

Watercare complaints management policy

Introduction

Purpose

Watercare is committed to being a truly customer centric organisation, fully supportive of all customers seeking assistance, lodging a complaint, or requesting information or a service. We will approach each interaction with empathy, seeking to find the best resolve possible for the customer, while not compromising our business. We want to ensure all feedback is well documented and can be used to improve future processes.

Scope

Customers are encouraged to inform Watercare if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of our service. Watercare's Resolutions team will work with relevant subject matter experts in the business to resolve complaints in a fair, timely and confidential manner. Should the customer still feel aggrieved in any way, they will have the option to escalate the complaint/issue through the following steps:

1. Head of Customer Experience
2. Chief Customer Officer
3. Chief Executive Officer
4. Disputes Tribunal or Ombudsman, depending on the nature of the complaint.

At any internal escalation point, the responsible party may choose to solicit support from other internal resources, for example Internal Audit, or external resources, for example a mediator, to further investigate and resolve the complaint/issue.

Watercare acknowledges that this relationship will continue whilst the customer is connected to and receiving services from the Watercare network.

Policy

2.1 Definition of complaint:

A complaint is defined as follows –
 "A complaint is any repeated expression of dissatisfaction or escalation made to or about Watercare related to its products, services, projects, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required."
 This definition is broader than, but consistent with, the definition in Australian and New Zealand Standard

Guidelines for complaint management in organisations AS/NZS 10002:2014. It includes dissatisfaction with an agency or its contractors:

- customer services
- actions or decisions
- inaction or delay
- policy or processes.

2.2 Support for complainants

Watercare encourages customers to seek the support of a family member, friends or advocacy services e.g. Whānau Ora or Citizens Advice Bureau, in submitting the complaint. Where someone is acting on behalf of the complainant, this must be notified at the start of the process, and Watercare would require the customer to authorise such support person to act on their behalf. We may require this authorisation in writing.

If the assistance of an interpreter is required to facilitate the issue, Watercare can arrange this.

2.3 Exceptions

Although it is intended that all issues will be dealt with under this process, there may be exceptions that arise as a result of other processes of review or statute. Possible examples:

- Complaints that are criticisms or disagreement with Watercare policy or decisions, as outlined by the Watercare Customer Contract
- Complaints that constitute a disagreement with or refusal to accept matters that Watercare is obliged or required by statute to apply
- A complaint where the customer or Watercare has started legal proceedings or has taken court action
- A complaint that has already been ruled upon and a formal decision made by the Disputes Tribunal or Ombudsman. The ruling will be upheld by Watercare and will no longer be investigated
- Any other complaint where another formal process has been commenced (for example when the issue has been referred to mediation)

The management of such complaints falls outside this policy, with each situation suitably managed according to the circumstances.

2.4 Unacceptable actions by complainants

Customers may behave out of character in times of distress. Watercare does not accept forceful, disrespectful or in any way inappropriate behaviour towards its staff.

A complainant's behaviour may be deemed inappropriate when, for example:

- They are abusive to Watercare staff either in person, written or verbal
- They **persistently** make the same complaint, despite it having been fully investigated under the complaints policy, or else persist in seeking an unrealistic outcome
- They **repeatedly** change aspects of the complaint or the desired outcome part way through an investigation.

Where staff handling a complaint consider the complainant's behaviour as inappropriate, they should politely advise the complainant of this and request them to desist from such behaviour. If the inappropriate behaviour continues, the investigation may be suspended, with no further communication. The investigation will recommence on receipt of an undertaking from the complainant that they will suitably modify their behaviour.

If an arrangement to limit interaction with a vexatious customer is to be put in place, this will be vetted through a panel including the Chief Customer Officer and the Complaints Manager, together with advice from Watercare's lawyers.

Where a repeated unreasonable demand is made i.e., multiple requests under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987, Watercare reserves the right to charge customers for this service. This could include but is not limited to, time spent to compile information as explained on our website here <https://www.watercare.co.nz/Contact/Request-information>

2.5 Monitoring

As indicated earlier, all complaints will be investigated and dealt with in confidence, consistent with the needs of the investigation. We endeavour to respond within 10 working days. If there is a requirement for further investigation that means the response may take more than 10 working days, we will let the customer know.

2.6 Informing the public and staff

The complaints policy will be publicised through Watercare's website.

All staff are to be made aware of the complaints policy. The responsibility for ensuring awareness and knowledge of the process is with the Complaints Manager.

2.7 Responsibility and review

The complaints policy is the responsibility of the Chief Customer Officer and will be subject to regular review.

3. Procedure

3.1 Making a complaint

A customer (or their representative) can make a complaint in person, by visiting Watercare head office during normal business hours, or by telephone, letter, email, or via our website. The customer's name and contact details are to be provided to allow a meaningful response.

3.2 Responding to complaints

Complaints will be responded to as quickly as possible by the most appropriate method. All correspondence will be recorded against the customer account.

3.3 Extending complaint response times

Issues of a more complex nature may take longer than the specified time limits to investigate. If this is the case, the customer will be informed of the reasons why the time scales cannot be met and when they can expect to receive a full response.

3.4 Misdirected complaints

If any complaint is misdirected, the receiving unit will acknowledge the complaint and commit to get back to the customer within an agreed timeframe. This information should be shared with the Complaints Resolutions team immediately. The Complaints Resolutions team will take ownership of the complaint and get in touch with the customer as soon as possible.

3.5 Complaints against an individual staff member

Watercare is committed to ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly and impartially. If a complaint is received about a staff member, the appropriate Unit Manager will be responsible for investigating and resolving the issue.

3.6 Anonymous complaints

Complaints made anonymously will be given consideration and dealt with as appropriate depending on the information given. This includes any issues that may be laid anonymously under the whistle-blower legislation.

3.7 Monitoring

For all stages of the procedure, the responsible member of staff within a service area, business unit or group, will be responsible for the compliance with the policy. They will document the following information to ensure adequate records are maintained:

- Name and contact details of the complainant (where there are no requirements for anonymity)
- Details of complaint
- Tracking/progress information
- Resolution information
- Further redress information provided and any action taken.