

Complaints management

Policy statement

The Department of Infrastructure and Planning places a high value on feedback from its clients, customers, staff and the public generally. The department is committed to ensuring that complaints received against its actions, decisions, or the conduct of its officers, are dealt with in a responsive, confidential, fair, and economical manner.

The department:

- encourages feedback about how we carry out our business
- takes a client focused approach to how we deal with complaints about our services
- accepts complaints about our services orally or in writing
- uses information from complaints about our services to improve our business processes.

In support of the department's commitment to an effective complaints management process, all officers are to ensure that complainants do not suffer any reprisals or detriment for making a complaint covered by this policy.

Scope

This policy applies to all departmental services and officers, or representatives of the department.

The ability to lodge a complaint applies to all clients, customers, employees and the public in general. For the purposes of this policy all complainants are referred to as 'clients'.

Complaints management process

The complaints management process offers various channels to lodge a complaint. Where possible, the department aims to resolve complaints informally at the frontline of interaction (Stage 1).

It is impracticable to record a complaint where the client expresses dissatisfaction but does not expect a response or any action. Similarly, anonymous complaints will be accepted and actioned according to their merits.

Where a complaint is of a more serious nature, or cannot be resolved at the frontline, it will be referred to a more senior officer for review and action (Stage 2). The nature of complaints will be recorded in a departmental database.

If a client remains unsatisfied after a complaint has been dealt with at stage 2, alternative avenues for review or appeal are available, including the Queensland Ombudsman, and these will be advised to the client.

Where a review is to be conducted by a person other than the original decision-maker the reviewer will be equal, or senior to, the original decision-maker.

A complaint about a decision or action of the department that is received more than one year after the client was notified of that decision or action will be reviewed only if the authorised review officer considers that exceptional circumstances exist.



The following model contains the essential features of our system of review. Details of its application are contained in the departmental Complaints Management Procedure.

Informal and frontline complaints handling (Stage 1)

Officer at the first point of contact resolves less serious complaints where possible, in consultation with their supervisor if necessary.

Details are logged for later analysis.

Unresolved complaints or more complex formal complaints are referred directly to the next stage.

Complaints regarding the investigation outcomes, or the process of handling a stage 1 complaint, are referred directly to stage 2.

Complaints for which there is a statutory complaints or review mechanism will be referred to the relevant agency/process and the client will be notified of the referral.

Formal and internal review or investigation (Stage 2)

More senior officer or designated complaints review officer will:

- review complaints unresolved at the front line (Stage 1)

- investigate serious and formal complaints referred directly from the frontline

Where there is a complaint about investigation outcomes, a more senior officer to the original decision-maker may review the complaint in accordance with the procedure document.

External review

Complaints regarding the department's services or the conduct of its officers, may be lodged with:

- the Queensland Ombudsman

- the Crime and Misconduct Commission

or another relevant external agency.

Specific statutory review mechanisms may exist in particular cases, following internal reviews. Clients will be advised of these avenues upon enquiry and on finalisation of the complaint.

Some complaints may amount to public interest disclosures under the *Whistleblowers Protection Act 1994*. Others may be relevant to legislative obligations under the *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994* and our Code of Conduct, or the *Crime and Misconduct Act 2001* (duty to report official misconduct), in such cases they will be dealt with in accordance with the relevant legislation and this department's policies.

Reviews of complaints will consider whether:

- the assessment and investigative process adequately addressed the issues
- the decision was correct in the circumstances
- the decision was properly explained to the client.

Complaints management principles

In keeping with the *Queensland Public Service Commission Directive 13/06 Complaints Management and the Australian Standard ISO10002: 2006 Customer Satisfaction – Guidelines for Complaints Handling in Organisations*, complaints will be managed according to the following principles.

Visibility and access

- The public, and departmental staff, have a right to complain when dissatisfied with a service. They should easily be able to find information regarding making a complaint.
- Unless otherwise required by legislation, contractual or other Queensland Government requirements, complaints are accepted both verbally and in writing and through a variety of channels including face-to-face, telephone, letters, emails, fax and online.
- The complaint system is to be flexible with assistance available for making a complaint.

Responsiveness

- Complaints are often sensitive and complex. They may require detailed investigation and analysis. Timeframes for the management of complaints are to be reasonable.
- Legislative, contractual or other Queensland Government requirements will be met in responding to complaints.
- Departmental employees handling complaints will be provided with information, training and resources through the intranet, induction, and learning and development programs.
- Relevant policies and procedures will be available on the departmental internet and intranet sites.
- Complaints will be dealt with in a timely manner according to urgency.
- Complaints may be categorised into informal and formal complaints:
 - informal complaints, which are able to be resolved easily and at the frontline
 - formal complaints will be tracked, with timeframes for resolution monitored and clients entitled to reasonable progress reports where relevant.
- Complaints will be tracked via the departmental electronic document and records management system.

Assessment and action

- Complaints are managed in accordance with the principles expressed within this policy.
- Upon receiving a complaint, reasonable steps will be taken to ensure that the complaint is properly understood and clarification or further information has been sought where required and possible.
- Complaints will be assessed and, if necessary, categorised according to nominated criteria. Primarily this will assist in appropriate referral, monitoring and business improvement.
- Complaints are to be dealt with fairly and objectively, with natural justice observed where practicable, and privacy and confidentiality observed as far as possible.



- Review staff have the authority to re-make decisions or provide another appropriate remedy within the policy.
- Anonymous complaints will be treated on their merits.

Feedback

- Clients will be advised of outcomes as soon as possible after a decision is made, and will be provided with reasons for negative decisions
- Clients will be advised of any available internal review options, and any statutory external appeal options, where applicable.
- Clients will be advised of any other review options (eg Queensland Ombudsman) upon enquiry and via the departmental website.
- Opportunities for business improvement resulting from a complaint will be referred to the responsible area and a senior officer will have responsibility for any action.

Monitoring effectiveness

The complaints management system:

- must meet all statutory, policy and reporting requirements
- must identify complaint trends and outcomes
- must monitor the time taken to resolve complaints
- will be reviewed/audited from time to time by a senior officer
- reports on the quality and effectiveness of the complaints management system will be provided on a quarterly basis to the relevant committee within the departmental governance framework.

Resources and training

Appropriate technological and other resources will be made available to ensure the effectiveness of the system, and staff will be trained in the appropriate areas.

Remedies

Informal resolution and compromise are to be attempted wherever possible. Where appropriate, remedies are to be offered that are fair to both the client and the agency. Remedies should aim to restore a legitimate client to the position they would have been in had the complaint not been necessary. The remedy sought by the client should be considered as a first option. Similar remedies are to be offered to all persons in the same situation.

Delegations

Delegations are in accordance with the departmental delegation schedule.

Review

Reports on the quality and effectiveness of the complaints management system will be provided on a quarterly basis to the relevant committee within the departmental governance framework. Reviews of this policy will be informed by the reporting process, and will be conducted on an annual basis.

Definitions

Administrative decision	A decision made by the department in relation to the administration of its affairs and includes the failure to make a decision.
Complaint	A generic term referring to the expression of dissatisfaction, orally or in writing about the service or actions of the department in relation to any aspect of the service provided by the department, or the conduct of an officer.
Complainant	A person who makes a complaint to department or an officer
Public interest disclosures	Has the same meaning as in the <i>Whistleblowers Protection Act 1994</i>
Official misconduct	<p>As per the <i>Queensland Crime and Misconduct Act 2001</i></p> <p>Conduct relating to the performance of a staff member's duties that is dishonest or lacks impartiality, involves a breach of trust placed in an officer by virtue of their position, or is a misuse of officially obtained information and is a criminal offence or serious enough to justify dismissal.</p> <p>Official misconduct also includes conduct by anyone who seeks to corrupt a public officer.</p>


Records

Complaints will be recorded in a departmental database, and tracked and filed via the department's electronic document and records management system.

Additional information

Reference documents

- *Queensland Crime and Misconduct Act 2001*
- *Whistleblowers Protection Act 1994*
- *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994*
- Queensland Public Service Commission Directive – 13/06 – Complaints Management
- Australian Standard ISO10002:2006 Customer Satisfaction – Guidelines for Complaints Handling in Organisations
- Guide to Developing Effective Complaints Management Policies and Procedures – Queensland Ombudsman, 2006



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