



OmbudsmanSA

**VALUING COMPLAINTS - AN AUDIT OF COMPLAINT HANDLING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COUNCILS**

**AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS SURVEY**

As a follow-up to the 2011 audit on the complaints management systems in local government the Ombudsman is seeking feedback from all South Australian councils. The focus of this survey is on evidence of implementation of the nine recommendations from the final audit report which relate directly to council business.<sup>1</sup>

Data from this document concludes the audit process. The information from each council will be collated for a report to be made to the Parliament in mid-2013.

Audit Recommendations 10 and 11 on the legislative and regulatory framework will be followed-up separately with the Office for State/Local Government Relations.

Please note that Part C is a self-assessment tool based on the Australian Standard for Complaints Handling (AS ISO 10002-2006). Whilst the assessment is subjective, it will provide a good overall picture of how councils see the performance of their business in handling and managing complaints from members of the public.

A completed copy of this survey is requested by **Thursday 28 February 2013** to Ombudsman SA PO Box 3651 Rundle Mall SA 5000.

**Part A: Council details**

*(Please check the relevant multiple choice boxes and attach additional pages if more space is required for comments)*

Council name.....

CEO *(for sign-off)*

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of this survey is available in electronic form at [www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au/publications/audit-report](http://www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au/publications/audit-report)

## **Part B: Audit Recommendations relevant to SA councils**

### **1. A complaint valuing culture**

That all councils promote a complaint valuing culture and revise policy and procedures to incorporate the three elements of quality management principles, improved accountability and better decision making.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

### **2. Policy development and standards**

That all councils review their general complaints and internal review of council decisions policy and procedures documents to establish best practice and comply fully with the requirements established by law.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

### **3. Defining complaint procedures and requests for service**

That all councils establish a clear process of internal graduated complaint handling; including first point of contact, optional referral to senior staff for investigation and section 270 internal review procedure.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

#### 4. Complaint management information systems

That all councils have in place systems to enable logging, tracking and analysis of complaints and to separate these from requests for service. This should include a system for monitoring complaint outcomes, the implications for council policy and decision making and the identification of systemic weaknesses and underlying problems.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

#### 5. Information for the public

That all councils highlight a direct link on their website homepage to a plain English description of the policy and procedures for making complaints. This should include rights of review and (if chosen) an opportunity for registering a compliment or making a comment.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

## 6. Monitoring complaints at senior management level

That all councils regularly review complaints at the level of senior management. As appropriate, a summary should be prepared, including outcomes, for the council Annual Report.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

## 7. Training matters

That all councils prioritise training for staff in the appropriate handling of complaints, including an understanding of alternative dispute resolution approaches, and the in-house policy and procedures for section 270 internal reviews.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

## 8. Communication with Ombudsman SA

That all councils establish a dedicated liaison officer role to facilitate information flow, analysis and learning from complaints handled by Ombudsman SA as related to that particular council.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

Name and contact details for liaison officer

Name: .....

Title: .....

Telephone: .....

E-mail: .....

**9. Section 270: Internal review of council decisions**

That all councils ensure that their internal review of decision procedure is fully compliant with the requirements of section 270 of the *Local Government Act 1999*.

Further, that all councils consider a standard form of wording for exclusions and a statement about the exercise of discretion in accepting matters for review.

As an adjunct to development of complaints policy, councils should consider the merits of establishing a network or panel of independent reviewers from which to draw support for internal review processes.

Council has:

- Fully implemented recommendation
- Partially implemented recommendation (*please explain*)
- Accepted recommendation but not yet implemented (*please explain*)
- Not accepted recommendation (*please explain*)

Comment:

## Part C: Complaints management best practice

Please rate your council against the following core elements of the Australian Standard for Complaints Handling:

1. A commitment at all levels within the council, which is reflected through a culture acknowledging citizens have a right to complain about matters which affect them  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
2. Fair treatment to both the person complaining (“the complainant”), and the section or person against whom the complaint is made  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
3. Allocation of adequate resources for handling complaints, with sufficient levels of delegated authority to the personnel dealing with complaints  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
4. Publicised, readily available information about complaint handling processes, which is easy to read and understand  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
5. A process which is accessible to all, with assistance provided for complainants to lodge complainants where required  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
6. A responsive process, where complaints are dealt with quickly, and complainants are treated with respect  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
7. Data collection and recording, with a systematic review and analysis  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
8. Identify recurring problems which need to be addressed  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
9. Report against documented standards  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor
10. Ensure the complaint handling system is delivering effective outcomes  
 Excellent  Good  Satisfactory  Poor

***THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO RESPOND TO THIS SURVEY***