

City of Humboldt

Policy Title Citizens Concerns Policy		Adopted By City Council	Policy Number 1520	
Origin/Authority City Manager	Jurisdiction City of Humboldt		Effective Date June 29, 1994 Amended: April 25, 2011	Page 1(4)
Reviewed By Administration Committee				

Purpose of Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to the Mayor, Council, City staff and citizens of Humboldt for responding to public concerns and requests.

The City of Humboldt strives to maintain a high quality of service delivery, and improve relationships between City staff, Council members, Mayor and the citizens. It is the policy of the City to accept, investigate, and resolve concerns or requests fairly, consistently, effectively and efficiently.

In order to properly resolve and address a concern or request, Managers and Directors should be given first recourse for the customer. Any attempt to go through a Council member should be redirected to staff; and unless the issue has not been resolved all the procedures outlined in Steps 2 and 3 in the procedures section of this policy shall be followed.

Definition of a Complaint

The elected official or staff member fielding the concern will need to determine whether or not the issue is a complaint. It is important to recognize the difference between a complaint and a suggestion, observation, question, neighbour dispute, or simply a call pointing out a hazard or safety issue.

A service complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided by the City. For example:

- the decision of a staff member
- the advice of a staff member
- the quality and range of services provided;
- failure to meet a service standard;
- a Council policy or procedure not being followed; or
- the conduct of a staff member or agent.

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A formal complaint is a concern of a more serious nature involving allegations of maladministration, serious and substantial waste of public money, corrupt conduct or pecuniary interests which may require notification or referral to another investigative agency.

A complaint is not:

- an initial request for service*;
- a request for information or explanation of Council's policies or procedures;
- an objection; or
- negative feedback in a submission or survey, or dislike of a policy or procedure;

If the issue relates to something other than a complaint, the elected official or staff member must direct the customer to the appropriate contact so that the proper response is provided effectively and efficiently.

Lodging Complaints

All complaints lodged with Council or staff members must be in writing and can be forwarded by facsimile, mail, hand delivery, email or other electronic means. The written complaint must include contact information of the complaint, details of the complaint, and any other pertinent information that will assist in having the matter addressed effectively.

Anonymous Complaints

In general, anonymous complaints will not be accepted. If the matter is not considered serious or there is insufficient information in the complaint to enable the investigation to be conducted, the complaint will not be investigated; however, every effort will be taken to explore every available avenue of enquiry before an investigation is closed.

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Persistent Complainant

From time to time, the Council and City staff will encounter customers who are persistent and write again and again to the point that the City's resources are unreasonably diverted. Where the complaints are about the same or similar issue(s) and the City has either addressed or judged the issue(s) as being without substance, then an administrative control may be put in place to limit responses to future complaints.

Under these circumstances details of the number and nature of the complaints will be provided to the City Manager who will provide notification to the customer explaining the City's intention not to acknowledge or respond to further correspondence on the matter(s) unless new information is provided that the complaint warrants action. The customer will also be advised that future written material will be filed. With respect to telephone calls, the customer may be told that no future phone calls will be accepted or interviews granted about the same matter.

Difficult Complainants

In cases where a customer's behaviour is aggressive or threatening, e.g. the customer:

- is consistently rude or abusive or uses inappropriate language or makes threats to Council or a staff member;
- causes damage to City property or threatens physical harm to staff or third parties

Under these circumstances details of the aggressive or threatening behaviour will be provided to the City Manager who will provide notification to the customer explaining the City's intention not to acknowledge or respond to further correspondence on the matter(s) unless the customer refrains from such behaviour. Serious threats and damage will be reported to the RCMP.

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Procedure Upon Receipt of Written Concern or Complaint

1. If a matter is brought to the attention of Council or a staff member verbally or otherwise, it should be determined whether it is a complaint or a suggestion, observation, question, or simply a notice pointing out a hazard or safety issue. Whether it is deemed to be a complaint or not, the customer should be dealt with in an attentive, polite and expedited manner; and the customer shall be directed to the appropriate department head to address the matter.
2. If the matter has been determined as a complaint, the customer shall be asked to submit a written complaint to the appropriate staff member which must include a name, address, and telephone number. This information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be released.
3. Should the response from the City be considered not to be what the customer expected, the customer shall be advised that it is his/her option to request, in writing, to the City Manager that the matter be placed before the appropriate Committee. The customer will be advised that the issue shall be placed before the Committee at their next regular meeting.
4. The City Manager shall place such written requests upon the respective Committee Meeting agenda in order for the Committee to give due consideration to the matter.
5. The Committee shall determine if such complaints shall be directed to the Council for further consideration.
6. If necessary, Council shall review and consider the matter and the customer shall be informed of the final decision in writing and of the reasons for judgment.