



COUNCIL POLICY NO:

Exec CP202 – COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT PROCESS - CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES
GOVERNANCE INFORMATION

Procedure Link:	NA	Administrative Policy Link:	NA
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ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

Version							
Version	1	New	OCM	24/02/2021	Res: 31-21	Synopsis	Policy created.
Version	2	Exec CP202	OCM	24/11/2021	Res: 377-21	Synopsis	Policy replaced and renamed
Version	3	Exec CP202	OCM	28/09/22	Res: 243-22	Synopsis	Reviewed and Adopted by Council
Version	4	Exec CP202	OCM	23/10/24	Res: 275-24	Synopsis	Reviewed and Adopted by Council

1. RESPONSIBLE DIRECTORATE

Executive

2. PURPOSE OR OBJECTIVE

To ensure that a Complaint received in relation to an alleged breach of Division 3 – Behaviour, of the Shire of Dardanup Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates is managed on the basis of –

- Confidentiality
- Timeliness
- Natural justice and due process
- Fairness and impartiality

Clause 15(2) of the Code of Conduct provides that the procedure for dealing with Complaints may be determined by the local government to the extent that it is not dealt with by the Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021 (Regulations). This policy (Policy) meets this objective.

2.1 Scope

This Policy applies to Council Members, Committee Members, Candidates, Complaints Officers, and Complainants in respect to Complaints of an alleged breach of “Division 3 – Behaviour” of the Code of Conduct (Division 3 Complaints).

The management of Complaints related to Division 4 of the Code of Conduct is prescribed by the *Local Government Act 1995* and not by this policy. The CEO, or a senior officer nominated by the CEO, is the Complaints Officer for the purpose of Complaints related to Division 4.

3. DEFINITIONS

Act - means the Local Government Act 1995.

Behaviour Complaints Committee - means a committee established by the Council in accordance with s.5.8 of the Act for the purpose of dealing with Complaints. The role of the Behaviour Complaints Committee is outlined in Part 4.2.3 of this Policy.

Breach - means a breach of Division 3 of the Shire of Dardanup Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

Candidate - means a candidate for election as a Council Member, whose nomination has been accepted by the Returning Officer under s.4.49 of the Act but does not include a Council Member who has nominated for re-election. A person is a Candidate from the date on which their nomination is accepted, until the Returning Officer declares the election result in accordance with s.4.77 of the Act.

Candidate Complaint - means a Complaint alleging a Breach by a Candidate. Candidate Complaints are dealt with in Part 4.3.2 of this Policy.

CEO - means the Chief Executive Officer of the Shire of Dardanup.

Code - means the Shire of Dardanup Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

Committee - means a committee of Council, established in accordance with s.5.8 of the Act.

Committee Member - means a Council Member, employee of the Shire of Dardanup or other person who has been appointed by the Council to be a member of an Advisory, Occasional or Standing Committee, in accordance with s.5.10(1) of the Act. A person is a Committee Member from the date on which they are appointed, until their appointment expires or is terminated by Council resolution.

Complaint - means a complaint submitted under Division 3, Clause 11 of the Code of Conduct.

Complainant - means a person who has submitted a Complaint in accordance with this Policy.

Complaints Assessor – means an independent person appointed by the Complaints Officer to assess or manage a complaint in accordance with this policy and the Code of Conduct.

Complaint Documents - means the Complaint Form and any supporting information, evidence, or attachments provided by the Complainant.

Complaint Form - means the form approved under clause 11(2)(a) of the Code of Conduct [by Council resolution or by the CEO exercising delegated authority]. Code of Conduct Complaints Form

Complaints Officer - means a person authorised in writing [by Council resolution or by the CEO exercising delegated authority] under clause 11(3) of the Code of Conduct to receive complaints and withdrawals of complaints. The role of the Complaints Officer is addressed in Part 4.2.1 of this Policy.

Council - means the Council of the Shire of Dardanup.

Council Member - means a person who is currently serving a term of office as an elected member of the Council in accordance with the Act.

Finding - means a finding made in accordance with clause 12(1) of the Code of Conduct as to whether the alleged Breach has or has not occurred.

Minor breach - means a complaint made under Division 4 of the Code of Conduct.

Plan - means a Plan under clause 12(4)(b) of the Code, to address the behaviour of the person to whom the complaint relates (the Respondent), if a Finding has been made that a Breach has occurred.

Respondent – means a Council Member, Committee Member or candidate the subject of a complaint.

Response Documents - means the response provided by the Respondent to the Complaint and includes any supporting information or evidence that is supplied.

4. POLICY

4.1 Principles

4.1.1 Procedural fairness

The principles of procedural fairness and natural justice will apply when dealing with a Division 3 Complaint under this Policy. In particular:

- a Respondent will be afforded a reasonable opportunity to be heard before any findings are made.
- a Respondent will be afforded a reasonable opportunity to be heard before any Plan is imposed.
- the decision maker must be objective and impartial and must act in an unbiased manner and must not act in a manner likely to give rise to a perception of bias; and
- any findings made will be based on proper and genuine consideration of the evidence.

4.1.2 Consistency

The application of this Policy should lead to consistency in process and outcomes. While each Complainant and Respondent will be dealt with according to their circumstances, and each Complaint considered and determined on its merits, similar circumstances will result in similar decisions.

4.1.3 Confidentiality

All Complaints must, as far as possible, be dealt with confidentially until such a time as they are required to be reported to Council in accordance with this Policy or are otherwise lawfully made public or disclosed. The Shire of Dardanup will take all reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality when dealing with a Complaint, in order to protect both the Complainant and Respondent.

Council Members, local government employees and contractors who have a role in handling a specific complaint will be provided with sufficient information to fulfil their role. They must manage this information securely and must not disclose or inappropriately use this information.

Complainants will be advised of the level of confidentiality they can expect, and that breaches of confidentiality on their part may prejudice the progress of their Complaint.

In order to allow the Respondent to understand and respond to the Complaint against them, the name of the Complainant will be provided to the Respondent, unless the Complainant provides valid reasons why this should not occur. The Complainant's contact information will not be provided to the Respondent.

4.1.4 Accessibility

The Shire of Dardanup will ensure that information on how to make a complaint, including this Policy, is available at the Shire's Administration Building and on the Shire's website. The Shire will make information available in alternative formats if requested.

Any person wishing to make a Complaint may contact the Complaints Officer if they require assistance in completing the complaint form or otherwise navigating the complaints process.

4.1.5 Perception of Bias

A reasonable perception of bias may arise by virtue of personal, financial, or family relationships, evidence of a closed mind or participation in the Complaint process (such as being a Complainant or Respondent).

Where a person's involvement in the decision-making process (whether at Council or Committee level) may reasonably give rise to a perception of bias on their behalf, they must recuse themselves.

4.2 Roles

4.2.1 Complaints Officer

The Complaints Officer is authorised in accordance with clause 11(3) of the Code of Conduct to accept Complaints and withdrawal of Complaints.

The Complaints Officer is not an advocate for the complainant or the respondent. The Complaints Officer provides procedural information and assistance to both Complainant and Respondent.

The Complaints Officer will liaise with and provide administrative support to a Complaint Assessor appointed under this Policy.

The Complaints Officer will liaise with the local government to facilitate the calling and convening of Council or Behaviour Complaints Committee meetings if required.

In undertaking their functions, the Complaints Officer will apply the Principles of this Policy.

4.2.2 Complaints Assessor

The Complaint Assessor is appointed by the Complaints Officer in accordance with Part 4.3.8 of this Policy.

The Complaint Assessor is an impartial third party who will undertake the functions specified in this Policy. In undertaking their functions, the Complaint Assessor will apply the Principles of this Policy.

The Complaint Assessor will liaise with the Complaints Officer to manage the administrative requirements of dealing with the Complaint in accordance with this Policy.

4.2.3 Behaviour Complaints Committee

A Behaviour Complaints Committee is a Committee of Council that may be established in accordance with s.5.8 of the Act for the purpose of dealing with Division 3 Complaints.

Where established, the Behaviour Complaints Committee is a Committee of Council, comprising all Council members. An appointed Committee member must recuse themselves if they are a Complainant or a Respondent.

The authority delegated to the Behaviour Complaints Committee will be specified by Council delegation and may include:

- Conditions to which the delegation is subject.
- Dismissing a Division 3 Complaint in accordance with clause 13 of the Code of Conduct and providing reasons for any such dismissal.
- Making a finding as to whether the conduct specified in a Complaint did or did not occur, and whether a contravention of the Code of Conduct has been established, based upon evidence from which it may be concluded that it is more likely that the breach occurred than it did not occur (Finding) *[clause 12(3) of the Code of Conduct]*.
- Determining reasons for such a Finding.
- Where a Finding is made that a breach has occurred, determining:
 - To take no further action; or
 - To Prepare and implement a Plan to address the behaviour of the person to whom the Complaint relates.

4.3 Complaint process

4.3.1 Making a Complaint

Any person may make a Complaint alleging that a Council Member, Committee Member or Candidate has behaved in a way that constitutes a breach of Division 3 of the Code of Conduct *[clause 11(1) of the Code of Conduct]*.

A Complaint must be made within one (1) month after the alleged Breach *[clause 11(2)(c) of the Code of Conduct]*.

A Complaint must be made by completing the Complaint Form in full and providing the completed forms to the Complaints Officer.

Save where this Policy otherwise provides, a Complaint will usually be determined by reference to the information provided by the Complainant and the Respondent.

A Complaint must:

- Be specific (including identifying the provisions of the Code of Conduct which the complainant alleges have been breached).
- Provide as much supporting evidence as possible to assist an investigation (including the grounds and circumstances of the Complaint). This may include Statutory Declarations and witness statements.
- Provide the name of the Council Member, Committee Member or Candidate who has allegedly breached the Code of Conduct.
- Provide the name and contact details of the complainant and the name and contact details of the person submitting the complaint (if different to the complainant).

Anonymous complaints will not be investigated by the Complaints Officer unless required by law.

Where a Complaint Form omits required details, the Complaints Officer will invite the Complainant to provide this information in order for the Complaint to be progressed.

Where a Complaint is made more than 1 month after the alleged breach, the Complaints Officer will give the Complainant written notice that the Complaint cannot be made *[clause 11(2)(c) of the Code of Conduct]*.

4.3.2 Candidate Complaints

A Complaint in relation to a Candidate must be made in accordance with [4.3.1](#), above, but cannot be dealt with unless the Candidate is subsequently declared elected as a Council Member.

Within 7 days after receiving a Candidate Complaint, the Complaints Officer will provide written notice:

- To the Complainant confirming receipt, and advising of the procedure for candidate complaints; and
- To the Respondent, including a summary of the complaint, and advising of the procedure for candidate complaints.

No action will be taken until the results of the election are declared by the Returning Officer. If the respondent is elected, then the complaint will be dealt with in accordance with this Policy. Timeframes that would otherwise commence on the receipt of a Complaint will be taken to commence on the election date.

If the Respondent is not elected, the Complaints Officer will provide the Complainant with notice that the Respondent has not been elected and that the Complaint cannot be dealt with *[clause 15(1) of the Code of Conduct]*.

4.3.3 Withdrawing a Complaint

A Complainant may withdraw their Complaint at any time before a Finding has been made in relation to the Complaint *[clause 14 of the Code of Conduct]*.

A Complainant may withdraw a Complaint by advising the Complaints Officer in writing that they wish to do so.

After receiving a written withdrawal of the Complaint, the Complaints Officer will take all necessary steps to terminate the process commenced under this Policy.

4.3.4 Notice to Complainant

Within 7 days after receiving a Complaint, the Complaints Officer will provide written notice to the Complainant that:

- confirms receipt of the Complaint.
- outlines the process that will be followed and possible outcomes.
- explains the application of confidentiality to the complaint.
- includes a copy of this Policy; and
- if necessary, seeks clarifications or additional information.

If the Complaint Form indicates that the Complainant agrees to participate in Alternative Dispute Resolution, the Complaints Officer will advise the Complainant of the process in accordance with Part 4.3.6 of this Policy.

4.3.5 Notice to Respondent

Within 14 days after receiving a Complaint, the Complaints Officer will provide written notice to the Respondent that:

- advises that a Complaint has been made in accordance with the Code of Conduct and this Policy.
- includes a copy of the Complaint Documents.
- outlines the process that will be followed, the opportunities that will be afforded to the Respondent to be heard and the possible outcomes.
- includes a copy of this Policy; and
- if applicable, advises that further information has been requested from the Complainant and will be provided in due course.

If the Complainant has agreed to participate in Alternative Dispute Resolution, the Behaviour Complaints Officer will ask the Respondent if they are also willing to participate in accordance with Part 4.3.6 of this Policy.

4.3.6 Alternative Dispute Resolution

The Shire of Dardanup recognises that Alternative Dispute Resolution may support both parties reach a mutually satisfactory outcome that resolves the issues giving rise to the Complaint.

Alternative Dispute Resolution requires the consent of both parties to the Complaint and may not be appropriate in all circumstances.

To commence the process, the Complaints Officer will, as the first course of action upon receiving a complaint, offer the Complainant and the Respondent the option of Alternative Dispute Resolution. If both parties agree to participate in Alternative Dispute Resolution, the Behaviour Complaints Officer will pause the formal process.

The objective of Alternative Dispute Resolution will be to reach an agreed resolution that satisfies the Complainant that the formal process is no longer required, allowing them to withdraw the Complaint, in accordance with Part 4.3.3 of this Policy. For example, an offer by a Respondent to issue a voluntary apology in response to a Complaint, even in the absence of a request from the Complainant, qualifies for consideration as Alternative Dispute Resolution.

If Alternative Dispute Resolution is commenced, both the Complainant and Respondent may decline to proceed with the process at any time. The process may also be terminated on the advice of a third party who is providing assistance to the Local Government, such as a facilitator or mediator.

If Alternative Dispute Resolution is terminated or does not achieve an agreed outcome that results in the withdrawal of the Complaint, the Complaints Officer will resume the formal process required under this Policy.

Examples of Alternate Dispute Resolution include –

- negotiation with the assistance of the Complaints Officer or other appropriate person as intermediary.
- facilitation with a contracted service provider such as a mediator or conciliator.
- other mutually agreed process.

4.3.7 Order of Complaints

Complaints will normally be dealt with in the order in which they are received.

If more than one Complaint is received that relates to the same alleged behaviour, the Complaints Officer may decide to progress those Complaints concurrently.

4.3.8 Appointment of Complaints Assessor

If Alternative Dispute Resolution is not commenced, is terminated, or does not achieve an agreed outcome resulting in the withdrawal of the Complaint, the Complaints Officer may appoint a suitably qualified and experience Complaints Assessor, in accordance with the Shire of Dardanup Procurement Framework.

A Complaints Assessor may be appointed under the following circumstances –

- Where a complaint relates to a Council Member.
- Where a complaint relates to a Candidate who is elected as a Council Member; and
- Where internal resources are limited and/or the nature of the complaint requires specific expertise.

In appointing a Complaints Assessor, the Complaints Officer will have regard to the qualifications and independence of the person appointed.

The Complaints Officer will endeavour to appoint a Complaint Assessor within a reasonable period. The Complaints Officer will provide written notice of the appointment to the Complainant and the Respondent.

4.3.9 Search of Local Government Records

The Complaint Assessor may request the Complaints Officer to search for any relevant records in the Shire of Dardanup's Record Management System.

In particular, if the behaviour is alleged to have occurred at a Council or Committee Meeting, the Complaints Officer will be requested to identify any Local Government records that provide evidence that may support a decision as to whether:

- the behaviour occurred at a Council or Committee Meeting,
- the behaviour was dealt with by the person presiding at the meeting, and/or
- the Respondent has taken remedial action in accordance with the Shire of Dardanup Standing Orders Local Law 2014.

The Complaints Assessor must provide the Respondent with a copy of any records that are identified. In addition, where a clarification or additional information has been sought from the Complainant by either the Complaints Officer or the Complaint Assessor, copies must also be provided to the Respondent.

4.3.10 Assessment of the Complaint

The Complaints Officer or where appointed, the Complaint Assessor will undertake an assessment of the Complaint in accordance with the process outlined in the Notices given under Part 4.3.4 and Part 4.3.5 of this Policy.

The Complaints Officer or where appointed, the Complaints Assessor must ensure that the Respondent is provided with a reasonable opportunity to respond to the Complaint before forming any opinions or drafting the Complaint Report or recommendations.

4.3.11 Complaint Report

The Complaints Officer or where appointed, the Complaint Assessor will prepare a Complaint Report that will:

- outlines the process followed, including how the Respondent was provided with an opportunity to respond.
- include the Complaint Documents, the Response Documents, and any relevant Local Government Records as attachments; and
- include recommendations on each decision that may be made by the Local Government or a Complaints Committee; and
- include reasons for each recommendation, with reference to Part 4.4 of this Policy.

If the Complaint Report recommends that a Plan is prepared and implemented in accordance with clause 12(4)(b) of the Code of Conduct and Part 4.4.4 of this Policy, the Complaint Report must include a Proposed Plan.

The Complaints Officer or where appointed, the Complaint Assessor will include the Complaint Report in the Agenda for a meeting of the Council or where established, the Behaviour Complaints Committee. The Complaints Officer or where appointed, the Complaint Assessor will be responsible for preparation of an Officer Report with the Complaint Report provided as a confidential attachment. The recommendations of the Complaint Report will be provided as the Officer Recommendations.

4.3.12 Complaint Determination Meeting

The agenda will be prepared on the basis that the part of the meeting that deals with the Complaint Report will be held behind closed doors in accordance with s.5.23(2) of the Act.

The Local Government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee will consider the Complaint Report and attachments and give due regard to the recommendations.

In accordance with Regulation 11(d)(a) of the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996, reasons for any decision that is significantly different from the Officer Recommendation must be recorded in the meeting minutes.

If the behaviour that is the subject of the Complaint is alleged to have occurred at a Council or Committee Meeting, the local government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee will determine whether or not to dismiss the Complaint in accordance with Clause 13 of the Code of Conduct and Part 4.4.2 of this Policy.

If the Local Government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee dismisses a Complaint, the Complaints Officer must give the Complainant and the Respondent written notice of the decision and the reasons for the decision in accordance with clause 13(2) of the Code of Conduct. This concludes the process for this Complaint.

If the Complaint is not dismissed, the Local Government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee will consider the Complaint and make a Finding as to whether the alleged Breach that is the subject of the Complaint has or has not occurred, in accordance with clause 12 of the Code of Conduct and Part 4.4.3 of this Policy.

If the Local Government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee finds that the alleged Breach did not occur, the Complaints Officer must give the Complainant and the Respondent written notice of the Finding and the reasons for the Finding in accordance with clause 12(7)(a) of the Code of Conduct. This concludes the process for this Complaint.

If the Local Government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee finds that the alleged breach did occur, the Committee will decide whether to take no further action in accordance with clause 12(4)(a) of the Code of Conduct or prepare a plan to address the behaviour in accordance with clause 12(4)(b) of the Code of Conduct and Part 4.4.4 of this Policy.

If the Local Government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee decides to take no further action, the Complaints Officer must give the Complainant and the Respondent written notice of this decision and the reasons for the Finding in accordance with clause 12(7)(a) of the Code of Conduct. This concludes the process for this Complaint.

If the Council or Behaviour Complaints Committee decides to prepare a Plan, it will first consult with the Respondent in accordance with clause 12(5) of the Code of Conduct. Council or the Behaviour Complaints Committee will consider any submissions made by the Respondent before preparing and implementing a Plan.

4.3.13 Compliance with Plan Requirement

The Complaints Officer will monitor the actions in timeframes set out in a Plan.

Failure to comply with a requirement included in a Plan is a minor breach under section 5.105(1) of the Act and clause 23 of the Code of Conduct.

The Complaints Officer must provide a report advising the Council of any failure to comply with a requirement included in a Plan.

4.4 Decision Making

4.4.1 Objectives and Principles

All decisions made under this Policy will reflect the Policy Objectives and the Principles included in Part 4.1 of this Policy.

4.4.2 Dismissal

The Local Government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee must dismiss a Complaint in accordance with clause 13(1)(a) and (b) of the Code of Conduct if it is satisfied that -

- (a) the behaviour to which the Complaint relates occurred at a Council or Committee Meeting; and
- (b) either —
 - (i) the behaviour was dealt with by the person presiding at the meeting; or
 - (ii) the Respondent has taken remedial action in accordance with the Shire of Dardanup Standing Orders Local Law 2014.

4.4.3 Finding

A Finding that the alleged breach has occurred must be based on evidence from which it may be concluded that it is more likely that the breach occurred than that it did not occur *[clause 12(3) of the Code of Conduct]*.

This may involve first considering whether the behaviour occurred, on the balance of probabilities, and then whether that behaviour constituted a breach of a requirement of Division 3 of the Code of Conduct.

4.4.4 Action

In deciding whether to take no further action, or prepare and implement a Plan, the Local Government or the Behaviour Complaints Committee may consider:

- the nature and seriousness of the breach(es).
- the Respondent's submission in relation to the contravention.
- whether the Respondent has breached the Code of Conduct knowingly or carelessly.
- whether the Respondent has breached the Code of Conduct on previous occasions.
- likelihood or not of the Respondent committing further breaches of the Code of Conduct.

- personal circumstances at the time of conduct.
- need to protect the public through general deterrence and maintain public confidence in Local Government; and
- any other matters which may be regarded as contributing to or the conduct or mitigating its seriousness.

4.4.5 Plan Requirement

The Proposed Plan may include requirements for the Respondent to do one (1) or more of the following:

- engage in mediation.
- undertake counselling.
- undertake training.
- take other action the Complaints Committee considers appropriate (e.g. an apology).

The Proposed Plan should be designed to provide the Respondent with the opportunity and support to demonstrate the professional and ethical behaviour expected of elected representatives expressed in the Code of Conduct.

The Proposed Plan may also outline:

- the actions to be taken to address the behaviour(s).
- who is responsible for the actions.
- any assistance the Local Government will provide to assist achieve the intent of the Plan; and
- a reasonable timeframe for the Plan action(s) to be addressed by the Respondent.

6. LEGISLATION

Local Government Act 1995 – Section 5.104 Adoption of model code of conduct:

Local Government Act 1995 – Section 5.105 Breaches by council members

Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021

7. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Shire of Dardanup Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

Attachment: Code of conduct - 'Complaint About Alleged Breach Form' [Code of Conduct Complaints Form](#)

Note:

Also refer to website for copy of Code of Conduct and Complaints Form:

<https://www.dardanup.wa.gov.au/council/elected-members/code-of-conduct/>