

Township of Norwich

Formal Complaint Handling Policy and Procedure

Policy Statement

The Township of Norwich is committed to dealing with all formal complaints promptly, courteously, impartially and professionally. All complainants will be treated with respect and will not receive adverse treatment or any form of reprisal.

The information gained from complaints helps improve the quality of the services provided by the Township and the client experience of its residents.

Purpose

This Policy is to provide a consistent and uniform process to respond to formal complaints received from members of the public regarding programs, facilities, services, staff or operational procedures of the Township. This policy and the accompanying procedures outline the process to be followed and service standards for the handling of such public complaints.

General Principles

Early and informal resolution is encouraged. In most cases complaints will be handled informally by the department that deals with them. If a concern/complaint cannot be handled by a front line staff person, the complaint will escalate to the Department Head. If resolution is not satisfied there, the CAO/Clerk will be involved. This should resolve the large majority of the complaints. If the issue is not resolved using this process the individual may file a formal complaint.

All formal complaints will be dealt with in accordance with *the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and other applicable legislation. The identity of the complainant will be made known only to those who need to know in order to consider the complaint. All participants in the complaints process shall keep the details of the complaint confidential except as may be required by law. If a matter goes to arbitration or to the courts, it may be necessary to release a complainant's name and contact information during the resolution process.

Definitions

Formal Complaint – an expression of dissatisfaction about the action or lack of action taken by any Township employee, elected official or by a person or body acting on behalf of the Township of Norwich regarding operations, facilities or services provided by the Township. The term “dissatisfaction” is key to the definition of a complaint. Feedback of a positive or general nature, comments on a service or facility that do not require a response, or requests for service, are not complaints. Formal Complaints imply that the complainant is unhappy with the service received and after having tried the normal recourse are still not satisfied, and they require a follow-up response in regards to the issue. The formal complaint is a last resort after all methods of resolving the issue have been exhausted.

Complainant – the person who is dissatisfied and filing the complaint. Anyone who uses or is affected by Township services can make a complaint including: residents, people who work in or visit the town, local businesses or community groups.

Compliment – an expression of appreciation for satisfactory or above-satisfactory service.

Feedback – Input from client that is neither positive, nor negative, but provides input or ideas.

Application of Policy

This policy is for the benefit of all ratepayers and applies to all Township functions and services including Council, with the following exceptions:

This policy **does not** apply to:

- Outside boards and agencies, including the Police Service Board, which has its own complaints handling processes.
- Requests for service (including By-law enforcement requests)
- Requests for reconsideration
- Insurance Claims or potential claims
- Issues already addressed by legislation
- Feedback
- Compliments
- Inquiries
- Anonymous complaints
- Request for accommodations

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone who uses or is affected by Township services can make a complaint, including

- residents
- people who work in or visit the town
- local businesses
- community groups

Some individuals may require assistance to make a complaint, and complaints can be made on their behalf, provided that the person affected has given their written consent.

Service Standards

The following Service Standards will be adhered to in the handling of all formal complaints received.

- Complainants must receive an acknowledgement of receipt of their formal complaint and an assigned tracking number within three business days. This acknowledgement must identify who will be following up on the complaint as well as their contact information.

- A final response will normally be sent to the complainant within 20 business days, barring exceptional circumstances.
- Complaints that require outside input such as a meeting investigator or integrity commissioner may take longer than 20 days.

Responsibilities

Employees - All employees are to have knowledge and awareness of the Township requirement to receive formal complaints, the process through which a formal complaint can be made and the service standards that apply to formal complaints.

Supervisors - Supervisors are responsible for facilitating prompt response to all formal complaints by their staff to ensure that service standards are achieved.

Department Heads - Department Heads are responsible for the receipt and response of all formal complaints according to the service standards set out. Department Heads hold responsibility for departmental compliance to this Policy.

Process/Procedures

What is a formal complaint?

Most often a disagreement with an action or lack of action can be resolved by contacting the department administering the service. If a satisfactory conclusion is not found by the department head the individual may seek recourse from the CAO/Clerk. If after all avenues have been exhausted and the individual is still not satisfied they may file a formal complaint.

The complaints process will not deal with:

- Requests for service
- Feedback and compliments
- Inquiries
- Anonymous complaints

In these cases, the Complainant will be referred to the proper forum (if possible).

Receipt of Complaint

General (initial) concerns may be received by telephone, mail, email, and in person.

Formal complaints must be in writing, and include information such as:

- Details of what happened.
- Where did this happen?
- When?
- Who was involved?
- What was said or done?
- What kind of resolution is being sought?
- Contact details of the Complainant.

A form will be provided and available on the website. All complaints filed necessitate a response.

If the information received is not a complaint, but rather a request for service, the information is to be forwarded to the appropriate department for service.

Where it is determined to be a formal complaint, assign a tracking number and advise the complainant that you have forwarded their complaint, and provide them the name of the forwarded department.

Acknowledgement

Complainants should receive an acknowledgement within 3 business days. The Complaint Owner (the relevant Department Head) should be identified and the Complainant should be given the Complaint Owner's contact information, a tracking number, and expected timelines as part of this acknowledgement.

Actions to be Taken

Identify Department/Department Head

The appropriate Department Head is to be identified, and Complaint referred in writing.

Assessment

A Complaint Assessment will be carried out by the Department Head

- The Complainant may be contacted to clarify the complaint. The complaint may be terminated at this point if a resolution is mutually determined, if it's a duplicate, not a complaint, or is frivolous or vexatious. The complainant will be notified and redirected if possible.
- If a complaint was received by your department in error and it should be handled by another department, forward the email to the appropriate Department Head.

Investigation of complaint

Carry out formal investigation

- Investigation is coordinated by the Department Head. Define the subject matter and develop an investigation plan. Consult with staff, summarize findings and identify action to resolve the complaint. The Complainant should be notified of the approximate length of time the investigation should take.

Complaint response

A response is to be completed by the Department Head. Such response is to include:

- Setting out the of the complaint
- Detailing how the investigation was conducted
- Summarizing the facts
- Outlining the findings
- Suggesting appropriate resolution along with the rationale for such resolution. Resolutions may include an explanation, apology, reconsideration, reimbursement, restitution and/or change in policy – all are possible remedies.
- Identifying any next steps and any review options.

Review

The Complaint Response is reviewed by CAO/Clerk

Communication of the Decision

Provide the Complainant the response.

- The final response or update is to be provided within 20 business days, barring exceptional circumstances. Complaints may be prioritized depending on the circumstances.

Close of File

If the Complainant is satisfied, the complaint is closed.

Notes:

Some submissions may include both a request for service and a complaint. In these instances, the service request should be handled in the normal manner, and the complaint handled in accordance with the above. The acknowledgement sent to the complainant should identify the distinction between the complaint and the request for service.

The complaint needs to be tracked from its initial receipt to its resolution.

All complaint records will be kept securely and in accordance with corporate policy requirements and legislative responsibilities. The complaints records will be needed for regular future review and analysis so as to capture recurring issues and improve customer service and satisfaction.

Each department should ensure they have a method in place for keeping track of complaints, utilizing a provided excel spreadsheet or approved alternative.

If action is taken on a complaint by telephone/voicemail, ensure that a record of this action is retained.

Name of Complainant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Where Complaint filed by representative:

I, _____, consent to the filing of this complaint, and have all communications and information relating to my complaint with the Township of Norwich, disclosed to my representative _____.

Office Use Only:

Complaint Tracking Number: _____

Received By: _____

Date Received: _____

Forwarded to: _____