PALM ISLAND
Aboriginal Shire Council

Complaints Management Policy

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Responsible Officer	Governance Officer

1. PURPOSE

This policy and procedure establishes a fair, accessible and consistent system for receiving, assessing, investigating, determining, reviewing, recording and reporting administrative action complaints made to Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council. It supports accountability, natural justice, culturally respectful communication and continuous improvement in Council services and decision-making.

2. SCOPE

This policy and procedure applies to administrative action complaints about Council decisions, failures to make decisions, actions, failures to act, proposals, recommendations, service delivery, delays, policies, procedures and the conduct of Council employees, contractors or volunteers. It does not apply to routine customer requests, competitive neutrality complaints, public interest disclosures, suspected corrupt conduct, complaints about Councillor conduct, complaints involving the public official, statutory appeals or reviews, or matters governed by another legislative process. The Governance Officer will identify excluded matters promptly and refer them to the appropriate internal or external pathway.

A customer request asks Council to provide information, take routine action or deliver a service within an advised timeframe. A matter becomes a complaint when a person expresses dissatisfaction with Council's action, decision, service, delay or failure to act, including where a customer request has not been completed within an advised timeframe or has been handled inadequately.

3. DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Council	Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and its authorised representatives
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction made to Council about an administrative action, decision, service, or staff conduct
Administrative Action Complaint	A complaint about a decision or failure to act, including delays, policies, procedures, or service delivery
Complainant	The person or entity making the complaint
Council Officer	Any employee, contractor, or volunteer acting on behalf of Council

Internal Review	A secondary assessment of a complaint outcome, conducted by a senior officer not involved in the original decision

4. POLICY STATEMENT

Council is committed to managing administrative action complaints fairly, efficiently, consistently and transparently. Complaints will be assessed impartially, handled in accordance with natural justice and human rights obligations, and documented from receipt to resolution. Council will provide reasons for decisions and use complaint information to identify administrative errors, systemic issues and opportunities for service improvement. A person will not be disadvantaged for making a complaint in good faith.

5. LODGING A COMPLAINT

How to Lodge a Complaint

Complaints may be made in writing, in person or by telephone. Written complaints should be sent to **complaints@palmcouncil.qld.gov.au**. Complaints received through any other Council channel must be promptly forwarded to the Governance Officer through this email address for registration, assessment and allocation.

- Email: complaints@palmcouncil.qld.gov.au
- In writing: by letter or email
- In person: at a Council's Reception
- By telephone: 07 4770 0200

Council will provide reasonable assistance to people who need help to make a complaint, including people with disability, communication barriers or limited access to written or online channels. A complainant may use an authorised representative or support person. Council will communicate in plain, respectful and culturally appropriate language.

Information Required

Complainants should provide sufficient detail to enable Council to understand and assess the issue. This includes:

- A clear description of the issue
- Relevant dates, locations or persons involved
- Any supporting documentation or evidence
- The outcome or action the complainant is seeking

Anonymous Complaints

Council may accept anonymous complaints if they contain enough information to support a meaningful investigation. However, anonymous complaints may limit Council's ability to provide feedback or seek clarification.

6. COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCESS

6.1 Receipt, Registration and Acknowledgement

The Governance Officer will monitor complaints@palmcouncil.qld.gov.au, register each complaint in Council's complaints register and acknowledge receipt within three business days. The acknowledgement will provide a contact officer, outline the next steps and identify any further information required.

6.2 Initial Assessment and Allocation

The Governance Officer will complete an initial assessment as soon as practicable and ordinarily within five business days of receipt. The assessment will consider the complaint's nature, jurisdiction, seriousness, risk, urgency, desired outcome, available evidence and appropriate pathway. The complaint will then be allocated to an officer with suitable authority and no actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest. Where another statutory or internal process applies, the complainant will be advised of the referral where lawful and appropriate.

Complaints involving an immediate risk to health, safety, child safety, service continuity, evidence preservation, legal rights or Council assets will be prioritised and escalated without delay. The Governance Officer will record the risk assessment, interim controls, required notifications and responsible decision-maker.

6.3 Early Resolution and Investigation

The Governance Officer may close a complaint without investigation where it is withdrawn, duplicates a matter already determined without presenting material new information, is outside Council's jurisdiction, or cannot be meaningfully assessed after reasonable attempts to obtain necessary information. The complainant will be advised of the closure and reasons where contact details are available.

Where suitable, Council may seek early resolution by explanation, correction, apology, service action or another agreed remedy. If investigation is required, the investigating officer will define the issues, gather and assess relevant evidence, provide procedural fairness to any person adversely affected, keep adequate records and prepare findings and recommendations based on the balance of probabilities. Wherever practicable, the officer who determines the complaint will not be the person whose actions are complained about and will be separate from the investigating officer.

6.4 Decision and Timeframe

Council will aim to provide a written determination within 25 business days from the date the complaint is received. If Council is waiting for information requested from the complainant or another person, the complainant will be advised whether and for how long the timeframe is suspended. If the complaint is complex or cannot otherwise be finalised within the target period, Council will advise the complainant of the reason for delay, the revised timeframe and the contact officer. The outcome will state whether the complaint is substantiated, partly substantiated or unsubstantiated, explain the reasons and evidence considered, identify any action or remedy, and provide internal and external review information.

Where a complaint is substantiated or partly substantiated, the decision-maker will identify any remedy, corrective action, responsible officer and completion date. The Governance

Officer will monitor agreed actions to completion and record evidence of implementation in the complaints register. Remedies may include an explanation, apology, correction of records, reconsideration of a decision, service action, procedural change, staff guidance or another lawful and proportionate response.

6.5 Internal Review

A request for internal review should be lodged within 28 days of receiving the outcome, unless Council accepts a later request because of exceptional circumstances. Council will acknowledge the request within three business days and aim to provide a written review decision within 20 business days. If additional time is required, the applicant will be advised of the reason and revised timeframe. The review will be conducted by an officer who is more senior than, and was not involved in, the original decision. The reviewer will reconsider the matter afresh and may confirm, vary or set aside the original decision. Written reasons and available external review options, including the Queensland Ombudsman where appropriate, will be provided.

External review bodies do not replace Council's responsibility to address complaints. Depending on the subject matter, a complainant may contact the Queensland Ombudsman or another relevant oversight body. Council will provide accurate referral information in the outcome or internal review decision and will cooperate with any lawful external review or investigation.

6.6 Conflicts and Escalation

An officer must disclose any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest before assessing, investigating or reviewing a complaint. The Governance Officer will arrange reassignment where impartiality could reasonably be questioned. Complaints about the Governance Officer will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer. Complaints about the Chief Executive Officer, or suspected corrupt conduct involving the public official, will be managed under the applicable statutory and Council referral process.

7. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

Complaints will be handled on a need-to-know basis. Council will collect, use, store and disclose personal information in accordance with the *Information Privacy Act 2009* (Qld), as applicable, and any successor Queensland privacy legislation in force when this policy and procedure is applied. Information may be disclosed where authorised or required by law, including referral to an oversight or law enforcement body.

Complaint information will only be shared with officers who require it to assess, investigate, determine, review, record or report on the matter, or where disclosure is authorised or required by law. Council will take reasonable steps to protect complainants, respondents and witnesses from inappropriate disclosure, victimisation or reprisal.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATION

Council will consider the potential impact of complaint decisions on individual human rights, as required under the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Qld). Any limitation of rights will be reasonable, justifiable, and documented.

9. UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT CONDUCT

Council may manage unreasonable complainant conduct by applying proportionate communication and service-management arrangements approved by the Chief Executive Officer. Restrictions must be based on documented conduct, consider personal circumstances and human rights, specify their scope and duration, provide a review mechanism, and must not prevent access to emergency services or statutory complaint pathways.

10. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Governance Officer

- Administers Council's complaints management system and monitors complaints@palmcouncil.qld.gov.au
- Registers, assesses and categorises complaints and confirms the correct handling pathway.
- Allocates matters to an impartial officer and monitors timeframes, procedural fairness and outcome quality.
- Coordinates internal reviews, maintains the complaints register and records, and provides guidance to staff.
- Reports complaint trends, overdue matters, systemic issues and recommended improvements to the Chief Executive Officer.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Provides executive oversight of the complaints management system and ensures the Governance Officer has appropriate authority, resources and organisational support.

- Ensures compliance with this policy and applicable legislation
- Receives periodic reports on complaint trends and systemic issues
- Provides strategic direction for continuous improvement
- Acts as Council's final internal decision-maker for complaint reviews. Once the CEO has completed the internal review and issued a decision, there is no further internal escalation or review available; however, the complainant may pursue any available external review options.

Director, Managers and Supervisors

- Investigate and resolve complaints within their areas of responsibility
- Ensure complaints are handled impartially, promptly, and in accordance with Council procedures
- Support staff in applying complaint handling protocols consistently

Immediately notify the Governance Officer of complex, high-risk or urgent complaints so that appropriate escalation, specialist advice and notification to the Chief Executive Officer can be coordinated.

Council Officers

- Receive complaints respectfully and record the information accurately.

- Promptly forward every complaint to the Governance Officer through complaints@palmcouncil.qld.gov.au
- Not investigate or determine a complaint unless it has been formally allocated to them.
- Protect confidentiality, disclose conflicts of interest, cooperate with authorised enquiries and comply with approved timeframes and procedures.

Complainants

- Engage constructively with Council staff
- Provide accurate and relevant information to assist in complaint resolution
- Respect the complaint handling process and associated timeframes

Council will provide complaint-handling induction and refresher training to officers who receive, assess, investigate, determine or review complaints. Training will cover complaint identification, referral pathways, cultural capability, procedural fairness, human rights, privacy, conflicts of interest, recordkeeping and unreasonable complainant conduct.

11. PUBLIC ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

This policy and procedure will be published on Council's website and made available in accessible hard-copy form.

The Governance Officer will maintain a secure complaint register recording the date received, complainant details where provided, complaint category, responsible area, risk and priority, conflicts identified, allocation, actions taken, key dates, outcome, review status and any systemic improvement. Records must be managed in accordance with Council's records management obligations, approved retention requirements and access controls. Access to complaint records will be limited to authorised officers with a business need. Changes to register entries must preserve an auditable history. Requests by a complainant for access to or amendment of personal information will be managed under applicable privacy, right to information and records management requirements.

The Governance Officer will provide quarterly reports to the Chief Executive Officer on complaint volumes, categories, timeliness, overdue matters, outcomes, internal reviews, recurring issues, corrective actions and emerging risks. Council will publish de-identified annual information about complaint performance and use identified trends to improve services, procedures, staff capability and internal controls.

12. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

This policy is guided by relevant Queensland legislation, including but not limited to:

- *Local Government Act 2009 (Qld)*
- *Local Government Regulation 2012 (Qld)*
- *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)*
- *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2010 (Qld)*
- *Crime and Corruption Act 2001 (Qld)*

- *Public Records Act 2002 (Qld)*
- *Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld), as applicable, and any successor privacy legislation*
- *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994 (Qld)*

This policy and procedure is intended to satisfy Council's obligations for an administrative action complaints management process under the *Local Government Act 2009* and *Local Government Regulation 2012*. If this document is inconsistent with legislation, the legislation prevails.

Supporting internal documents:

- *PIASC Records Management Policy*
- *PIASC Code of Conduct*
- *PIASC Public Interest Disclosure Policy*
- *PIASC Employee Conflict of Interest Policy*
- *PIASC Competitive Neutrality Policy*
- *PIASC Dealing with a Complaint Involving a Public Official*
- *PIASC Employee Code of Conduct Policy*
- *Code of Conduct for Councillors in Queensland*

13. REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE

This policy and procedure will be formally reviewed every three years, or earlier if required because of legislative change, audit recommendations, complaint trends or operational changes.