

Complaints Management Policy



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1. Policy statement

The Complaints Management Policy articulates the overarching principles the Audit Office applies to its handling of complaints.

Complaints can come from inside and outside the organisation and can be made by our stakeholders, including members of the public or public officials.

The Audit Office is committed to providing a quality service to its stakeholders: the Parliament of New South Wales, the agencies and local councils we audit and members of the public. A key element of this commitment is an effective and efficient complaints management system.

The Policy is developed and maintained in line with the Standards Australia AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for complaint management in organisations and the Commitments to Effective Complaint Handling developed by the NSW Ombudsman and the Customer Service Commissioner.

The Audit Office also receives correspondence raising concerns about other entities and treats this correspondence as feedback to inform our audit function. More information about providing feedback to the Audit Office is available on our website.

2. Scope

This Policy only applies to complaints received about the Audit Office and should be read in conjunction with Complaints Management Procedure, relevant legislation and other relevant Audit Office policies.

Public officials can make reports about certain types of misconduct under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 1994*. Public Interest Disclosures (PIDs) about serious and substantial waste, corrupt conduct, maladministration or a breach of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* by the Audit Office are covered by the Internal Public Interest Disclosures Policy.

PIDs about serious and substantial waste in the organisations we audit are covered by the External Public Interest Disclosures Policy.

3. Policy content

3.1 Complaints management principles

The Audit Office adopts the following principles when managing complaints:

Fairness and respect

To achieve fairness for the complainant, the Audit Office handles complaints impartially and transparently. All complainants will be treated with respect by Audit Office staff and each complaint will be considered with an open mind and evaluated with objectivity.

Accessibility

A copy of this Policy is available on the intranet and the Audit Office website. There are several options for people wishing to make complaints. Complaints can be made either online, by email, by letter, fax, in person or by phone.

Responsiveness

The Audit Office is committed to responding to complaints within a reasonable timeframe and keeping the complainant up to date with the progress of their matter. Generally, simple complaints will be responded to within two weeks and more complex complaints within four weeks. The specific standards and timeframes for responding to Public Interest Disclosures and employee grievances are contained in the respective policies and procedures.

The Audit Office will help complainants with special needs, for example those from a non-English speaking background or with other communication difficulties.

Confidentiality

All complaints will be dealt with confidentially and personal information will be managed in accordance with the Information Protection Principles in the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*. For further information refer to Audit Office's Privacy Management Plan.

Efficiency

The Audit Office will resolve complaints using resources appropriate to the nature of the complaint. We will track progress regularly to ensure complaints all are dealt with promptly and efficiently. Complaints will be registered and tracked using a central register.

Integration

Managing complaints effectively is important to the Audit Office. A quarterly report on complaints will be submitted by the Executive Manager, Governance to senior management and the Audit and Risk Committee.

3.2 Complaints management process

There are seven possible stages of complaint handling. The steps required will depend on the nature of the complaint:

1. Assessment
2. Acknowledgment
3. Planning
4. Investigation
5. Response
6. Follow up
7. Systemic issues and analysis.

The Complaints Management Procedure contains more detail about each stage of the complaints management process.

3.3 Complaints management considerations

Anonymous complaints

The Audit Office will accept and assess anonymous complaints. However, anonymity may limit the Audit Office's ability to seek further information to assess the complaint adequately. It will also limit our ability to inform the complainant of the outcome of our assessment and where appropriate, the outcome of any detailed investigation.

Unreasonable complaints or complainants

From time to time, complainants to the Audit Office may act unreasonably and/or make unreasonable complaints. For example, complainants may be rude or aggressive, they may continue to make the same complaint after it has been investigated and closed or make unrealistic or disproportionate requests.

The Audit Office will be guided by New South Wales Ombudsman's publication, '[Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Manual 2012](#)' in responding in such cases.

Mandatory notifications

The Audit Office, along with other public authorities, has a responsibility under s11 of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988* to report to the Independent Commission Against Corruption any matter that we suspect on reasonable grounds concerns or may concern corrupt conduct.

Dissatisfaction with the way the complaint was handled

If a complainant is not satisfied with the way we have responded to their complaint, it may be necessary to refer a complaint for internal review by a senior staff member not involved in the original matter.

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the internal review or is otherwise dissatisfied with how we have dealt with their complaint, then they have the option of pursuing their complaint with another appropriate agency such as the NSW Ombudsman.

3.4 No reply necessary

Generally, the Audit Office will not reply to anonymous complaints where no return address details are provided and to complaints sent 'for information only' where it is explicit that a response is not sought.

4. Roles and responsibilities

All staff – responsibility to comply with the Policy.

Auditor-General – overall responsibility for ensuring complaints management is handled appropriately across the organisation.

Executive Director, Professional Services – responsible for conducting internal reviews requested by the complainant.

Executive Manager, Governance – responsibility for:

- reporting complaints data to senior management
- the policy and procedures for managing complaints
- determining whether a matter is a complaint, feedback, a request for information, a potential Public Interest Disclosure and
- appropriate referral of complaints and Public Interest Disclosures within the Audit Office for action.

5. Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy, the following definitions apply:

Complaint – an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the Audit Office related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Complainant – a person or organisation making the complaint.

Complaints management system – encompasses all aspects of the policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by an organisation for the management of complaints.

6. Contact point

The Executive Manager, Governance is the contact point for all enquires relating to this policy, governance@audit.nsw.gov.au.

7. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if significant new information, legislation or organisational change warrants an update.