

# Procedure

PR3034.1.0

Effective Date: 30/04/18

## Customer Complaints

### What I Need to Know and Why

- Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) welcomes feedback about its services, actions and decisions and is committed to effectively managing customer complaints, and resolving them in an accountable, transparent, timely and fair manner.
- This procedure supports staff and volunteers by providing guidance and setting out the requirements for handling customer complaints. It also assists customers to understand how their complaints will be dealt with.
- This procedure does not apply to:
  - Customer complaints relating to inappropriate workforce conduct (refer to Management of Complaints about Staff, Volunteers and Contractors Procedure).
- For simplicity, staff, volunteers and contractors may be referred to as 'workforce / members of the workforce' in this procedure.

### How I Do It

#### ACTION:

1. Determine whether a complaint is a 'customer complaint'.

#### NOTES:

- A customer complaint is a complaint about the service or action of QFES or its workforce, by a person who is apparently directly affected by the service or action. It includes, for example, a complaint about:
  - A decision made, or a failure to make a decision, by a member of the workforce;
  - An act, or failure to act, of QFES;
  - The formulation of a proposal or intention by QFES;
  - The making of a recommendation by QFES; or
  - The customer service provided by a member of the workforce.

**NOTE:** not every expression of dissatisfaction needs to be handled as a customer complaint, including:

- A response of dissatisfaction that is immediate, of a venting nature, and/or non-specific. Examples include: general comments from a customer directed towards a member of the workforce such as "you don't know what you are talking about" or "that's not right"; or
- When a person complains about an issue where they are not directly affected by a service or decision of QFES. Examples include: a person complains that there is a residential unit complex which does not comply with fire regulations; or, a road user complains that they saw a QFES vehicle driving over the speed limit without apparent justification.
- In addition, a complaint is not a customer complaint if:
  - It is raised by a member of the workforce about any aspect of their employment/engagement with QFES; or
  - It alleges staff/volunteer misconduct or corrupt conduct (refer to the *QFES Complaints Quick Guide* for further information about different categories of complaints).
- Where a complaint meets the definition of a customer complaint, follow the steps set out below.

**Responsibility:** Member of the workforce dealing with the customer, or who receives the complaint



2. Classify the complaint.

- Customer complaints must be classified as either 'straightforward' or 'serious'.
- 'Straightforward' customer complaints:
  - Involve minimal risk or detriment to the complainant or QFES;
  - Do not require formal investigation; and
  - Are suitable for frontline informal resolution.

Examples include complaints about incorrectly addressed correspondence, minor communication issues/misunderstandings, or minor delays in dealing with a matter.

These complaints are more likely to have been made informally and directly to the member of the workforce concerned.

- 'Serious' customer complaints:
  - Are more significant or complex;
  - Involve medium or high level of risk/detriment to the complainant or QFES; or
  - Are not suitable for local resolution.

Examples include complaints about decisions; extensive delays; significant service delivery concerns; a challenge to the competency of a member of the workforce; or serious communication difficulties.

These complaints are more likely to have been made formally in writing.

**Responsibility:** Member of the workforce dealing with the customer, or who receives the complaint

3. Manage a straightforward complaint.

- Where a member of the workforce receives a straightforward customer complaint, they should attempt to resolve it informally with the complainant. However, they should refer the complaint to their supervisor if any of the following issues arise:
  - They are not confident they can deal with the complaint;
  - The complainant requests someone else deal with the complaint;
  - The problem is clearly outside their area of expertise; or
  - The complaint is from another public sector agency or a Member of Parliament.
- To manage a straightforward complaint, members of the workforce should:
  - Respond to the complainant in an objective, polite and courteous manner;
  - Engage with the complainant to correctly understand the complaint;
  - Seek clarification and confirm the issues, relevant information, and outcomes sought (i.e. summarise the main points made and ask whether you correctly understand the issues);
  - Generally acknowledge the complainant's sense of grievance, justified or not;
  - Clarify the application of any relevant policies or procedures;
  - Resolve the complaint within 7 days (see section 5 for options to resolve complaints);
  - If unable to resolve the matter immediately, advise the complainant about the complaints process and indicative timeframe for a response;
  - Ensure that the complainant is advised of how their complaint was dealt with and the outcome;
  - Take reasonable action to prevent similar complaints in the future; and

4. Manage a serious complaint.

- Ensure that any documentation relating to the complaint is appropriately stored/filed at the business unit level.

**Responsibility:** Member of the workforce dealing with a straightforward complaint

- Serious complaints must be referred to the Ethical Standards Unit (ESU) as soon as practicable.
- The ESU will record serious complaints in the QFES Complaints Management System.
- The ESU will refer the complaint to a senior manager within the QFES division to which the complaint relates.
- The relevant senior manager will arrange for an acknowledgement letter (or email) to be sent to the complainant within five business days if the complaint cannot be resolved within that period.
- The relevant senior manager will identify a suitable staff member or volunteer to deal with the complaint.
- The member of the workforce assigned responsibility to deal with the complaint must:
  - Review/deal with the matters raised in the complaint (see section 5 for options to resolve complaints);
  - Where appropriate, seek advice from other functional units or officers with particular expertise;
  - Seek to finalise the complaint within 30 days; and
  - Provide a written response to the complainant addressing the issues raised and providing a specific outcome in relation to their complaint.

**Responsibility:** Member of the workforce dealing with a serious complaint, and ESU

5. Options for dealing with customer complaints.

- In determining how a complaint should be dealt with, consideration should be given to the nature and seriousness of the issues raised; the quantity and quality of information in the complaint; the outcome/s being sought by the complainant; and whether the presenting issues can be productively dealt with. Anonymous complaints should be assessed against the same criteria.
- The options available to deal with complaints include (but are not limited to):
  - Taking no action (in rare cases - e.g. trivial/vexatious complaints, however the complainant must be advised of the reason);
  - Informal resolution by conciliation with the complainant;
  - Mediation;
  - Fact finding; or
  - Investigation (as a last resort).
- Some examples of action that may be taken to resolve/address the specific issues within a complaint include:
  - An expression of empathy or regret that the complainant has suffered some form of detriment, without admitting any fault;
  - Expediting the work on a matter where there has been some delay;
  - Offering an apology where it is apparent that a member of the workforce was at fault;

- Providing explanations and giving reasons for a decision or action;
- Undertaking some remedial action; and/or
- Providing training/counselling to the staff member concerned.

**NOTE:** it may not always be possible to satisfy a complainant. Common sense will dictate whether the member of the workforce handling the complaint has done everything reasonably possible to resolve the complainant's concerns. The complainant should be told in clear terms what QFES can and cannot do in relation to their desired outcomes.

**Responsibility:** Member of the workforce dealing with a customer complaint

## 6. Internal reviews.

- If a complainant is dissatisfied with how their complaint has been dealt with, they may request an internal review be conducted.
- The purpose of an internal review is to determine whether the action taken to deal with the complaint in the first instance was fair and reasonable in the circumstances.
- Requests for internal review must be immediately forwarded to the ESU.
- The ESU will update the QFES Complaints Management System to record the receipt of the request for internal review.
- The ESU will refer the request to a senior manager within the QFES division which dealt with the complaint in the first instance. The senior manager will identify a suitable staff member to conduct the internal review.
- The reviewing staff member should have had no previous involvement in the matter, have no conflict of interest and be impartial and qualified/experienced to conduct the review. It is also preferable that the reviewing staff member be more senior to the staff member who dealt with the complaint.
- Internal reviews are to be conducted in accordance with natural justice.
- Internal reviews should be completed within 30 days of receipt of the request, unless:
  - The timeframe has been extended with the complainant's agreement; or
  - It can be demonstrated that reasonable attempts have been made to progress the review.
- Upon completion of an internal review, a written decision must be provided to the complainant. This decision must:
  - Outline how the internal review was conducted;
  - Detail the outcome/s of the internal review, and the reasons for same;
  - Outline any action that QFES proposes to take, or has taken, as a result of the outcome/s of the internal review; and
  - Be sufficiently documented to be capable of further review if required.
- The ESU must be advised of the outcome of all internal reviews, so that it can update the QFES Complaints Management System accordingly.

**Responsibility:** Reviewing staff member and ESU

7. External review.

- Complainants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of an internal review will be advised that they may contact the Queensland Ombudsman to seek an external review of their complaint, if they wish.

**Responsibility:** Staff member advising complainant of outcome of internal review

8. Reporting and recording.

- The ESU is responsible for ensuring that adequate information concerning customer complaints is recorded in the QFES Complaints Management System. Accordingly, the following information/documentation must be provided to the ESU for each serious customer complaint:
  - The date the complaint was received, acknowledged and finalised;
  - The name of the complainant;
  - A copy of the complaint;
  - The complainant's desired outcome (if known);
  - The name/s of the member/s of the workforce subject of the complaint;
  - A copy of any report prepared in relation to the complaint; and
  - A copy of any outcome advice or decision provided to the complainant.
- The ESU must also be advised of the receipt of any request for internal review of a customer complaint, and be provided with any significant documentation arising from an internal review (such as any report or outcome advice to the complainant), for record-keeping purposes.

**NOTE:** some business units which regularly receive customer complaints and which have in place a formal system/process for recording serious customer complaints, may instead provide the above information to the ESU on an annual basis (at the conclusion of each financial year).

- It is a statutory requirement that QFES publishes on its website (by 30 September) the number of customer complaints actioned in the preceding financial year.
- De-identified complaints information will be used by QFES to identify complaint trends and to identify improvements in the way services are provided to the Queensland community.

**Responsibility:** Member of the workforce dealing with a serious complaint or internal review, and ESU.

10. Recordkeeping.

- Retain all related records and documentation in accordance with QFES ARG Procedure PD3.4 – Coordinate Records Management.

**Responsibility:** All areas.

11. Monitor customer complaints.

- Customer complaints and outcomes are to be monitored at the Region/Directorate level. Any issues are to be resolved and/or reported, as required.

**Responsibility:** Assistant Commissioners (ACs), Executive Directors (EDs)/Deputy Commissioners (DCs).

12. Management of complaints.

- Foster an environment in which complaints are effectively managed and resolved in an accountable, transparent, timely and fair manner.  
Ensure effective processes are in place to resolve issues.

**Responsibility:** Commissioner, QFES.

## OMS Activity Type

OMS Activity Type Record Activity using the following navigation paths, as required:

## Reference Material

- Management of Complaints about Staff, Volunteers and Contractors Procedure
- QFES Complaints Quick Guide

## Contacts

- Ethical Standards Unit

## Regional Reference

- Far Northern Region
- Northern Region
- Central Region
- North Coast Region
- Brisbane Region
- South Eastern Region
- South Western Region

## Planning

<b>Service Standard:</b>	No	<b>Government Objective:</b>	
		Delivering quality frontline services	
		<b>QFES Strategic Plan Reference:</b>	
		Priority Area: Strategy:	Business-enabling services 5.1



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