive, in accordance with the procedures prescribed in the Code of Conduct.

A1.11 Customer Process Flow

The following diagram summarises the complaint management process flow.

BULLER DISTRICT COUNCIL

Complaints process map

Complaint lodged by phone,
in-person, email, letter or website

Complaint forwarded to: complaints@bdc.govt.nz.
Complaints admin to log information into the Complaints Register within 24 hours, and
send acknowledgement email to the complainant within 3 working days

Any investigative action required?

No

Yes

Complaints admin to send outcome
email, update register and close
complaint within 10 working days.

Complaints admin to assign complaint
to relevant GM. To be prioritised as
Extreme, High, Medium or Low.
Record any conflict of interest

Is the complaint about a staff member?

No

Yes

GM to outsource to relevant
manager/s or staff to provide
responses and information

GM or appropriate line manager to
meet with staff member to discuss

Within 7 working days, responses
returned for complaints admin to
collate

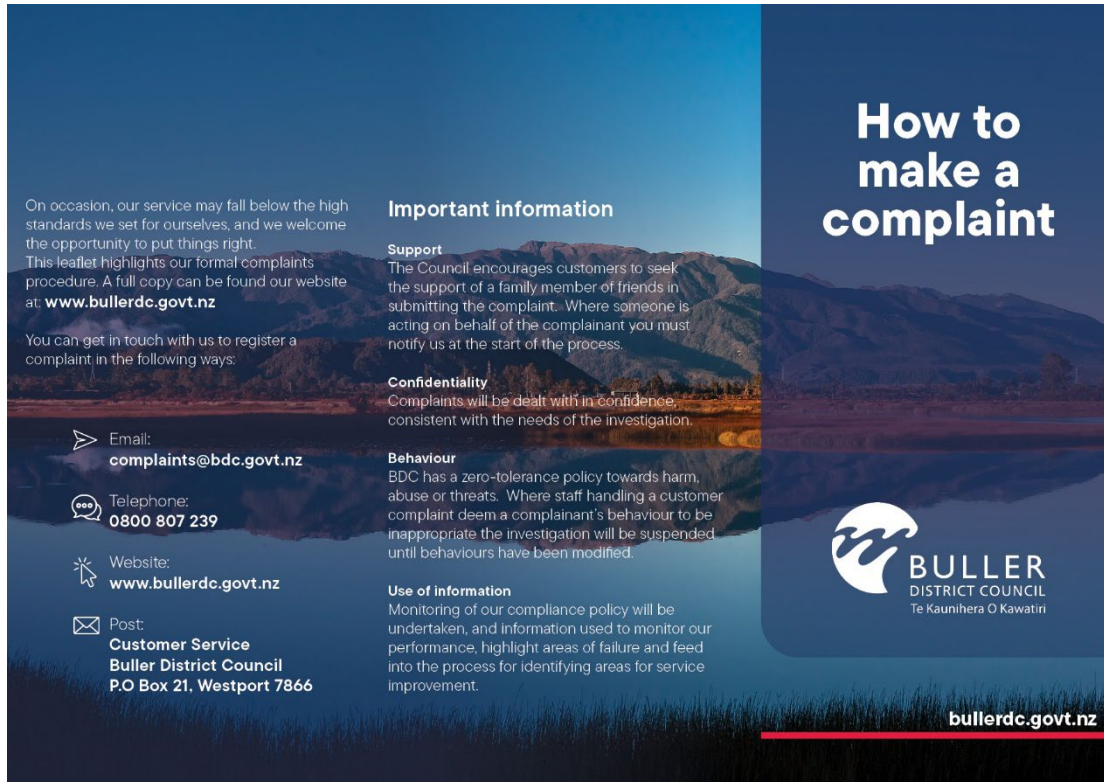
Within 7 working days, responses
returned for complaints admin to
collate

Complaints admin to send outcome email, update register and close complaint within
10 working days, unless the complaint complexity requires an extension. This must be
communicated to the complainant as soon as possible.

GM to update department processes or trainings to mitigate recurrence

A1.12 Print collateral – How to make a complaint

The following brochure is available at Council service centres and on the BDC website:



How to make a complaint

On occasion, our service may fall below the high standards we set for ourselves, and we welcome the opportunity to put things right. This leaflet highlights our formal complaints procedure. A full copy can be found on our website at www.bullerdc.govt.nz

You can get in touch with us to register a complaint in the following ways:

- Email: complaints@bdc.govt.nz
- Telephone: **0800 807 239**
- Website: www.bullerdc.govt.nz
- Post: **Customer Service
Buller District Council
P.O. Box 21, Westport 7866**

Important information

Support
The Council encourages customers to seek the support of a family member or friends in submitting the complaint. Where someone is acting on behalf of the complainant you must notify us at the start of the process.

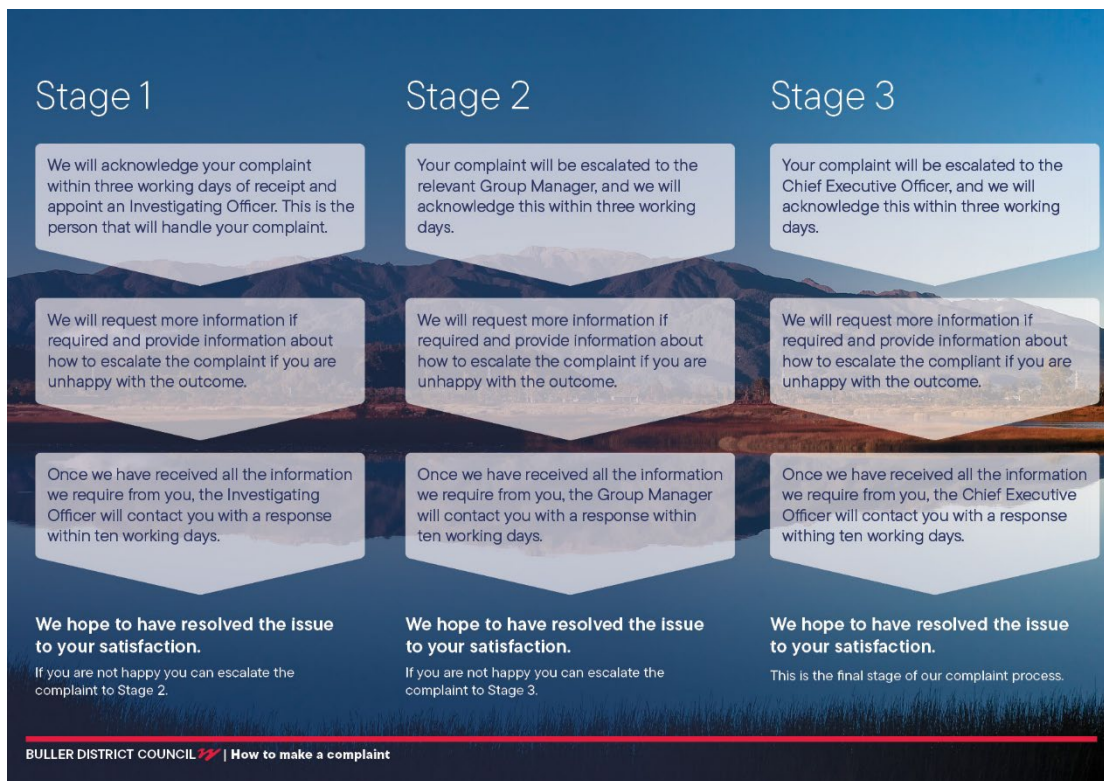
Confidentiality
Complaints will be dealt with in confidence, consistent with the needs of the investigation.

Behaviour
BDC has a zero-tolerance policy towards harm, abuse or threats. Where staff handling a customer complaint deem a complainant's behaviour to be inappropriate the investigation will be suspended until behaviours have been modified.

Use of information
Monitoring of our compliance policy will be undertaken, and information used to monitor our performance, highlight areas of failure and feed into the process for identifying areas for service improvement.

 **BULLER**
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera O Kawatiri

bullerdc.govt.nz



Stage 1

We will acknowledge your complaint within three working days of receipt and appoint an Investigating Officer. This is the person that will handle your complaint.

We will request more information if required and provide information about how to escalate the complaint if you are unhappy with the outcome.

Once we have received all the information we require from you, the Investigating Officer will contact you with a response within ten working days.

We hope to have resolved the issue to your satisfaction.

If you are not happy you can escalate the complaint to Stage 2.

Stage 2

Your complaint will be escalated to the relevant Group Manager, and we will acknowledge this within three working days.

We will request more information if required and provide information about how to escalate the complaint if you are unhappy with the outcome.

Once we have received all the information we require from you, the Group Manager will contact you with a response within ten working days.

We hope to have resolved the issue to your satisfaction.

If you are not happy you can escalate the complaint to Stage 3.

Stage 3

Your complaint will be escalated to the Chief Executive Officer, and we will acknowledge this within three working days.

We will request more information if required and provide information about how to escalate the complaint if you are unhappy with the outcome.

Once we have received all the information we require from you, the Chief Executive Officer will contact you with a response within ten working days.

We hope to have resolved the issue to your satisfaction.

This is the final stage of our complaint process.

BULLER DISTRICT COUNCIL  | How to make a complaint