



Township of Augusta

Policy:	Public Complaints Procedure Policy	Date issued: By-Law:	March 12, 2018
Application:	All Employees, contractors, elected officials, volunteers, consultants and residents	Revision No.	4
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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This policy is intended to ensure that we handle complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively.

Our complaint management system is intended to:

- enable us to respond to issues raised by people making complaints in a timely and cost-effective way
- boost public confidence in our administrative process, and
- provide information that can be used by us to deliver quality improvements in our, citizen engagement services, staff and complaint handling.

This policy provides guidance to our staff and people who wish to make a complaint on the key principles and concepts of our complaint management system.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all staff receiving or managing complaints from the public made to or about us, regarding our citizen engagements, infrastructure, systems, practices, procedures, services, staff and complaint handling.

2. Terms and Definitions

Complaint

Expression of dissatisfaction relating to a township policy or program, service or operation, or lack thereof.

A complaint covered by this Policy does not include:

- Enquiry – General Requests for service or information
- Feedback – an opinion or comment regarding service delivery not directed as a complaint
- Compliment – express of appreciation or approval
- Suggestion – an idea for service improvements
- code of conduct or conflict of interest complaints
- reports of problems or wrongdoing merely intended to bring a problem to our notice with no expectation of a response
- Grievance - A clear, formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work related problem.

Complaint management system

All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by township staff in the management of complaints.

Dispute

An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of our organization.

Frivolous

A complaint not having any serious purpose or value

Procedure

A statement or instruction that sets out how our policies will be implemented and by whom.

Vexatious

A complaint instituted without sufficient grounds so as to cause annoyance or embarrassment to the defendant.

3. Guiding principles

We are committed to seeking and receiving communications about our services, systems, practices, procedures, citizen engagements, infrastructure and complaint handling.

It is in the interest of all parties that complaints are dealt with promptly and be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Complaints will be dealt with integrity, equitability and in an unbiased manner within a reasonable time frame.

We will assess and prioritize complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

No detriment to people making complaints

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

Confidentiality

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where it is practicable and appropriate.

Complaints, to the extent possible, will be dealt with confidentially. Privacy issues will be considered before information obtained about an individual during an investigation is released

Anonymous or vexatious complaints

Anonymous complaints are accepted, but not tracked, and investigations will be carried out in so far as practicable.

Complaints that are unreasonable, frivolous, vexatious, that include threats, harassing or abusive language will not be acknowledged.

Accessibility

We will insure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about us is easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

4. Procedure and Implementation



4.1 Introduction

When responding to complaints, staff should act in accordance with our complaint handling procedures as well as any other internal documents providing guidance on the management of complaints.

Staff should also consider any relevant legislation and/or regulations when responding to complaints and feedback.

Our staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and efficiently as possible. We will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.

4.2 Complaint processing

The five key stages in our complaint management system are set out below:

1. Receipt and acknowledgement of complaints

Complaints can be made by phone, in person or in writing.

Unless the complaint has been resolved at the outset, we will record the complaint and its supporting information in our complaint system. We will also assign a unique identifier to the complaint file.

The record of the complaint will document:

- the contact information of the person making a complaint
- the category of the complaint
- issues raised by the person making a complaint and the outcome/s they want
- any other relevant information and
- any additional support the person making a complaint requires.

We will assess and prioritize complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

Staff will strive to respond to a complaint in a timely manner, depending on the complexity of the issue.

2. Initial assessment and addressing complaints

Initial assessment

After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, we will confirm whether the issue/s raised in the complaint is/are within our control. We will also consider the outcome/s sought by the person making a complaint and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed.

There are 5 levels of complaint handling. One being the highest priority and five being frontline resolutions.

When determining how a complaint will be managed, we will consider:

- How serious, complicated or urgent the complaint is
- Whether the complaint raises concerns about people's health and safety
- How the person making the complaint is being affected
- The risks involved if resolution of the complaint is delayed, and
- Whether a resolution requires the involvement of other organizations.

Addressing complaints

After assessing the complaint, we will consider how to manage it. To manage a complaint we may:

- Give the person making a complaint information or an explanation
- Gather information from the product, person or area that the complaint is about, or
- Investigate the claims made in the complaint.

3. Action and reasons for decisions

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, the following will be recorded in the complaints system:

- the outcome of the complaint and any action we took
- the reason/s for our decision
- the remedy or resolution/s that we have proposed or put in place.

4. Closing the complaint, record keeping, redress and review

We will keep comprehensive records about:

- How we managed the complaint
- The outcome/s of the complaint, including whether it or any aspect of it was substantiated, any recommendations made to address problems identified and any decisions made on those recommendations
- Any outstanding actions that need to be followed up.

Where an email is provided, an automatic reply will be sent to the complainant at the close of the complaint. If no email is provided, staff will endeavor to contact complainant regarding the outcome.

We will ensure that outcomes are properly implemented, monitored and reported to senior management.

5. Accountability and Learning

5.1 Monitoring of the complaint management system

We will continually monitor our complaint management system to:

- ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints, and
- identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system.

5.2 Continuous improvement

We are committed to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of our complaint management system. To this end, we will:

- support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- regularly review the complaints management system and complaint data to monitor systemic issues and trends, and
- implement appropriate system changes arising out of our analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system.