

QLDC is committed to delivering high quality services that satisfy the needs and expectations of our community customers. Our teams aim to be helpful, respectful and responsive at all times. On the occasions where we do not meet these standards, we encourage customers to make a formal complaint. QLDC welcomes the opportunity to understand these formal complaints, in order to continuously improve our people, processes and services.

1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline QLDC's structured approach to managing formal complaints. It explains how we will manage and resolve them in a fair, timely and objective manner with remedies/response actions that are proportionate to the issues raised.

2 What is a Formal Complaint?

All formal complaints that are received by QLDC will be managed according to this policy. A formal complaint is defined as:

A formal expression of dissatisfaction with QLDC that has not been resolved at the first point of contact. This could relate to our services, facilities, staff or contractors.

On most occasions, the first point of contact will be a member of the Customer Services team, but it could be any QLDC staff member or contractor that works directly with our community. This person will usually be able to resolve the matter directly, preventing the need to enter the matter as a formal complaint.

If the first point of contact cannot resolve the matter, then a formal complaint can be raised. This will be tracked and escalated within the formal complaint system.

Examples of formal complaints include:

- Taking longer to do something than we said we would
- Not doing what we said we would
- Not following what we said we would do in a policy or set of rules
- Not taking decisions in the way we said we would
- Giving wrong information
- Being unhelpful, disrespectful or unresponsive

The community can raise a complaint through any of our usual channels i.e. in person, phone, email, website or social media.

QLDC will publicise the Formal Complaints Policy through our website and printed copies will be available at the front counters.

2.1 What's the difference between an RFS and a formal complaint?

Given the nature of our work, we need to make a clear distinction between formal complaints and requests for service (RFS).

- Formal complaint – relates to QLDC's quality of service and is an escalation beyond the first point of contact.
- RFS – relates to a request for action to resolve or investigate a problem.

For example, if Mr Smith calls QLDC to report loud music from a neighbour, we will treat this as an RFS and send our officers to investigate. If Mr Smith then calls back to complain that the officers didn't arrive, this would be registered as a formal complaint i.e. a complaint about our performance.

This can be confusing as the community often calls QLDC to 'complain' about consent breaches, noisy neighbours, roaming dogs, food safety, roading and water faults. We will initially address all of these matters with an RFS. A formal complaint will only be registered if you are then dissatisfied with our response in tackling the matter.

2.2 Is there anything that can't be addressed through the formal complaints process?

There are some circumstances where an expression of dissatisfaction from our community is not considered to be a formal complaint. These sit outside of this policy's scope and need to be addressed through other avenues. Examples of this include:

- Disagreement with the Council's policy or decision
- Disagreement with matters that the Council is statutorily obliged to apply
- Matters where a legal procedure is already underway between the customer and QLDC
- Insurance claims
- Emergency response matters
- Criminal allegations
- Matters that already have a formal right of appeal

3 Timeframes

QLDC will adhere to the following timeframes when managing formal complaints:

- Within one working day – the Customer Services Manager will acknowledge receipt
- Within three working days – the relevant Complaint Champion will make contact to confirm the details of the formal complaint and propose a resolution
- Within ten working days – the relevant Complaint Champion will make contact to finalise resolution of the matter and outline continuous improvement measures

For complex formal complaints, it is possible that these targets will be exceeded. Under these circumstances, the complainant will be informed of the reasons why the time frames cannot be met and when they can expect to receive a full response.

4 QLDC Roles and Responsibilities

The *General Manager Corporate Services* will be responsible for the Customer Complaints Policy and ensure that it's subject to regular review.

The *Customer Services Manager* is responsible for the operational processes that are associated with complaint management and closure.

The *Complaint Champion* is the designated member of staff within a service area, business unit or group, who will be responsible for managing the complaint through to closure. Following this policy and the process outlined above, they will communicate clearly, respond within the timeframes, keep accurate records and take action as required.

The Complainant

The complainant needs to provide their name and contact details, which will be treated confidentially. Formal complaints that are made anonymously will be given consideration, but it's unlikely that they can be progressed without a contact reference.

QLDC understands that circumstances leading to a formal complaint can be frustrating and distressing. However, we will be best positioned to resolve the problem if all parties communicate clearly and effectively. We recommend that complainants seek the support of friends and family if needed. Translation services are also available.

We will not tolerate abusive, forceful or inappropriately determined behaviour towards QLDC staff.

For example, the following behaviour would be considered unacceptable:

- Verbal, written or physical abuse of staff
- 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

QLDC may refuse to investigate a complaint if there is evidence that the complaint is frivolous, habitual or vexatious. Under such circumstances the Complaint Champion shall advise and consult with the Customer Services Manager and local General Manager before making a decision.

If QLDC staff consider the complainant's behaviour to be unacceptable, they will advise them of the following in writing:

- That the process has been suspended
- Reasons for the suspension
- That the process will be re-started when the complainant agrees to modify their behaviour

Suspensions can be escalated to the QLDC Customer Services Manager if the complainant disagrees with it.

The complainant will be advised of the outcome of the formal complaint process. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they have 28 working days from the date of the full written response to provide details of why they consider their formal complaint unresolved. If the complainant wishes to request this then the complaint will be escalated to Chief Executive or their designate.

5 Complex Formal Complaints

Formal Complaints involving more than one service or business unit

Formal Complaints that allege dissatisfaction of service from more than one department will be reviewed and assigned on a priority basis by the Customer Services Manager. Consultation may occur between the affected departments to evaluate which will take primary responsibility for managing the formal complaint.

If a formal complaint is incorrectly assigned to a department for investigation, the receiving unit may request that the Customer Services Manager reassigns it to the appropriate area.

Complaints against an Individual Staff Member

If a formal complaint is received about a staff member, the Complaint Champion will work with the appropriate Manager to resolve the issue. HR will be consulted as required and all formal complaints will be managed according to privacy and confidentiality standards.

Complaints against the Chief Executive

Any formal 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.

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.

6 Performance Monitoring

Complaint data will be collated and monitored by QLDC to allow operational reporting on formal complaints trends.

The Customer Services Manager will report this information to a range of key stakeholders, including Elected Members and the Council's Executive Team.