

# City of Greater Geraldton Council Policy

## 4.30 CODE OF CONDUCT BEHAVIOUR COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT

### STRATEGIC THEME

#### Leading

### OBJECTIVES

To establish, in accordance with Clause 15(2) of the *Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021* and the City of Greater Geraldton Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates, the procedure for dealing with complaints about alleged breaches of the behaviour requirements included in Division 3 of the City of Greater Geraldton Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

To give effect to the City of Greater Geraldton's commitment to an effective, transparent, fair and accessible complaints handling process that supports high standards of behaviour of Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

The assessment of the complaint will be conducted purely based on all documents provided, the complaint documents, any local government records identified by the Behaviour Complaints Officer, and the response documents.

### POLICY STATEMENT

This Policy applies to complaints made in accordance with Clause 11 of the City of Greater Geraldton Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

This Policy applies to Council Members, Committee Members, Candidates, and any person who submits a complaint in accordance with this Policy.

### POLICY DETAILS

#### 1. Principles

##### 1.1. Procedural Fairness

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

- the Respondent will be afforded a reasonable opportunity to be heard before any findings are made, or a plan implemented;
- the decision maker should be objective and impartial, with an absence of bias or the perception of bias; and
- any findings made will be based on proper and genuine consideration of the evidence.

#### **WALGA Note:**

Local Governments may wish to refer to the Ombudsman WA Guidelines: [Procedural fairness \(natural justice\)](#) for detailed commentary on these principles.

### 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.

### 1.3. Confidentiality

The City of Greater Geraldton will take all reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality when dealing with the Complaint, 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, as detailed below, and that breaches of confidentiality on their part may prejudice the progress of their Complaint:

- 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 reasons this should not occur.
- The Complainant's contact information will not be provided to the Respondent.
- The Complainant's name and contact information will not be included in any publicly available documents such as meeting agenda or minutes.
- The Complainant should be aware that Complaint Documents may be subject to an FOI request, noting that they must be consulted before any documents are released, and exemptions may apply.

#### **WALGA Note:**

*In accordance with Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996, r.11(d) the details of decisions made at Council or Committee meetings must be included in the minutes. Local Governments should consider how resolutions are drafted to ensure that they are suitable for inclusion in the public record.*

*A breach of confidentiality by council members or committee members under an adopted Complaints Policy would breach the Code of Conduct clause 8(2)(b) requirement to comply with all Local Government Policies. In the case of council members, this may also be a breach of Rule of Conduct 18(1).*

### 1.4. Accessibility

The City of Greater Geraldton will ensure that information on how to make a complaint, including this Policy, is available at the City of Greater Geraldton's Administration Building and on the City's website. The City of Greater Geraldton will make information available in alternative formats if requested. Complaints are acknowledged in a timely manner, addressed promptly and according to order of urgency with the complainant kept informed throughout the process.

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

## 2. Roles

### 2.1. Behaviour Complaints Officer

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

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

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

The Behaviour Complaints Officer will liaise with the Local Government to facilitate the calling and convening of Council meetings if required.

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

### 2.2. Complaint Assessor

The Complaint Assessor is appointed by the Behaviour Complaints Officer in accordance with Part 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 Behaviour Complaints Officer to manage the administrative requirements of dealing with the Complaint in accordance with this Policy.

## 3. Procedure

### 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 form to the Behaviour Complaints Officer.

A Complaint must be made in accordance with the Complaint Form and specify which requirement(s) of the Code of Conduct is alleged to have been breached.

A Complaint is required to include the name and contact details of the Complainant therefore anonymous complaints cannot be accepted.

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

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

### 3.2. Candidate Complaints

A Complaint in relation to a Candidate must be made in accordance with 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 Behaviour Complaints Officer will provide written notice:

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

### 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 Behaviour Complaints Officer in writing that they wish to do so.

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

### 3.4. **Notice to Complainant**

Within 10 days after receiving a Complaint, the Behaviour 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 Behaviour Complaints Officer will advise the Complainant of the process in accordance with Part 3.6 of this Policy.

### 3.5. **Notice to Respondent**

Within 14 days after receiving a Complaint, the Behaviour 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 3.6 of this Policy.

### 3.6. Alternative Dispute Resolution

The City of Greater Geraldton recognises that Alternative Dispute Resolution may support both parties to 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 Behaviour 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 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 assisting 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 Behaviour Complaints Officer will resume the formal process required under this Policy.

### 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 Behaviour Complaints Officer may decide to progress those Complaints concurrently.

### 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 Behaviour Complaints Officer will appoint a suitably qualified and experienced Complaint Assessor, in accordance with the City of Greater Geraldton's Purchasing Policy.

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

### 3.9. Search of Local Government Records

The Complaint Assessor may request the Behaviour Complaints Officer to search for any relevant records in the City of Greater Geraldton's Record Management System.

If the behaviour is alleged to have occurred at a Council or Committee Meeting, the Behaviour 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 City of Greater Geraldton Meeting Procedures Local Law 2011.

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

### 3.10. Assessment of the Complaint

The Complaint Assessor will undertake an assessment of the Complaint in accordance with the process outlined in the Notices given under Part 3.4 and Part 3.5 of this Policy

The Complaint Assessor must ensure that the Respondent is provided with a reasonable opportunity to be heard before forming any opinions or drafting the Complaint Report or recommendations. The Complaint assessor will request that the respondent provide a written response including any evidence or information that the Respondent considers relevant. The Complaint Assessor will advise the Respondent of the time period within which to respond.

The assessment of the complaint will be conducted purely based on all documents provided, the complaint documents, any local government records identified by the Behaviour Complaints Officer, and the response documents.

#### **WALGA Note:**

*As outlined in the WALGA Note at Part 2.2, Local Governments may wish to include details of their assessment process in their Policy. This may empower the Complaint Assessor to undertake an investigation within defined parameters. Alternatively, the Policy may require that Complaint Assessor to request that the Respondent provide a written response, including any evidence or information that the Respondent considers relevant. The assessment would then be conducted purely on the basis of all documents provided (the Complaint Documents, any Local Government Records identified by the Behaviour Complaints Officer, and Response Documents).*

*The Code of Conduct requires that a Respondent is provided with a reasonable opportunity to be heard. What may be considered reasonable may depend on the process that is followed, and on the circumstances. For example, if the Complaints Assessor is empowered to gather additional evidence or information, the Respondent must be presented with this information, and have an opportunity to respond. If a Respondent is asked for a written response, the Complaint Assessor should ensure they are given a reasonable period in which to respond. It may also be reasonable to accept responses in other formats. Given this variation, Local Governments may wish to specify minimum requirements, and/or direct the Complaint Assessor to exercise their professional skill and judgment.*

### 3.11. Complaint Report

The Complaint Assessor will prepare a Complaint Report that will:

- outline the process followed, including how the Respondent was provided with an opportunity to be heard;
- 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 Council: and
- include reasons for each recommendation, with reference to Part 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 of this Policy, the Complaint Report must include a Proposed Plan.

The Complaint Assessor will liaise with the Behaviour Complaints Officer to include the Complaint Report in the Agenda for a meeting of the Council. The Behaviour Complaints Officer 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.

**WALGA Note:**

*Local Governments may wish to include in their Policy a requirement that the Respondent is provided with a draft copy of the Complaint Report, and an opportunity to make submissions, before the Complaint Assessor finalises the Complaint Report.*

*If the Complaint Report includes a Proposed Plan, this may contribute to consultation in accordance with clause 12(5) of the Code of Conduct.*

**3.12. Council Meeting**

The Agenda report 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(4) of the Act.

The Council will consider the Complaint Report and attachments and give due regard to the recommendations.

In accordance with Regulation 11(da) 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.

**WALGA Note:**

*The Local Government is required to include reasons when providing notice of its decisions under clauses 12(4), 12(7) and 13 of the Code of Conduct. The Complaint Report is required to provide reasons for each of its recommendations, which become the Officer Recommendations.*

If the behaviour that is the subject of the Complaint is alleged to have occurred at a Council or Committee Meeting, the Council will determine whether or not to dismiss the Complaint in accordance with Clause 13 of the Code of Conduct and Part 4.2 of this Policy.

If the Council dismisses a Complaint, the Behaviour 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 Council 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 4.3 of this Policy.

If the Behaviour Council finds that the alleged Breach **did not** occur, the Behaviour 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 Council finds that the alleged breach **did** occur, the Council 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 of this Policy.

If the Council decides to take no further action, the Behaviour 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 decide to prepare a Plan, the Council will first consult with the Respondent in accordance with clause 12(5) of the Code of Conduct. The Council will consider any submissions made by the Respondent before preparing and implementing a Plan.

#### **WALGA Note:**

*\* In actioning clause 12(5) of the Code of Conduct, the Respondent may be invited to make an oral submission or provide a written response. If the final decision to implement a Plan is referred to a subsequent meeting of the Council, the Complaints Assessor or Behavioural Complaints Officer may provide a report attaching the written response and potentially make an associated recommendation as to the effect of a Plan.*

The Behaviour Complaints Officer must give the Complainant and the Respondent written notice of the Finding and the reasons for the Finding and its decision under subclause 12(4)(b) in accordance with clause 12(7)(a) and 12(7)(b) of the Code of Conduct.

#### **3.13. Compliance with Plan Requirement**

The Behaviour 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 Conduct breach under section 8A.3 of the Act and clause 23 of the Code of Conduct. A Conduct breach is dealt with by the Local Government Inspector and the Principal Adjudicator under section 8A.13 of the Act.

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

### **4. Decision Making**

#### **4.1. Objectives and Principles**

All decisions made under this Policy will reflect the Policy Objectives and the Principles included in Part 1 of this Policy.

#### **4.2. Dismissal**

The Council 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 City of Greater Geraldton Meeting Procedures Local Law 2011.

#### **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. Action

In deciding whether to take no further action, or prepare and implement a Plan, the Council 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.

#### 4.5. Plan Requirements

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 Council 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.

## KEY TERM DEFINITIONS

**Act** means the *Local Government Act 1995*.

**Behaviour 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 Behaviour Complaints Officer is addressed in Part 2.1 of this Policy.

**Breach** means a breach of Division 3 of the City of Greater Geraldton Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

**The City** means the City of Greater Geraldton.

**Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** means the CEO of the City of Greater Geraldton.

**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 3.2 of this Policy.

**Code of Conduct** means the City of Greater Geraldton Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates, Council Policy 4.2.

**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 City of Greater Geraldton, or other person who has been appointed by the Council to be a member of a committee in accordance with s.5.8 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 made under clause 11 of the City of Greater Geraldton Code of Conduct for Council Members, Committee Members and Candidates.

**Complainant** means a person who has submitted complaint in accordance with this policy.

**Complaint Assessor** means a person appointed by the Behaviour Complaints Officer in accordance with Part 2.2 and Part 3.8 of this Policy.

**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].

**Council or Committee Meeting** means a formal meeting of the Council or a Committee that is called and convened in accordance with the Act. It does not include informal meetings, such as workshops or briefings.

**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.

**Local Government** means the Council of the City of Greater Geraldton.

**Local Government Inspector** means the person appointed to the office of the Local Government inspector in accordance with section 8B.2(1) of the Act.

**Plan** means a Plan that may be prepared and implemented under clause 12(4)(b) of the Code of Conduct, 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.

**Principal Adjudicator** means the person appointed to the role of Principal Adjudicator in accordance with section 8B.19(1) of the Act.

**Publish** includes to publish on a social media platform.

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

**Respondent** means the person about whom the complaint has been made.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The CEO is responsible for the implementation of this policy.

## WORKPLACE INFORMATION

*Local Government Act 1995*

*Local Government (Model Code of Conduct) Regulations 2021*

*Department of Local Government Sport and Cultural Industries - Guidelines on the Model Code of Conduct for Council Members Committee Members and Candidates*

*Council Policy 4.2 Code of Conduct for Council Members Committee Members and Candidates*

Ombudsman Western Australia - Investigation of Complaints

Ombudsman Western Australia - Guidelines - Effective handling of complaints made to your organisation - An Overview

Ombudsman Western Australia - Procedural fairness (natural justice)

## POLICY ADMINISTRATION

Directorate		Officer	Review Cycle	Next Due
Office of the CEO		Chief Executive Officer	Biennial	2028
Version	Decision Reference	Synopsis		
4.		Changes to reflect Local Government Reforms		