

# Complaints policy



# Our approach

**Otago Regional Council (council) is committed to delivering high-quality services that satisfy the needs and expectations of our customers.**

We are accessible, helpful, and respectful to all customers in accordance with the Customer Policy principles.

We value feedback and are committed to ensuring contact with us is of the highest standard and people have the best possible

experience. If a customer feels we did not meet these standards, we encourage customers to contact us for resolution or to make a formal complaint.

Where a formal complaint is raised, council will respond with courtesy, fairness and impartiality and will welcome the opportunity to understand the customer's position and improve our customer delivery.





# What is a formal complaint?

## We define a formal complaint as:

**“A formal expression of dissatisfaction with council’s:**

- Lack of adherence to council policy or rules.
- Decision or outcome from council services that are not consents, regulatory<sup>1</sup> or enforcement matters.
- Standard of service, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected, i.e.:
  - » Action or lack of action.
  - » Timing of response or resolve.
  - » Unsafe actions or conditions controlled by council staff or contractors.
  - » Being unhelpful, disrespectful, or unresponsive.”

1 For the purposes of this policy, regulatory includes (but is not limited to) inspections pursuant to any statute, compliance/enforcement decisions and processes, and Bylaw approvals/authorities.

## A formal complaint is not:

- A request for delivery of routine services (but a complaint may result in a request for service).
- A request for readily available information.
- Complaints from one staff member about another.
- Matters for which there is a right of appeal and/or legal remedy.
- Matters of consents, regulatory<sup>1</sup> or enforcement.
- Feedback as part of a formal consultation process.
- Disagreement with matters that council is obliged to apply by law.
- Issues regarding an Elected Member, as these are dealt with under the [Elected Members Code of Conduct](#).
- Allegations of criminal or serious misconduct against a staff member or contractor, as these are handled in line with the [Protected Disclosure Policy](#).

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# Guiding principles

## When handling complaints, we commit to:

- Following a process that is customer focused, visible, accessible, and supported by management.
- Resolving the complaint at first point of contact or within a reasonable time frame.
- Disclosing any conflicts of interest and managing accordingly.
- Gaining an understanding of the complainant's perspective, and why they think we were wrong.
- Acting with integrity and fairness.
- Communicating in a way that is easy to understand.
- Maintaining privacy and dignity for both complainant and staff.
- Maintaining a register of complaints.
- Providing training and support for staff handling complaints.
- Acknowledging our mistakes and putting them right where we can.
- Learning from complaints to improve how we do things.

## Process

### All staff

- Receive and record complaint.
- Aim to resolve.
- If immediate resolution is not met, a formal complaint is raised.

### Manager

- Formal complaint received by the appropriate manager to investigate and respond.

### Specialist/general manager

- Formal complaint issues that are complex, highly sensitive or require a bespoke investigation.

**If a customer is dissatisfied with the response or outcome, an escalation of formal complaints to a general manager or specialist complaints to the chief executive can be requested.**

At the conclusion of a general manager's or chief executive's review, if a customer

remains dissatisfied with the outcome or feels they have been treated unfairly by Otago Regional Council, they have the right to ask the New Zealand Ombudsman to consider their complaint.

# Roles and responsibilities

All staff may be approached by a customer wishing to raise a complaint or asked to assist with an investigation or contribute their expertise.

Complaints are recorded by emailing a copy to: [formalcomplaints@orc.govt.nz](mailto:formalcomplaints@orc.govt.nz)

At a general level, all staff handling complaints are expected to be:

- impartial, independent, professional, and accountable
- familiar with this formal Complaints Policy
- customer-focused and in line with the [Customer Principles](#)
- aware of their roles and responsibilities, including how and where to record complaints
- aware of where to go for help.

## Timing

Council will work to the following time frames when managing formal complaints:

- Acknowledge receipt of complaint — within three business days.
- First contact with complainant to confirm details and propose solution — within five business days.
- Final resolution agreed with complainant — within 15 business days.

If the matter is a complex formal complaint and we are not able to meet the time frame, we will advise the reason for the delay and when the response will be given.

Where council is waiting for further information from the complainant, the process may be delayed.

## Complainants

Council understands that the circumstances leading to a formal complaint can be frustrating and distressing.

We recommend that complainants seek the support of friends, family and whānau if needed.

The complainant is required to provide their name and contact details, which

will be treated confidentially in line with council's [Customer Privacy Policy](#).

Complaints from complainants who do not provide their details will still be registered, but council is unlikely to be able to resolve them fully without a contact reference.

# Unreasonable complainant conduct

People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress, and in a very small number of cases, customers may choose to interact with council in a manner that is unreasonable and because of the nature or frequency of the behaviour, is disruptive to the conduct of council's ordinary business.

If a complainant's behaviour is deemed to be unreasonable, a member of the ELT may intervene to minimise the potential impact of unreasonable behaviour on staff.

If a complainant's behaviour has been found unreasonable, they will be advised in writing that the process has been suspended, and the reasons why.

The process will only resume when the complainant agrees to modify their behaviour. If the complainant disagrees with the suspension, it can be escalated to the chief executive.

## **Unreasonable behaviour towards council staff will not be tolerated. For example:**

- Abusive, inappropriate, or aggressive interactions with council staff will be terminated immediately.
- Threats or threatening behaviour will be notified to the Police.
- Frivolous, habitual, or vexatious complaints may be refused to be investigated. These include, but are not limited to:
  - » Persistent formal complaints about the same matter, despite it having been fully explored through the formal complaint process.
  - » Persistent formal complaints in pursuit of an unachievable outcome.
  - » Repeated changes to aspects of the formal complaint through the process.

## Monitoring and reporting

Complaint data will be collated and monitored by the Customer Experience Manager, who will provide a quarterly report to the ELT on complaint trends, types of formal complaints received, outcomes and timings against KPI measures.

