



COMPLAINT AND FEEDBACK POLICY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Establish a uniform approach in the management of complaints and feedback across the department.
- Ensure complaints and feedback are handled in a manner which is fair, courteous and respectful of privacy.
- Outline the standards and principles for the management of complaints and feedback.
- Ensure Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) employees are aware of their responsibilities regarding complaint and feedback management.
- Enhance the department's relationship with its customers and general public, supporting the provision of quality service to our external customers.

2. Scope

The complaint and feedback policy is applicable to all DPC employees who may receive, manage, investigate and respond to complaints and feedback from members of the public. Where a fit for purpose alternate complaint and feedback policy and procedure for a departmental group is implemented, the guiding principles of this policy are to be included.

This policy and the associated procedure comply with the *Australian and New Zealand Standard on Guidelines for Complaints Management in Organisations (AS/NZS 10002:2014)*, and the *Commonwealth Ombudsman Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling*.

Matters not considered applicable to this policy are complaints relating to; Administrative law, appeal decisions, judicial decisions, internal staff complaints, panel selection grievances, official misconduct or the matters relating to the *Whistleblowers Protection Act 1993*. Where an alternative whole of government Complaints Management Policy is mandated, the DPC complaint and feedback policy is not applicable, for example, the State Procurement Board's *Supplier Complaints Policy*.

Matters concerning the conduct and practice of public officers and public authorities in South Australian public administration, specifically corruption, misconduct and maladministration, (occurring whilst a public officer is discharging their duties in public administration) can be reported via the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (ICAC) <http://www.icac.sa.gov.au/>.

3. Definitions

Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the service or action of a South Australian public sector agency, or its staff, by a person or organisation that is directly affected by the service or action.



Complainant is any person, organisation or its representative making a complaint.

Dispute is an unresolved complaint escalated internally or externally, or both.

Feedback is any opinion, comment/suggestion, compliment or expression of interest/concern made directly or indirectly by a client.

Public Officer includes public sector employees and contractors performing contract work for a public authority or the crown.

4. How to lodge a complaint with the agency

Members of the public are given a range of options for providing the department with complaints and feedback. Options available include:

Postal Address: GPO Box 2343 Adelaide SA 5001
Telephone: +61 8 8226 3500
Fax: +61 8 8226 3535
Email: dpcwebmaster@dpc.sa.gov.au
Face-to-face: Service SA customer service centres
<http://www.sa.gov.au/directories/customer-service-centres/locations-and-opening-hours>

Online: DPC website <http://www.dpc.sa.gov.au> or
<http://www.sa.gov.au/home>.

5. Complaint Handling Process

The department will endeavour to acknowledge the receipt of a complaint within three working days and resolve and respond to all complaints within 21 working days of receipt. Where a complaint cannot be resolved within 21 working days, an interim response must be provided to the complainant with an indicative timeframe as to when a full response can be expected.

The four major stages in the complaint handling and feedback process are:

1. Receive the complaint/feedback
2. Assess the complaint/feedback
3. Investigate the complaint
4. Resolve, respond and record the complaint/feedback.

Note: depending on the nature of the feedback received, investigation may not be necessary, therefore proceed to stage 4. All four stages are to be followed when responding to a complaint.

Implementation of this policy will ensure the following standards are met:

- Increase client satisfaction with the department's services



- A fair, efficient and transparent approach to handling complaints and feedback
- Respect the complainant privacy
- Use customer feedback to improve processes and services.

Reporting:

In accordance with the Premier's Circular PC013- Annual Reporting Requirements, South Australian government agencies are expected to report annually on complaint and feedback data commencing 2014/15 and to address system improvements planned for the next financial year.

Complaints and feedback referenced in the DPC Annual Report will include as a minimum:

- Number of complaints received
- Category of complaints received
- Service improvements made as a result

All documentation regarding a complaint and feedback management is to be retained in accordance with the *State Record Act 1997* and the details of the incoming complaint are to be recorded in an approved records management system (eg. Objective) – refer to Section 3 of the DPC complaint and feedback procedure.

6. Guiding Principles of Complaint and Feedback Management

The department is committed to the management of complaints and feedback in a manner consistent with the principles of natural justice and equity of access. Complaint handling 'good practice' requires staff to exercise *reasonableness, impartiality, fairness* and *ethics* in the decision-making process by officially acting in the public interest. We will build a culture of customer service excellence through leadership, knowledge, empowerment and developing skills.

DPC staff are guided by the following principles when handling and resolving complaints and feedback.

6.1 Enabling complaints

- *People focus*
 - everybody has a right to complain; adopt a people-focussed and proactive approach to seeking feedback and receiving complaints.
- *Ensuring no detriment to complainant*
 - no detriment should be suffered by the complainant for making a complaint.
- *Visibility and transparency*
 - there should be well-publicised information about how and where a complaint and feedback can be made to the department.



- place information about how and where to complain or provide feedback on the department and other relevant departmental websites.
- *Accessibility*
 - ensure the complaint management system is accessible.
 - Seek and welcome feedback and suggestions, to improve services proactively.
- *No charges*
 - no fees are to be charged for making a complaint or providing feedback.

6.2 Managing complaints

- *Responsiveness*
 - promptly acknowledge each complaint and feedback received and assess and advise complainants about process and timelines.
- *Objectivity and fairness*
 - each complaint should be managed in an objective and unbiased manner; conflicting interests should not interfere with or be perceived to interfere with the management and resolution of complaints.
 - operate from the view that a person who makes a complaint is entitled to a review of the issues raised and a considered response.
- *Equity*
 - a complaint should be addressed in an equitable manner.
 - each person should be treated in the same way no matter who they are.
- *Privacy and disclosure*
 - personal information should only be disclosed or used in compliance with relevant privacy laws (IPPI). Staff are to treat all complaints in the strictest confidence and only disclose information and the complainant's personal information to officers who have a need to know.
 - handle all complaints confidentially. The privacy of the complainant and any staff member the subject of complaint should be respected.
- *Communication*
 - communicate the reason behind your decision to the complainant, so they understand the facts and reasoning that formed the basis for the decision.
 - provide the complainant and stated staff member(where a staff member has been named), with sufficient information to enable them to understand and respond to the complaint made against them.

6.3 Accountability, learning and prevention

- *Accountability*
 - ensure that accountability for the operation of your complaint management system is clear, including record keeping obligations.
- *Continuous improvement*



- responding to and learning from complaints strengthens the department's commitment to continual quality improvement. Collect and record data on complaints lodged and outcomes, to assist in the identification of systemic and recurring problems and/or potential improvements to service delivery and customer relations.
- *Prevention of ongoing disputes*
 - develop and implement a process to prevent complaints escalating into ongoing disputes. Regularly review the complaints handling process to ensure it is efficiently delivering effective outcomes.

7. Dissatisfied and Escalated Complaints

Where a complaint remains unresolved or cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, the complaint may be referred to an external body such as the Ombudsman SA <http://www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au/>.

8. Improvement

The complaint and feedback policy is designed to identify opportunities for improving customer satisfaction with the delivery of services.

Complaint data is to be reviewed and analysed quarterly to:

- identify systemic issues that are required to be addressed, in order to improve performance
- identify trends and frequency of repeat complaints
- determine resolution outcomes of complaints
- determine improvements to remedy issues.

The department will record all complaints and feedback received, for the purpose of business improvement and the department's annual reporting requirements.

9. Governance and Responsibilities

The Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector requires all public sector employees to comply with the principles and values of public sector behaviour. Public officers are to exhibit the highest standards of professional conduct in undertaking their duties.

Chief Executive is responsible for:

- Ensuring the management of complaints and feedback is consistent with this policy.
- Approving this policy and subsequent revisions, endorsed by Executive Committee (ExCo).
- Reporting on the number and type of complaints received each year and related service improvements in the department's Annual Report in



accordance with *DPC Circular PC013 – Annual Reporting Requirements* commencing 2014-15 financial year.

Deputy Chief Executives/Executive Directors are responsible for:

- Ensuring the complaint and feedback policy and procedure is visible, accessible, communicated and promoted throughout the department.
- Encouraging an environment where complaints and feedback are handled promptly and fairly.
- Ensuring responses to complaints and feedback are signed by the Senior Executive of the business group the complaint or feedback relates to. Where applicable, the Senior Executive may delegate their authority to sign responses to complaints, to a Director or Senior Manager within their business group.
- Ensuring departmental employees are compliant with the DPC complaint and feedback policy and procedure.
- Ensuring departmental employees are supported and their obligations under the complaint and feedback policy and procedure are communicated.
- Ensuring departmental employees are adequately resourced, trained and engaged to manage complaints and feedback.
- Where required, ensuring escalated and unresolved complaints are effectively managed.
- Reporting significant complaints (deemed to be high-risk) to the Chief Executive.
- Reviewing and analysing complaint and feedback received, identifying opportunities and requirements for service and systemic improvements.

Managers are responsible for:

- Ensuring the effective and efficient management of complaints and feedback within their areas of control in accordance with the complaint and feedback policy and procedure.
- Ensuring complaints are recorded in accordance with the complaint and feedback procedure.
- Identifying complaint trends to enable corrective action and prevent a problem from reoccurring.
- Appointing and empowering staff with the authority to resolve complaints quickly and effectively.
- Ensuring appointed staff are trained and have a complete understanding of the relevant group's complaint management process.
- Ensuring all complaints are responded to in an efficient and timely manner.
- Monitoring progress of the complaints handling process.
- Developing and implementing continuous improvements to services that are the cause of complaints.
- Providing support and advice to staff managing consumer complaints.

Staff are responsible for:

- Treating complainants with respect.



- Respecting requests from a complainant that their complaint be handled confidentially or anonymously in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles Instruction.
- Communicating with the complainant throughout the process to help avoid complaints escalating further.
- Complying with the principles of the department's complaint and feedback policy and ensure complaints are operated in accordance with its associated procedure.
- Having a complete understanding of their responsibilities.
- Having a good understanding of the ethical issues that might arise as part of their role, including (not limited to) conflict of interest, procedural fairness, confidentiality and privacy, fiduciary obligations.
- Recording complaints in accordance with the complaint and feedback policy, procedure and the department's records management policy.
- Treating all complaints fairly and impartially and in accordance with the obligations in the Code of Ethics for the South Australian public sector.

10. Supporting Documentation

- AS/NZS 10002:2014 – Guidelines for complaint management in organisations ('the Australian standard').
- [Ombudsman SA, *An Audit of State Government Agencies' Complaint Handling* \(November 2014\)](#)
- [Commonwealth Ombudsman – Better practice guide to complaint handling](#)
- [Premier's Circular PC0013 – Annual Reporting requirements](#)
- [Premier's Circular – complaints management](#)
- [State Records Act 1997](#)
- [Premier's Circular PC0012 - Information Privacy Principles Instruction \(IPPI\)](#)
- [Information Sharing Guideline \(ISG\)](#)
- [Code of Ethics for South Australian Public Sector](#)
- [SA Strategic Plan: Target 32 – Customer and client satisfaction with Government Services](#)
- DPC Strategic Intent 2014-2017
- DPC Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2014-2019

11. Related Documents

Complaint and Feedback Procedure

12. Approval:

Chief Executive, Department of the Premier and Cabinet