

External Service-Related Complaints Policy

Purpose of this policy

The Department of Planning and Environment (the department) and its related agencies are committed to handling complaints fairly, efficiently, and effectively. We recognise that complaints and effective handling of complaints can improve the way we do business and build stronger relationships with our customers.

We know how important it is that complaints are treated seriously and have a timely resolution. When complaints are managed efficiently and effectively, this allows us to continually improve the quality of the service we provide and ensures we meet our regulatory obligations as a NSW Government department.

This policy outlines the key principles that apply when a customer makes a complaint about the activities of the department.

To whom this policy applies

This policy applies to all departmental employees, consultants and contractors. It also applies to the employees, consultants and contractors of all related entities who have people employed in or through the department.

Service-related complaint definition

An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, our employees or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. Matters relating to a delay or failure in providing a service and the quality of an action taken fall under the definition of service-related complaints.

Policy statement

We are committed to providing high quality services to our customers and stakeholders who access or are impacted by our programs, systems and services. We are also committed to the [NSW Ombudsman's complaint-handling principles](#) of:

- Respectful treatment
- Information and accessibility
- Good communication
- Taking ownership
- Timeliness
- Transparency and Continuous Improvement

The department's approach to service-related complaints management is to:

- receive and resolve complaints through frontline employees wherever possible
- acknowledge complaints within 3 working days where immediate resolution is not possible and aim to resolve within one month

- where unable to resolve within one month, keep customers informed on the progress of their complaint and likely date of completion
- record, track and undertake analysis to identify opportunities to improve our programs and services.

Matters relating to the following are not covered by this policy and should be addressed under separate arrangements by the business area concerned:

- Decisions subject to other review processes or outside the control of the department
- Costs of services provided by the department
- Grievances
- Public interest disclosures by employees
- Complaints about breaches of the Code of Ethics and Conduct
- Compliance enquiries or complaints
- General feedback
- Requests for information and/or service
- Responses to public consultations

For more information on complaint handling, refer to the [Complaint intranet page](#).

For information on how to identify and manage unreasonable complainant conduct, refer to the [Unreasonable Complainants Conduct Procedure](#).

Roles and responsibilities

Table 1: Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Secretary	Promote and enable a culture that values feedback, responds to complaints and uses these experiences to improve service delivery.
DPE Leadership Team	Support the Secretary in promoting and enabling a culture that values feedback, responds to complaints and uses these experiences to improve service delivery.
People Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure complaints are effectively managed and responded to in accordance with complaint handling practices. • Encourage all employees to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly. • Review reports on complaints and identify opportunities for improvements in service delivery outcomes

Role	Responsibilities
Employees whose duties include the handling of complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to complaints in a timely fashion and treat people with respect and courtesy. • Effectively manage and respond to complaints in accordance with complaint handling practices. • Provide feedback on issues arising from complaints and identify opportunities for improvements in service delivery outcomes.
All employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and comply with the department's complaint handling practices. • Help people to make a complaint if needed and treat people with respect and courtesy.
Executive Director Governance / Director Corporate Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage and maintain the complaint management framework and related reporting systems. • Promote awareness of complaints management arrangements. • Work with business areas and the Customer Experience Team to identify opportunities for improvements in service delivery outcomes.
Complaints Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate the receipt and tracking of the department's responses to complaints. • Train and help people to resolve complaints promptly and in accordance with NSW Ombudsman requirements and department's complaint handling practices. • Provide regular reports to business areas and the Customer Experience team on complaints volume and trends. • Provide feedback to business areas and the Customer Experience Team on issues arising from complaints and opportunities for improvements in service delivery outcomes.
Customer Experience Team	Support business areas to identify opportunities for improvements in service delivery and community engagement arising from complaints and other forms of feedback.

Failure to comply with this policy

Ethical and behavioural standards are set out in the [Code of Ethics and Conduct](#) and you are expected to demonstrate meeting these standards while working with the department. If you fail to meet those standards, action may be taken in accordance the Code.

Review timeframe

Corporate Governance Branch will review this policy no later than 3 years from the date the document is approved. The document may be reviewed earlier in response to post-implementation feedback, changes to legislation, or as necessary.

Related documents

Other documents that should be read in conjunction with this policy:

- [Unreasonable Complainants Conduct Procedure](#)

Policy metadata

Table 2. Policy metadata

Category	Description
Status	Final
Date of approval	27 Oct 2020
Approver	Chief General Counsel/Deputy Secretary Legal Services
Group	Legal and Governance
Division	Governance
Policy owner	Executive Director Governance
Branch	Corporate Governance
Document location	DPE Intranet and Internet
Next review date	September 2023
Associated procedure	Complaint intranet page
Any additional applicability	Not applicable
Superseded document	DPE – Management of Complaints Policy
Further information	complaints@dpie.nsw.gov.au
Document Reference	DOC20/896604

Version control

Table 3. Version Control

Version	Date issued	Change
1	27 October 2020	New Policy
1.1	3 May 2022	Updated to reflect new branding and name change